



The Lincoln Memorial and American Life

By Christopher A. Thomas

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Honoring perhaps the most celebrated and important president in history, the Lincoln Memorial is one of our most recognized national shrines. It seems impossible to envision the Mall in Washington, D.C. or national pageantry without it--yet the Lincoln Memorial was almost not built. From the project's inception, the memorial--a modified Greek temple designed by architect Henry Bacon--gave rise to charged cultural and aesthetic debate, including arguments about Modernism and Americanism. Christopher Thomas offers the first detailed analysis of Bacon's design and the memorial as a system, including the statue of Lincoln by Daniel Chester French. Using extensive archival data, Thomas discusses just why the memorial looks as it does.

Because the idea of a memorial to Lincoln raised questions of race, the legacy of the Civil War, and lingering sectional animosities, the project sparked political debate between the legislative and executive branches of government and between political parties. Thomas traces the long and controversial path of the project, ranging from the immediate aftermath of the Civil War through the Progressive era, with its mix of novelty, racism, and imperialism. As he concentrates on the memorial's background, design, construction, reception, and uses--including the many public demonstrations for civil rights and justice that have taken place there--Thomas shows that the Lincoln Memorial is not a neutral symbol of America at all but a partisan and racially coded object, susceptible to appropriation and re-appropriation.

A valuable contribution to American studies, this book combines architecture and art history with American history and politics. It will appeal to scholars in these fields and to any general reader with an interest in Lincoln, the early twentieth century, and the monuments of our nation's capital.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Thomas's lucid, revealing, and amply illustrated book gives a full-bodied life history of the Lincoln Memorial, with an eye to the ways various political, social, architectural, and artistic interests claimed and used the memorial to push their own ideas about nation, race, aesthetics, and social justice. Thomas (history of art, Univ. of Victoria, British Columbia) looks at the whole of the memorial, including the inscribed tablets, murals, building, and even landscape and location on the Mall, to show how and why the memorial came to dominate the public imagination. In the process of conceiving and then building the project, as Thomas argues, the memorialized Lincoln moved from being the symbol of sectional reconciliation, to aggressive statesman in the Theodore Roosevelt mold, to emancipator and more. By the 1960s, the memorial had become the symbol for civil rights and human justice that went beyond party or any one person. Thomas devotes considerable attention to issues of design and appearance, all to good effect, in showing how "beauty" informed belief. The result is a book that gives life and meaning to the great marbled temple on the Mall and reminds us how contested "memory" was and can be. Highly recommended for all libraries.

Randall M. Miller, Saint Joseph's Univ., Philadelphia

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Review

"Thomas's lucid, revealing, and amply illustrated book gives a full-bodied history of the Lincoln Memorial, with an eye to the ways various political, social, architectural, and artistic interests claimed and used the memorial to push their own ideas about nation, race, aesthetics, and social justice."--*Library Journal*

"A well-researched history of the Lincoln Memorial that takes into account the politics of commemoration as well as issues of aesthetics and design. . . . Students of architecture and design will especially appreciate Thomas's detailed treatment of architect Henry Bacon's evolving memorial design. Over 800 illustrations add interpretive value."--*Choice*

"A trove of information on the design and building, and the human story behind the construction."--**Kenneth Anderson, *Times Literary Supplement***

"[Thomas] presents his thoroughly researched, thoughtful, and thought-provoking study of a complex topic in an admirably concise and readable form: his book is exactly long enough to cover the subject. . . . [His] work deserves a broad readership."--**Catherine Bishir, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians***

"Undoubtedly *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* is the authoritative volume on all matters having to do with the Lincoln Memorial for the foreseeable future. . . . The finale of this book is worth the whole volume, being the definitive essay on the meaning of the memorial in American life."--**Cynthia R. Field,**

"A very fine study of the cultural politics surrounding the creation of one of the most important public monuments in the United States. . . . Christopher Thomas breaks much new ground in illuminating the context for the memorial's emergence and in the process makes his book required reading for students of the Civil War in American memory."--**Paul E. Teed, *Civil War History***

From the Inside Flap

"Using a detailed chronicling of historical events and a masterful writing style, Christopher Thomas has created a engaging reminder that architecture is a worldly art; one that is as much influenced by the complexities of the culture it serves as by the skills and talents of architects. Eschewing tiresome trends for narrowly focused, superficial, or purely theoretical examinations of our architectural icons, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* examines fifty-seven years of American life that influenced the creation of the Lincoln Memorial and the ensuing seventy-nine years during which the memorial has provided a site for transformative public rituals. The book gives the reader a rare but welcome glimpse of the politics, competitive intrigues, and self-interests that fused with altruism and the talents of architect Henry Bacon to give shape to one of our nation's most enduring memorials. Everyone interested in architecture and American culture will enjoy this book as much as I did."--James H. Boniface

"*The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* is engagingly written and is easy and fun to read. As the first synthetic study of one of the world's best known monuments, it is obviously an important contribution to American architectural and cultural history."--Kirk Savage, author of *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*

"Presenting abundant new information, this book places the Lincoln Memorial in accurate historical context. General readers as well as scholars will learn much from it, and will enjoy reading the author's clear, lively prose."--Carol Herselle Krinsky, New York University

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Tommy Heckman:

As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or data even knowledge to make them keep up with the era that is certainly always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will update themselves by reading books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know what type you should start with. This *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Charles Malone:

The *Lincoln Memorial and American Life* can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that can increase your

knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to put every word into pleasure arrangement in writing The Lincoln Memorial and American Life however doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one among it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial considering.

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