

LEADERSHIP IN TURBULENT TIMES

Reading anything by Doris Kearns Goodwin is a rare treat. She's a superb researcher, exceptional writer, and seamless storyteller. Her systemic portrayal of four major leaders in America: Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, and – surprisingly – Lyndon Johnson could easily provide ten pages about Leadership in this issue. I will only do 2 pages and let you read the rest of their stories on your own.

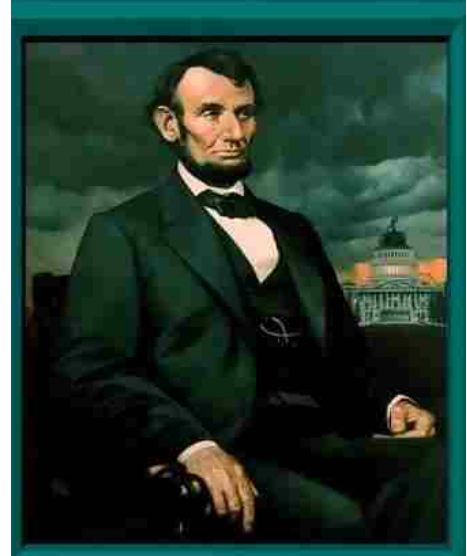


Doris Kearns Goodwin in 2016

She begins with Abraham Lincoln, stating that “When he entered the presidency on March 4 1861, the house was not merely divided; the house was on fire.” Seven states had already chosen to secede from the Union. He responded by piecing together a cabinet that represented every faction of the new Republican Party.

In her narrative Goodwin focuses on one action that was critical for each of her four leaders. With Lincoln, she chose the Emancipation Proclamation as the highlight of his presidency. It embodied many aspects of his personal history: “a life marked by perpetual struggle, a deep-rooted integrity and humility combined with an ever-growing confidence in his ability to lead.” Especially, Lincoln brought a mind tempered by failure -- that would give direction, purpose, and lasting inspiration.

Lincoln said “Everybody likes a compliment, everyone need praise for the work they are doing.” He gave that to each person in his cabinet and, also, met with them individually to get them to



Abraham Lincoln

approve his radical action. “In his refusal to let past resentments fester he transcended personal vendettas and set a standard of mutual respect and dignity.” In the midst of fierce opposition, Lincoln kept his word, was accessible and easy to approach. “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.” Lincoln, ever ambitious and concerned about being famous, said “If my name goes down in history, it will be for this act and my whole soul is in it.”

Lincoln organized mass rallies to sell his idea. Soldiers loved him, saying “He cares for us, he makes us fight but he cares.” And when Frederick Douglas protested that unequal pay for Negroes was unfair, Lincoln heard him out – and changed it.

Teddy Roosevelt’s handling of the Coal Strike of 1902 is the topic that Goodwin emphasizes for the 26th president. He had no legal authority to intervene in the issue but felt it was the executive’s duty to do whatever the needs of the people demand. Roosevelt read a ten volume biography of Lincoln during the strike and commissioned a detailed report of the controversy – which he then chose not to publish for many months. In time he convinced his entire cabinet to support his intervention – and embarked on a ten state train

trip to enlist the public in his efforts to settle the strike. He framed the narrative, kept his temper in check, and set up a crisis management team that assisted him in all phases of action.



Theodore Roosevelt

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's actions during the first 100 days of his presidency are documented by Goodwin as a series of leadership principles that were forged during earlier parts of Roosevelt's life: his crippling polio in 1924 when he was 25 years old, the irrepressible optimism he displayed while he was struggling to recover his ability to walk, and his deployment of a 'trial and error' method to find treatment options for his disability. FDR had a spiritual transformation at Warm Springs where he bonded with his "fellow polios" by listening and learning from them – and emerging with humility of spirit and with a deeper philosophy.

In 1931 FDR held a special session as Governor of New York to pass a comprehensive unemployment insurance program because "We are going to make a country into which no one is left out. . . It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails admit it and try another. Above all, try something."

As President, FDR's famous "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" became his battle cry, along with telling people they were not to blame for the misery of their individual circumstances. He announced a bank holiday to stem the financial crisis and, on March 13, he held his first "Fireside Chat." These helped educate the public on his many plans, with an estimated 60 million listeners tuning in to their radios. By the end of the first 100

Days 15 major pieces of legislation had been signed into law, including the Civilian Conservation Corps, with over 2 million men eventually involved in rebuilding projects. The Tennessee Valley Authority, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Works Progress Administration all became law early in FDR's presidency.

Lyndon Johnson had always operated on the premise that if 'he could get up earlier and meet more people and stay up later than anybody else' victory would be his. When he lost a Senate run in 1942 it plunged him into a protracted depression that he later described as "the most miserable period of my life." Years later, in 1955, he suffered a heart attack that was so consuming "it appeared that he was grieving over his own death."

During his recovery, LBJ asked himself the same questions Lincoln had asked after his defeats: "I've put together a substantial fortune, but what purpose did that serve? I've learned to manipulate the legislative machine of the Senate without parallel in American history – but to what end did one accumulate such power?"

When his health improved and he returned to the Senate he crafted a speech that would be an occasion to rededicate himself to the values that had originally drawn him into public service: assisting the poor, the undereducated, the ill-housed, the elderly, the sick. 'We've got to help these people – that's what we're here for.' On Sept. 9, 1957 the Civil rights Act became law in almost precisely the form Johnson had envisioned seven months earlier. And on July 2, 1964, as president, he signed into law a sweeping Civil Rights Act – over the objections of Richard Russell and many other Southern Senators – that LBJ stated "On this day, I knew that to the extent Negroes were free, really free, so was I. And so was my country."

Johnson's consummate skill as a bargainer resulted in his administration passing scores of "Great Society" bills such as Medicare, Voting Rights, Tax Reduction, Medicaid, and Federal Aid to Education all within a relatively brief period of five years' time
By Jim Ewens