

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### **OLD ABE**

John Cribb

Republic Book Publishers (400 pp.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

Cribb's intimate debut novel puts readers into the mind of Abraham Lincoln during the turbulent last five years of his life.

At the riotous and somewhat-drunken proceedings of the Illinois Republican Convention of 1860, a working Springfield lawyer, quietly whittling, suddenly finds himself hoisted into the air and onto the stage as their nominee for president. So begins the last, brief period of Lincoln's tumultuous existence. A modest man of pragmatism and compassion, with progressive ideas for the country, he enters the White House with his wife, Mary, and sons Willie and Tad in tow, with hopes of holding together a deeply divided country. But after barely a month in office, the first shots of the Civil War are fired at Fort Sumter, and Lincoln is now a wartime president. He struggles with his limited knowledge of military affairs, turning to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to stem the waste of the war machine while butting heads with the seemingly victory-averse Gen. George McClellan. As he tries to reunite the shattered Union, Lincoln is assailed by crushing personal tragedies. Further weighing on him is the horror of slavery, and he makes a covenant with God to move forward on emancipation. Cribb's novel stays largely faithful to historical events as it transports readers back to a time when individual citizens didn't need to buy the attention of their politicians. The book's characters are nearly all historical monoliths who can feel unapproachable in more traditional history books; here, readers experience Lincoln's tears at the loss of his son Willie, the active fire he faced at Fort Stevens in 1864, and the magnetic mischief that Tad brought him in the busiest of times. Two meetings with Frederick Douglass lay bare the shared ground between politicians and revolutionaries. This access to the characters—with context including the stacked, empty coffins at Gettysburg before his famed address or Lincoln's swollen fingers from shaking so many hands as he signs the Emancipation Proclamation—brings history to life.

Detailed, character-focused historical fiction that offers a new angle on a president.