



NON-FICTION BOOK CLUB

September 2019 Selection

***Lincoln's Last Trial* by Dan Abrams**

At the end of the summer of 1859, twenty-two-year-old Peachy Quinn Harrison went on trial for murder in Springfield, Illinois. Abraham Lincoln, who had been involved in more than three thousand cases—including more than twenty-five murder trials—was hired to defend him. This was to be his last great case as a lawyer. The case posed painful personal challenges for Lincoln. The murder victim had trained for the law in his office, and Lincoln had been his friend and his mentor. His accused killer, the young man Lincoln would defend, was the son of a close friend and loyal supporter. Dan Abrams captures the presidential hopeful's dramatic courtroom confrontations in vivid detail as he fights for his client—but also for his own blossoming political future.

ISBN 9781335461605

Discussion Questions:

1. We all come to any book or story with preconceived notions. How did this book either support or change your perceptions about Abraham Lincoln?
2. In addition to indulging in the curiosity factor of Lincoln's own words spoken in the courtroom in defense of a killer, the authors wanted to tell the story of the developing American legal system. Self-defense has been an essential aspect of American jurisprudence since its inception. More than 150 years later, would a jury today be more or less sympathetic to the defense depicted in this courtroom?

3. The authors write, “Lincoln might not have been able to cite the statutes verbatim, but he understood the spirit of the law; he knew that virtue was supposed to be rewarded and wrongdoing should be punished.” Yet in at least one case cited in the book he helped a woman who supposedly killed her husband escape judgment by the legal system. Was Lincoln right in his belief? Was he right in his actions?
4. The key testimony in this case was a deathbed “confession” from the victim, taken and then testified to by the accused killer’s grandfather, Reverend Cartwright. Should he have been allowed to testify for his grandson? Should the prosecution have made a larger issue of his relationship to the defendant?
5. Lincoln spent the early part of his career “riding the circuit,” bringing the benefits of law to the frontier. This is how the law in America developed. How important do you believe this frontier justice proved to be in American history, and do you feel early Americans had more faith in the law than we do today?
6. Lincoln is described during the trial going “over the top of the bench on top of the judge.” Do you recall ever reading about Lincoln being so animated? Did this overt display of emotion surprise you? Do you believe this was an honest reaction or theatrics? If theatrics, do you think he was wrong to do this?
7. All of the participants in the trial knew and respected each other and often worked together. In fact, several of them received appointments during the Civil War. Thinking of the way the legal system works today, in which opposing counsel seem to be enemies, do you think this kind of camaraderie would be helpful to the system?
8. What broad traits exhibited by Lincoln in this trial became more pronounced during his presidency? Are there aspects of his character on display here that might have proved helpful if emphasized during his presidency?



9. The American legal system was based on British law, but out of necessity it took on a very American character. From what you read in this book, what aspects of this pioneer application of the law are still visible in our legal system today?
10. Was justice done in this trial?

Review or Comment about this book:

Help others with their decision to read this book by simply leaving your comments and reviews online at <https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9781335461605>

Recommendations:

- If you liked *Lincoln's Last Trial*, you might like *Team of Rivals* (<https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9780743270755>)
- You might also enjoy *The Soul of America* (<https://www.booksamillion.com/p/9780399589829>)