

## Lincoln's Bishop: A President, A Priest, and the Fate of 300 Dakota Sioux Warriors

Linda Clemmons  
*Illinois State University*

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The focus is on the working relationship between Lincoln and Grant, Sherman's march through the Carolinas, the defeat of the Army of Northern Virginia, and the Union capture of Petersburg and Richmond. Also included are key political events such as Lincoln's Second Inaugural, passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, and Lincoln's visit to Richmond.

Preeminent Lincoln assassination scholar Edward Steers Jr. tenders a fast-paced overview of the assassination, including John Wilkes Booth's original plan to capture President Lincoln and deliver him to the Confederacy, the decision to kill Lincoln, information concerning the background of the conspirators (especially Mary Surratt and Dr. Samuel Mudd), the pursuit of Booth after his escape from Washington, and Booth's death. In 13 chapters Steers cuts through the myths surrounding the assassination, focusing on the people involved and explaining the event that so captivates students of history.

Many books have been written about Lincoln's assassination. Most focus on the "what" — facts and details. Steers writes about the "why." Why did Booth assassinate President Lincoln? Key to answering this question, and to understanding the assassination, is slavery. Lincoln was dedicated to emancipation. As the war progressed, he realized that a Union victory was tied to the abolition of slavery. Booth was a dedicated white supremacist and totally supported the institution of slavery. Steers writes, "Booth believed that, like Julius Caesar, Lincoln was a tyrant usurping civil liberties while at the same time destroying Southern culture, requiring his removal by any means possible" (3).

A highlight of all three books is the authors' use of primary sources, especially the words of Lincoln. Each book is well documented. Waugh's volume includes a valuable bibliography of cited sources.

Lincoln was a product of the western frontier, what is now the Midwest. He possessed qualities of honesty and friendliness. As current residents of that region, we are proud to say that we, too, retain those same qualities. Lincoln spent three days in Iowa; like people everywhere across this nation, we want to know this man and claim him as one of our own. These volumes help us do that and help us "get right with Lincoln."

*Lincoln's Bishop: A President, A Priest, and the Fate of 300 Dakota Sioux Warriors*, by Gustav Niebuhr. New York: HarperOne, 2014. xi, 210 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.99 hardcover.

Reviewer Linda Clemmons is associate professor of history at Illinois State University. She is the author of *Conflicted Mission: Faith, Disputes, and Deception on the Dakota Frontier* (2014).

Gustav Niebuhr, an associate professor of newspaper and online journalism, argues that Episcopal Bishop Henry Whipple was "a one-man

movement seeking respect and protection for American Indians" (xii). To support that statement, Niebuhr focuses on Whipple's involvement in the Dakota War of 1862, which culminated in the hanging of 38 Dakota men and the exile of the remaining Dakota from Minnesota. According to Niebuhr, the number hanged would have been much higher (over 300) without the involvement of Whipple, who pleaded the Dakotas' case to President Lincoln through letters, personal contacts, and a meeting with Lincoln in September 1862.

*Lincoln's Bishop* is not a complete biography of Henry Whipple. Rather, Niebuhr focuses on events that influenced Whipple to lobby for Indian reform. In the early chapters of the book, Niebuhr discusses important figures in Whipple's childhood who drew him to Indian reform. His religious training as an Episcopal priest also influenced his later missionary work. Whipple headed churches in Rome, New York, and Chicago before his appointment as the first Episcopal bishop of Minnesota. Niebuhr highlights Whipple's growing conviction, at each stage in his career, that federal Indian policy was corrupt and harmed native peoples.

In August 1862, shortly after Whipple moved to Minnesota, war broke out on the Lower Dakota Reservation. The war lasted six weeks and was deadly for settlers as well as Dakotas. Following the war, Dakota men were imprisoned, received hasty trials, and more than 300 were sentenced to be hanged. After the trials, most Minnesotans demanded vengeance: they insisted that all of the convicted men must be hanged and the rest of the Dakotas exterminated or removed entirely from Minnesota.

Niebuhr argues that Whipple was one of the few voices urging restraint during and after the war. While most Minnesotans attributed the war to the Dakotas' "savage" nature, Whipple placed blame on the federal government's "venality in running a dangerously corrupt Indian affairs system" (41). Across Minnesota and during a trip east he pleaded his case for reforming Indian affairs; he also wrote to Lincoln asking him to reexamine the sentences of the 300 men who were sentenced to hang. Niebuhr admits that historians cannot know for sure whether Whipple influenced Lincoln's decision to reduce the number to 38, but "it is difficult to imagine that Whipple's visit did not count in the president's decision" (185).

Niebuhr's background in journalism is apparent in *Lincoln's Bishop*; his prose is accessible and his story is engaging. Additional historical context, however, would have complicated Niebuhr's contention that Whipple "placed Christianity above race and ethnicity—specifically focusing on Native Americans—at a time when few whites, clergy or otherwise, did likewise" (xiii-xiii). Historians of antebellum missions

have argued that missionaries of the era placed “grace” above “race.” Far from being a lone voice, Whipple’s belief that Native Americans could adopt Christianity and become “civilized” was common among evangelical Protestant missionaries of the time.

*Lincoln’s Bishop* also underplays the importance of other Protestant missionaries in Minnesota. Missionaries affiliated with the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions had worked among the Dakota since 1835, predating the Episcopalians by almost three decades. Niebuhr makes the case that Whipple was tenacious in his desire to reform Indian affairs and was adept at promoting his ideas, but he was not the only voice for reform on the Minnesota frontier. It is also important to examine how the Dakota responded to Whipple’s assimilationist program, which demanded that they change their culture and religion.

Niebuhr introduces the public to Bishop Whipple, who played a key role in antebellum debates over federal Indian policy. He also discusses the Dakota War of 1862, which is often lost in the larger history of the Civil War. While Niebuhr successfully shows that Whipple demanded reform, he does not acknowledge that the bishop’s efforts were only part of a larger evangelical critique of U.S. Indian policy.

*Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie*, by Sallie Ketcham. New York: Routledge, 2015. Routledge Historical Americans. x, 169 pp. Notes, documents, bibliography, index. \$155.00 hardcover, \$34.95 paperback.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. An authority on the life and works of Laura Ingalls Wilder, he is also the editor of *Almost Pioneers: One Couple’s Homesteading Adventure in the West* (2013).

The life and works of Laura Ingalls Wilder have an enduring fascination for Americans. The eight Little House books have sold millions of copies since their first publication during the 1930s and 1940s. Year after year, books about Wilder are enjoyed by both an enthusiastic core of fans and a broader group of interested readers.

Sallie Ketcham’s book is in a series titled Historical Americans meant to be purchased by academic libraries or used in college or university history courses. Each book includes a section of primary source documents; in this volume, documents by and about Wilder take up about 40 of the book’s 160 pages of text. Each book in the series also has a companion website that includes images, additional documentary sources, and links to video.