
It seems very difficult, in a nation of over 260 million people that also harbors a constant influx of new citizens, to speak of "national memory" -- what, exactly, can Americans hope to remember together? And yet, as a people, we do share an understanding of the importance of some symbols, from the flag to the Capitol dome to the presidents memorialized on Mount Rushmore. Indeed, the fact that the meaning of these symbols is often contested only highlights their importance (we would not argue about something meaningless, after all).

Sociologist Barry Schwartz has written a book that explores how Abraham Lincoln became a part of our "national memory" -- and how our "memories" of him do not necessarily reflect the complexity of either the man or his presidency. But the strength of Schwartz's work is not in his "problematization" of Lincoln -- this has already been done in other scholarship. Schwartz does not deconstruct Lincoln as much as he explores the contours of American culture from the end of the Civil War through the early 20th century, highlighting the changes and challenges that shaped the nation, and that allowed Lincoln to rise to a position of prominence as a national symbol. Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory is a book about Lincoln, but it is first and foremost a book about America -- and the changing roles that presidents are asked to assume, even long after their years in the White House have come to an end.

Schwartz's task -- identifying the how and why of Lincoln's changing reputation -- leads him to draw on a wide range of sources, from archival materials to contemporary literary, political, and sociological theory. The book is actually only the first half of a two-part analysis: this volume covers the period from Lincoln's assassination through to the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial in 1922; a forthcoming work will cover the period from the Great Depression to the present. Schwartz begins and ends the book with a review and analysis of theory on collective memory, focusing on its uses and its shortcomings, but the real meat of the work is his analysis of the changing perspectives on Lincoln. This...
A ranking of all the best books about Abraham Lincoln. Part 16 of our Best Presidential Books Series. Selected as a Notable Book of the Year by the New York Times Book Review, this landmark work gives us a definitive account of Lincoln's lifelong engagement with the nation's critical issue: American slavery. A master historian, Eric Foner draws Lincoln and the broader history of the period into perfect balance. Now, in Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution, he offers a series of thoughtful and engaging essays on aspects of Lincoln and the war that have rarely been discussed in depth. Learn More About Book. Lincoln by Gore Vidal. Abraham Lincoln has long dominated the pantheon of American presidents. From his lavish memorial in Washington and immortalization on Mount Rushmore, one might assume he was a national hero rather than a controversial president who came close to losing his 1864 bid for reelection. The first part of a study that will continue through the present, Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory is the story of how America has shaped its past selectively and imaginatively around images rooted in a real person whose character and achievements helped shape his country's future. About the Author. He is the author or editor of four books, including George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol. No customer reviews. 5 star (0%). 0%.