

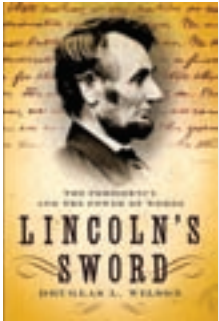
### Lincoln's Sword

At first, few thought much of Abraham Lincoln's skills as a writer, but his ability to galvanize public opinion with his prose changed the way Americans communicate, suggests Michiko Katuami in a *New York Times* review of *Lincoln's Sword*, by Douglas L. Wilson.

As Wilson writes: "...Lincoln was effectively forging a new, distinctively American instrument...perfecting a prose that expressed a uniquely American way of apprehending and ordering experience...to find a way to reach a large and diverse American audience, and to persuade them to support the government in its efforts to put down the rebellion."

He continues: "By the time Lincoln came to write the Gettysburg Address, for example, he was attempting to help put the horrific carnage of the Civil War in a positive light, and at the same time do it in a way that would have constructive implications for the future."

Lincoln particularly favored "dramatic images and the literary device of antithesis ('the balanced opposition of words or phrases') that would implant themselves in readers' and listeners' minds." Lincoln's greatest influences as a writer? Shakespeare... and the Bible.



### Averaged Americans

The question on the table is whether surveys, polls—social science data—reflects America or shapes it. The answer, according to a book called *The Averaged American*, by Sarah E. Igo, leans more toward the latter than the former. Reviewed by Scott Stossel in *The New York Times*, the book analyzes three studies that are considered to be "milestones in the annals of empirical research."

The first of these, the so-called *Middletown* study by Robert and Hellen Lynd, sought to present data points about a single community in Muncie, Indiana, to create a profile of the average American.

"Their survey undertook to examine every aspect of life" by collecting "information about everything from the hours spent on household cleaning to the size of backyards." The report became the "touchstone of modern market research" as well as the backbone of modern marketing. It also "changed how America understood itself, and created a new object for scientific study: *average America*."



Then along came George Gallup and Elmo Roper, whose work built on that of the Lynds, except that "instead of looking in a particular geographic place, the pollsters located the average in a disembodied statistical mean...at the expense of homogenizing the vast diversity that goes into any statistical mean."

Finally, there's Kinsey, whose goal was "to remove the stigma" associated with certain kinds of, *um*, deviant behavior—basically by proving how commonplace it was and therefore that there really is no such thing as "average" or "normal."

Ultimately, Scott Stossel suggests that for all our infatuation over "cold hard data" about ourselves, "our national self-understanding comes as much from the likes of art (Norman Rockwell), literature (F. Scott Fitzgerald) and journalism (James Agee) as it does from lies, damned lies and statistics.

### Au Pied de Cochon

One of Canada's most famous chefs, Martin Picard, has published a cookbook that was written much in the same way food is prepared at his Montreal restaurant, Au Pied de Cochon, reports Oliver Schwaner-Albright in *The New York Times*.

Martin and his staff wrote the cookbook, *Au Pied de Cochon—The Album*, as "a collective effort...over two years on Mondays, when the restaurant is closed. That is also the day when they do their pickling and preserving, so they held editorial meetings while making enough cornichons and corn relish to last through the winter."

In a similar spirit, the book's illustrations were done by one of the restaurant's waiters, and very much reflect the enterprise's irreverent attitude. For example, one illustration "is a manic pig with a missing foot (the *pied de cochon*)...The pig hobbles around with a glass of wine, falls in love with a roasted Guinea hen, sucks sap out of a maple tree and, next to a recipe for a cookie with an off-color name, loses consciousness under a nun's habit."

If this cookbook doesn't sound to you like mainstream publishing-house material, you'd be right. It was self-published—but priced at \$52 a copy, it quickly sold out its initial press run of 6,000 copies. And for all its subversive humor, *Au Pied de Cochon—The Album* is said to be a quite serious cookbook when it comes to the recipes.