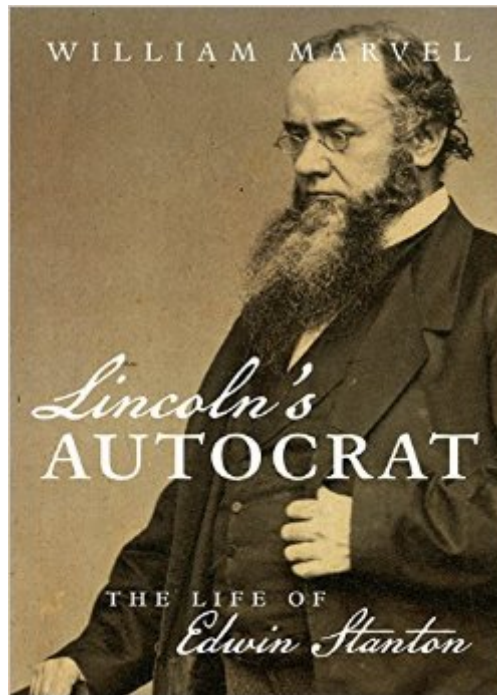


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Lincoln's Autocrat: The Life Of Edwin Stanton (Civil War America)



Synopsis

Edwin M. Stanton (1814-1869), one of the nineteenth century's most impressive legal and political minds, wielded enormous influence and power as Lincoln's Secretary of War during most of the Civil War and under Johnson during the early years of Reconstruction. In the first full biography of Stanton in more than fifty years, William Marvel offers a detailed reexamination of Stanton's life, career, and legacy. Marvel argues that while Stanton was a formidable advocate and politician, his character was hardly benign. Climbing from a difficult youth to the pinnacle of power, Stanton used his authority--and the public coffers--to pursue political vendettas, and he exercised sweeping wartime powers with a cavalier disregard for civil liberties. Though Lincoln's ability to harness a cabinet with sharp divisions and strong personalities is widely celebrated, Marvel suggests that Stanton's tenure raises important questions about Lincoln's actual control over the executive branch. This insightful biography also reveals why men like Ulysses S. Grant considered Stanton a coward and a bully, who was unashamed to use political power for partisan enforcement and personal preservation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Edwin Stanton was not a particularly likable man, and William Marvel makes clear he is among those who would concur with the statement. Edwin Stanton was Lincoln's second Secretary of War after his first, Simon Cameron, was discharged for being so grossly corrupt and incompetent that

the Union nearly lost the war in its first year. Stanton, a lawyer by training, had a genius for organization (as even Mr. Marvel concedes in a roundabout way) and quickly set about improving the quality of Union supplies and military personnel. The book does not cover only Stanton's war years, however. It traces his early years in Steubenville, Ohio and his budding law practice. Among the cases he argued was one involving a patent, *McCormick v. Manny*, which provided his first interaction with Mr. Lincoln. At first it appeared the case would be heard in Illinois, so they hired local counsel, but once it relocated to Ohio, they dropped Lincoln without bothering to notify him. As a result, he was left to watch the case from the court gallery. This, however, did not ruin Lincoln's opinion of the man, and when he arrived at the White House, he sought out the prominent Ohioan and appointed him to the cabinet. It is the war years that serve as the real meat of the story. Stanton throughout his tenure in office would complain about the president's decisions, all the while inflating his own contributions to the war effort. Asthmatic and nearsighted, on multiple occasions he nearly had a nervous breakdown and threatened to resign, but Lincoln managed to keep him on. One point Marvel covers, but which I wish he discussed even more thoroughly was Stanton's crushing of civil dissent.

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