



Lincoln and Congress

William C. Harris

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In *Lincoln and Congress*, William C. Harris reveals that the relationship between the president and Congress, though sometimes contentious, was cooperative rather than adversarial. During his time as president, Abraham Lincoln embodied his personal conviction that the nation's executive should not interfere with the work of the legislature, and though often critical of him privately, in public congressional leaders compromised with and assisted the president to unite the North and minimize opposition to the war.

Despite the turbulence of the era and the consequent tensions within the government, the executive and legislative branches showed restraint in their dealings with each other. In fact, except in his official messages to Congress, Lincoln rarely lobbied for congressional action, and he vetoed only one important measure during his tenure as president. Many congressmen from Lincoln's own party, although publicly supportive, doubted his leadership and sought a larger role for Congress in setting war policies. Though they controlled Congress, Republican legislators frequently differed among themselves in shaping legislation and in their reactions to events as well as in their relationships both with each other and with the president. Harris draws intriguing sketches of nineteenth-century congressional leaders and shows that, contrary to what historians have traditionally concluded, radical Republicans such as Representative Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner did not dominate their party or Congress. Harris includes the minority party's role, showing that Northern Democrats and conservative Unionists of the border states generally opposed Republican policies but worked with them on support for the troops and on nonwar issues like the Pacific Railroad Bill.

Lincoln and Congress sheds new light on the influence of members of Congress and their relationship with Lincoln on divisive issues such as military affairs, finance, slavery, constitutional rights, reconstruction, and Northern political developments. Enjoyable both for casual Civil War readers and professional historians, this book provides an engaging narrative that helps readers redefine and understand the political partnership that helped the Union survive.

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