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Review of *Lincoln's Secret Spy: The Civil War Case That Changed the Future of Espionage* by Jane Singer and John Stewart

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*Lincoln's Secret Spy: The Civil War Case That Changed the Future of Espionage.* By Jane Singer and John Stewart. (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2015. Pp. x, 310. \$26.95, ISBN 978-1-4930-0810-0.)

William Alvin Lloyd was an appalling man. During his erratic and almost sociopathic journey through the middle of the nineteenth century, he was a liar, a bigamist, a confidence man, and a shady minstrel show operator who frequently skipped out on hotel fares and wheedled free passes out of begrudging railroad executives. His only legitimate job was as a publisher of steamboat and railroad guides, but even then most of his profits came from extorting border state businessmen to take out ads or be accused of having unpopular political beliefs. Born in Kentucky, Lloyd spent significant time in New Orleans, Memphis, New York, and other cities.

Lloyd also claimed that he had been a spy for Abraham Lincoln. Although he never submitted a report—and Jane Singer and John Stewart quickly dismiss the idea that he had ever really intended to spy on anybody—once the war was over, Lloyd, one of his wives, and a lawyer named Enoch Totten tried to collect nearly \$12,000 in salary (Lloyd claimed the president had made a verbal promise of \$200 per month), interest, and expenses. Astonishingly, he was awarded \$3,427. Even after Lloyd died a few years later, Totten came back for more, but numerous appeals and lawsuits failed.

*Lincoln's Secret Spy: The Civil War Case That Changed the Future of Espionage* is a shrewdly researched book. Singer and Stewart combed dozens of newspapers to find the shadowy Lloyd in towns and cities throughout the South. He appears in ads, notices of mail received, and city court records. The most substantial sources are the numerous documents submitted during litigation of his claims and a series of letters he wrote to Jefferson Davis asking for help while he was imprisoned in Savannah in 1862, ironically, on suspicion of being a Yankee spy.

The book's title bears little relationship to its contents. Lloyd was never a spy, and Lincoln appears only on the supposedly official pass allowing the scoundrel to cross Union lines. The repeated efforts by Lloyd and his associates to defraud the government did not actually change the practice of espionage; they simply led to a legal precedent that protected the government from claims made by individuals who had contracted secretly to perform secret work. That hardly amounts to an exposé, and the authors do not suggest what exactly was changed by the "Totten Doctrine," as it came to be known. Indeed, the issue takes up only the last two pages of the book.

It is, of course, difficult to build a book of substance around the life of a man with no substance. The authors overdramatize the events they describe,

jumping back and forth from past to present tense and frequently ordering readers to watch, listen, or wait for the next thing to happen. Their first description of Lloyd is illustrative of the tone throughout the book: “Here was a man, a comet, streaking through decades with impudence and impunity. A simmering broth of lust, indefatigable energy, greed, and larceny, he was magical, priapic, musical, inventive, a survivor and a scoundrel” (p. ix). In the end, *Lincoln’s Secret Spy* fails to live up to its heightened title and florid prose, but it does offer an entertaining and lively glimpse of the greed, turmoil, and banality that lurked on the margins of Civil War society.

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