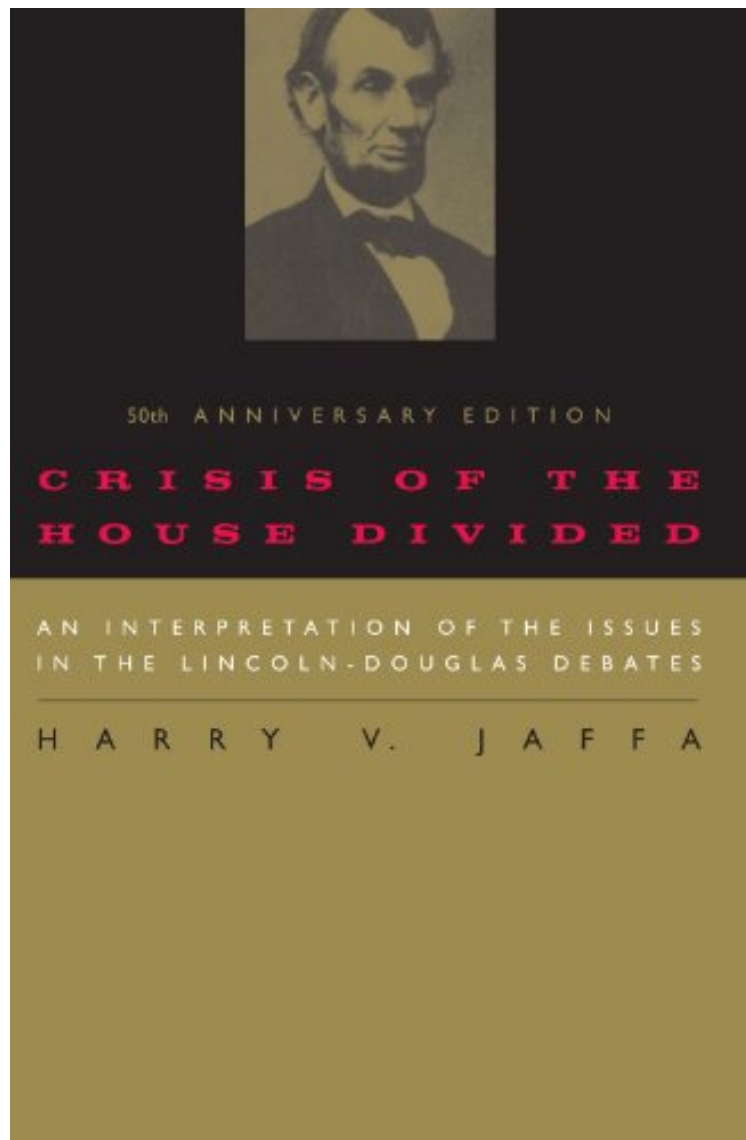


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## Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 50th Anniversary Edition

*Harry V. Jaffa*

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**Harry V. Jaffa : Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 50th Anniversary Edition** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, 50th Anniversary Edition:

21 of 22 people found the following review helpful. Highly relevant decades after publication  
By J. Grattan  
This book is a most profound examination of the thinking of both Sen. Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln concerning all of the issues associated with slavery up to the Civil War. Jaffa wants to set the record straight as far as any number of contentions by well-known historians of his era, known as revisionists. Most importantly, he flatly disputes the notion that the thinking and actions of Douglas (the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854) endorsing popular sovereignty were essentially equivalent to the principled stand of Lincoln based on the equality of all men in their long-term ramifications for slavery. Those revisionist historians contend that Lincoln and the Republicans should have accepted Douglas' solution to the slavery crisis, thus not precipitating the Civil War. Another claim against Lincoln that Jaffa thoroughly discredits is that Lincoln, in fact, did not hold Negroes as equals, and simply used the issue for personal political gain regardless of the consequences for the Union. But Lincoln understood that politics is the art of the possible. The author makes clear that Lincoln held an intense respect for the principles of the Declaration of Independence, including the rights of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness for all, including Negroes. It was one thing for the Union to be formed with the taint of slavery, but the contention that Southerners came to that slavery was a "positive good" was felt by Lincoln to have the potential to completely undermine the basis of the US. Perhaps it could even be justified to enslave a group of "inferior" whites. Lincoln felt compelled to move the nation back to its core principles without alienating those who did not have the same clarity as to what was at stake. The book is a challenging read. The issue of permitting slavery in territories became and remained contentious from 1820 on. The arguments for and against slavery in territories are quite subtle involving constitutionality, Congressional acts, territorial legislative bodies, and court decisions. The Dred Scott decision in 1857 disallowing restrictions on taking property (slaves) into territories is examined. Lincoln and the Republicans, rightfully so, were very apprehensive as to the long term ramifications of that decision. It was hardly a stretch to see where free states could become a thing of the past. The book is only indirectly concerned with the Lincoln-Douglas debates. They are randomly referred to throughout the text, but earlier writings and speeches receive far more attention. Douglas' words concerning the Mexican territories and the Kansas-Nebraska Act are well covered. The author devotes a large segment to examining Lincoln's speech to the Young Men's Lyceum in 1838, where his thinking on major issues had already crystallized. Lincoln's address on temperance receives much attention. The author is a disciple of Leo Strauss, the natural rights theorist. He does regard Lincoln as a preeminent natural rights thinker. There is some discussion of pre-civil society versus civil society. But the overall import of the book does not turn on acceptance of natural rights in a purist sense. This book, decades after its publication, cannot be ignored for understanding Lincoln.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By J. W. Henry Watson  
An incredible work of scholarship.  
17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. The one to read  
By Daniel Lowenstein  
If you want to read one book about Lincoln's thought, this is the one to read. The first part of the book, which takes Douglas seriously and states the strongest case for him, is historically dense and may be difficult for most readers. But keep going, because the payoff will be great. There follow chapters on two of Lincoln's early speeches. Jaffa's analysis here is brilliant, though perhaps a bit far-fetched. In the final part of the book, Jaffa states the case for Lincoln against Douglas. This part is rich in its ideas, rigorous in its reasoning, and eloquent to the point of being inspirational. (By the way, if you want to read one biography of Lincoln, I'd recommend the one by Lord Charnwood. Though written almost a century ago and therefore not up to date on all the details of historical scholarship, it is judicious throughout and beautifully written.)

Crisis of the House Divided is the standard historiography of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Harry Jaffa provides the definitive analysis of the political principles that guided Lincoln from his reentry into politics in 1854 through his Senate campaign against Douglas in 1858. To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the original publication, Jaffa has provided a new introduction. "Crisis of the House Divided has shaped the thought of a generation of Abraham Lincoln and Civil War scholars." Mark E. Needly, Jr., *Civil War History* "An important book about one of the great episodes in the history of the sectional controversy. It breaks new ground and opens a new view of Lincoln's significance as a political thinker." T. Harry Williams, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* "A searching and provocative analysis of the issues confronted and the ideas expounded in the great debates. . . . A book which displays such learning and insight that it cannot fail to excite the admiration even of scholars who disagree with its major arguments and conclusions." D. E. Fehrenbacher, *American Historical Review*

Four hundred pages of close textual analysis, biography and political philosophy, the book transformed the scholarly understanding of Lincoln, placing the prairie lawyer on a level with Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, and the other founders.