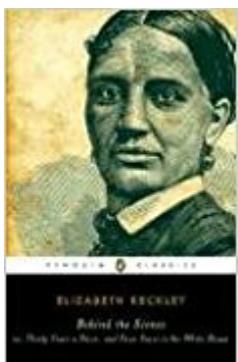


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Behind The Scenes: Or, Thirty Years A Slave, And Four Years In The White House (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Originally published in 1868—when it was attacked as an “indecent book”—authored by a “traitorous eavesdropper.” Behind the Scenes is the story of Elizabeth Keckley, who began her life as a slave and became a privileged witness to the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. Keckley bought her freedom at the age of thirty-seven and set up a successful dressmaking business in Washington, D.C. She became modiste to Mary Todd Lincoln and in time her friend and confidante, a relationship that continued after Lincoln’s assassination. In documenting that friendship—often using the First Lady’s own letters—Behind the Scenes fuses the slave narrative with the political memoir. It remains extraordinary for its poignancy, candor, and historical perspective. First time in Penguin Classics

Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics (July 26, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143039245

ISBN-13: 978-0143039242

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.5 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 423 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #321,624 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #53 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Women #241 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Civil War > Abolition #442 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > Civil War

Customer Reviews

The life and times of one remarkable woman encompasses Behind the Scenes. Keckley’s first 30 years were spent as a slave, and the cruelties and injustices of her life are related clearly and succinctly. This enlightening memoir recounts how she was beaten and how she became a dressmaker to support her master and his family, how determined she was to purchase freedom for herself and her son, how her friends in St. Louis came to her aid, how she became Mary Todd Lincoln’s dressmaker and close friend, and her perspectives and experiences from her inside view of Lincoln’s White House. Keckley emerges as a calm and confident person who speaks of a very

tumultuous period of American history. Reader Ameria Jones does a superb job, reading with a clear, strong voice. The musical performances are provided by David Hab. Recommended.?Denise A. Garofalo, Mid-Hudson Lib. System, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"Keckley provides a contrast between her life as a slave and her life as freed dressmaker. From her early years to her later friendship with Mary Todd Lincoln, Keckley's life is the pattern of a self-made woman as she buys her own freedom and becomes a friend to one of the most influential couples in history." -- Civil War "[Keckley's] unusual memoir offers a rare view of the formal and informal networks that African Americans established among themselves, as well as an intimate perspective of the Lincoln family... Heavily illustrated with eighty-six photographs." -- Documentary Editing "Lizzie Keckley in those Civil War years was privy to the most intimate conversations of the White House living quarters. You will never find a life of Abraham Lincoln in which her remembrances are not extensively quoted." -- Gene Smith, American Legacy --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

What a cast of (TRUE!) characters! Mrs. Keckley is the more interesting character. She deals with the obviously difficult Mrs. Lincoln with grace, compassion and humor. As one reviewer noted, after 39 years as a slave, dealing with difficult owners, Keckley had skills and experience for her interesting relationship with Mrs. Lincoln. In doing research to serve as book club discussion leader, I also discovered that Mrs. Keckley thrived for many years in the most lucrative professions available to nineteenth century women. We learn through the book that Mrs. Keckley was a highly accomplished entrepreneur. Integrity and loyalty are among the many virtues of Mrs. Keckley and in the end, they are her downfall. Some reviewers castigate our author for her detailed descriptions of fashion creation and business building while others praise her descriptions of Washington D.C. for the appreciation of the atmosphere of city during the late 19th century.Judge for yourself when you read this one.

This is penned by Mrs. Lincoln's former seamstress. She was present at every key moment in the Lincoln presidency (ironically, she had served the same role for the wife of Jefferson Davis before the confederacy). I learned more about Lincoln as a man and as a leader from this former slave than I have from all the scholars on the subject. Very well written and researched. This should be required reading for school children.

This was an interesting yet at the same time painful story to read. Elizabeth really had a hard life, but worked diligently to overcome her slave status and earlier abuses. It was fascinating to read about her close relationship with the Lincoln. It was also sad to read about her hardship imposed on her by Mrs. Lincoln's "Old Clothes" scandal. I know she eventually died alone (her son died during the Civil War). But I am also happy that she is being remembered today. I think Jennifer Chiaverini's novel "Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker" brought attention back to Elizabeth and these memoirs.

I had first read the book Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly before reading the Behind the Scenes.... Book. If I had read this book first, I probably would have given it a higher rating. Being from IL, near St. Louis, I certainly could identify with both of the women, their history, events and relationship. I found it very sad that Mrs. Keckly's later years were so desolate after her very hard work to free herself from slavery, her successes and her having shared such a close positive relationship for so many years with Mrs. Lincoln, that ended in a distasteful manner on the part of Mrs. Lincoln. No doubt Mrs. Lincoln's contributions to their relationship and her poor mental health contributed to the unfortunate outcome for Mrs. Keckly. I recommend both books, however, please read the Behind the Scenes book first since so much of the information is annotated the other book.

I loved this book. It was fascinating from the start. I was so impressed by Ms. Keckley's vocabulary and fluency. I loved how she expressed herself. Mostly I loved the intimate vignettes of Pres. Lincoln at home with his family. She buys herself out of slavery after several horrifying experiences. She needs to earn a living and pay back the money she borrowed to buy herself and her child. She ends up being Mrs. Lincoln's dressmaker. Wonderful to feel you are inside the Lincoln White House. She discusses Mary Todd Lincoln in kind terms, admitting Mrs. Lincoln had some idiosyncrasies. Well done! She describes mannerisms, actions, words of President Lincoln in very personal terms, so you feel close to him. Wish there had been more of that. Her descriptions of his manner and persona were so beautifully done, that when he died in such a horrible way (which we all know), it caught me off guard and I teared up...I am so glad she was able to become literate at a time when many slaves weren't allowed that luxury. I am glad she put these experiences down on paper...it was part of her efforts to be financially independent...sewing in the daytime, and writing at night. An admirable lady.

This was an interesting insight into a small portion of the life of Mary Todd Lincoln. The author,

herself an amazing story to tell, seems to take care in protecting the privacy of others as best she can. Very thoughts provoking and probably considered scandalous at the time of publication.

This was very interesting not only as the autobiography of a slave before and during the Civil War but also as a contemporary account of Mary Lincoln as First Lady. I wish it were at lot more detailed and told many more incidents of Elizabeth's life. She certainly glosses over her years as a slave and the conditions she endured are only hinted at. However, it was her story to tell as she wanted to tell it and it is amazing she told it at all. It is not long and is well worth the read.

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