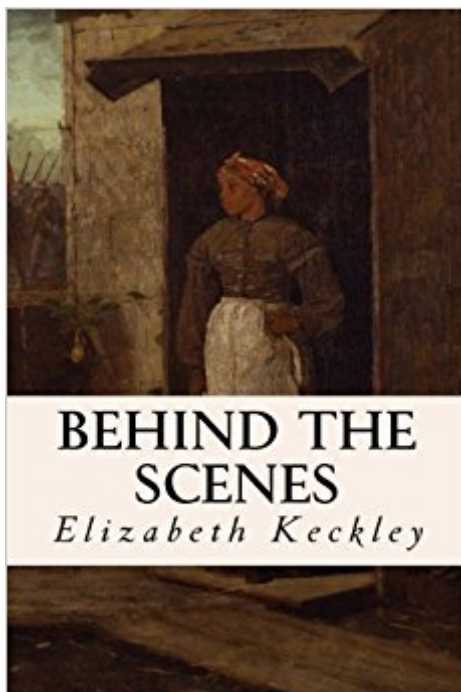


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# Behind The Scenes



## Synopsis

Behind the Scenes is an African American history classic by Elizabeth Keckley that details the author's life history including thirty years a slave, and four years in the White House.

## Book Information

Paperback: 152 pages

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## Customer Reviews

Recommended --Library Journal --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

Behind the Scenes: or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House was first published in 1868 and is considered one of the most candid and poignant slave narratives. Author Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley writes about her teenage years, working as a slave for the Rev. Robert Burwell in Hillsborough, NC. He is thought by many historians to have been Keckley's half-brother. The Burwells had twelve children and ran an academy for girls. She writes about mistreatment and violence visited upon her by Rev. and Mrs. Burwell, and the unwelcome sexual advances and eventual rape by one of the town's white citizens. After Keckley gave birth to a son, she and her baby were sent to live with Burwell's sister. --This text refers to the Audio CD 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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