



# Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President (Simon & Schuster Lincoln Library)

By Harold Holzer

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Winner of the Lincoln Prize

*Lincoln at Cooper Union* explores Lincoln's most influential and widely reported pre-presidential address -- an extraordinary appeal by the western politician to the eastern elite that propelled him toward the Republican nomination for president. Delivered in New York in February 1860, the Cooper Union speech dispelled doubts about Lincoln's suitability for the presidency and reassured conservatives of his moderation while reaffirming his opposition to slavery to Republican progressives.

Award-winning Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer places Lincoln and his speech in the context of the times -- an era of racism, politicized journalism, and public oratory as entertainment -- and shows how the candidate framed the speech as an opportunity to continue his famous "debates" with his archrival Democrat Stephen A. Douglas on the question of slavery.

Holzer describes the enormous risk Lincoln took by appearing in New York, where he exposed himself to the country's most critical audience and took on Republican Senator William Henry Seward of New York, the front runner, in his own backyard. Then he recounts a brilliant and innovative public relations campaign, as Lincoln took the speech "on the road" in his successful quest for the presidency.

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

Few people know more about Abraham Lincoln than Holzer (editor of *Lincoln the Writer; Lincoln Seen and Heard*; etc.). This fine new work focuses on a widely known but little studied address that Lincoln delivered early in 1860 in New York City, which Holzer believes made Lincoln the Republican candidate and therefore president. While one has to credit other political and historical factors, Holzer is probably right. Surely no one will again overlook this masterful speech, even if it never rose to the eloquence of the Gettysburg Address. That's precisely one of Holzer's main arguments: that the speech was intended as a learned, historically grounded, legally powerful rebuttal to claims of Lincoln's great Democratic opponent, Stephen Douglas, about the constitutionality of slavery's spread into the territories. But how, Holzer asks, did a long speech hold its audience at Cooper Union and then infuse tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of newspaper readers with enthusiasm for the man? The answer lies in large part with the nature of American culture—a highly politicized one of readers—in the 1860s. But as Holzer also makes clear, Lincoln conceived of the speech as part of an astute strategy to win his party's nomination. While his political wizardry will surprise few readers, they'll learn again how it was combined with intellectual power and a fierce determination to clarify his moral convictions. It was on this visit to New York that Matthew Brady shot his most celebrated portrait of Lincoln (which appears on the book jacket). Holzer devotes a fascinating chapter to this episode.

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#### From Booklist

A prolific Lincoln editor (*The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete, Unexpurgated Text*, 1993), Holzer here steps forward as a full-fledged Lincoln author. The oration he scrutinizes, the February 1860 address to a Republican Party audience in New York, gave wings to Lincoln's presidential aspirations, and its historical stature makes the humble details of its arrangement and delivery interesting in their own right. So much so that, after Lincoln's death, all sorts of apocrypha have risen around the speech, which Holzer studiously analyzes. Yet Holzer's is not a dry exercise in scholarly exactitude but a vivid narration of the episode, from Lincoln's purposes in consenting to speak to the physical appearances of his surroundings on trains and in New York. Holzer's prose conjures the figure Lincoln cut onstage and the aural impact of his words, which identified the Republicans as the genuine upholders of the Founders' position on slavery, that is, against its extension and for its extinction. An excellent contribution to Lincolnalicia. *Gilbert Taylor*  
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#### Review

"This book is a must for anyone fascinated by Abraham Lincoln." -- *Civil War Times*

"*Lincoln at Cooper Union* is the most interesting and important book on the sixteenth president published in years. Its richly detailed account of Lincoln's visit to New York in 1860 is as absorbing as any novel, and its close analysis of Lincoln's Cooper Union address adds significantly to our understanding of his political philosophy. I recommend it enthusiastically." -- David Herbert Donald, author of *Lincoln*

"It required someone with Harold Holzer's combination of knowledge, experience and talent to capture the speech's unique complexity and profundity. . . . All of this is brought to readers with meticulous historic precision, fascinating insight and charmingly facile prose." -- Mario Cuomo

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