



All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt

By John Taliaferro

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The first full-scale biography of John Hay since 1934: From secretary to Abraham Lincoln to secretary of state for Theodore Roosevelt, Hay was an essential American figure for more than half a century.

John Taliaferro's brilliant biography captures the extraordinary life of Hay, one of the most amazing figures in American history, and restores him to his rightful place. Private secretary to Lincoln and secretary of state to Theodore Roosevelt, Hay was both witness and author of many of the most significant chapters in American history—from the birth of the Republican Party, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, to the prelude to World War I. As an ambassador and statesman, he guided many of the country's major diplomatic initiatives at the turn of the twentieth century: the Open Door with China, the creation of the Panama Canal, and the establishment of America as a world leader.

Hay's friends are a who's who of the era: Mark Twain, Horace Greeley, Henry Adams, Henry James, and virtually every president, sovereign, author, artist, power broker, and robber baron of the Gilded Age. His peers esteemed him as "a perfectly cut stone" and "the greatest prime minister this republic has ever known." But for all his poise and polish, he had his secrets. His marriage to one of the wealthiest women in the country did not prevent him from pursuing the Madame X of Washington society, whose other secret suitor was Hay's best friend, Henry Adams.

All the Great Prizes, the first authoritative biography of Hay in eighty years, renders a rich and fascinating portrait of this brilliant American and his many worlds.

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Editorial Review

From [Booklist](#)

If not ringing a bell for general-interest history fans, the name John Hay should resonate with Civil War buffs because he was Lincoln's secretary. From this life-altering relationship that the 22-year-old Hay formed with Lincoln, author Taliaferro departs for the subsequent course taken by his subject, which ended with Hay's 1905 death in harness as secretary of state. At heart more a literary than political personality, Hay left a capacious and varied body of writing for Taliaferro to shape into a narrative arc: it consists of Hay's Civil War diary; poems, short stories, and novels; editorials and political tracts; a monumental Lincoln biography; private letters; and diplomatic documents. Setting Hay into the frame of late-nineteenth-century America, Taliaferro sympathetically shows Hay making his way. Marrying money helped, and as Hay advanced in politics and publishing, he could detach himself from affairs and cultivate friendships he formed with the leading intellectuals of his time, such as Henry Adams and Henry James. Spiced by Hay's extramarital pursuit of a socialite, Taliaferro's textured portrait exemplifies the better productions of the biographical craft. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"Utterly fantastic...the definitive portrait of a man whose life spanned a crucial era in American history – and whose work helped to define that era. A genius of animation works on every page. It's the author's best book." (*Open Letters Monthly*)

"Given that John Hay's public career was bookended by his service to Lincoln and Roosevelt, it seems surprising that this is the first biography written about him in 80 years. Thanks to Taliaferro's skillful work, it seems unlikely that another will be needed for a while." (*The Dallas Morning News*)

"A valuable reassessment of an underestimated politician and diplomat" (*The Economist*)

"This is a great biography of a great American." (*The Washington Independent Review of Books*)

"Taliaferro's textured portrait exemplifies the better productions of the biographical craft." (*Booklist*)

"Taliaferro's skillful, admiring biography (the first since 1934) brings Hay vividly to life by setting him among family, friends (many of them well-known figures in their own right), and the well-heeled political circles in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, in which Hay moved with ease." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"The best life of Hay that we have and a persuasive argument for taking another look at the life of a career public servant" (*Kirkus Reviews*)

"Taliaferro takes the reader on an intimate historical journey through the public and personal lives of Hay...Worthy as the most comprehensive biography of Hay to date." (*Library Journal*)

"John Hay has long been one of those remarkable American figures who hide in plain historical sight—until now. With insight and eloquence, John Taliaferro has brought Hay into the foreground, telling a remarkable story remarkably well." (Jon Meacham, author of *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*)

"John Hay began his career as private secretary to Abraham Lincoln, writing many of Lincoln's letters, and

ended it as secretary of state in the administrations of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, responsible for many of their foreign-policy achievements. He was at the bedside of Lincoln and of McKinley as each president lay dying of an assassin's bullet. John Taliaferro's absorbing biography of this notable author, diplomat, and *bon vivant* who knew most of the important people of his time fully measures up to the significance of its subject." (James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*)

"John Hay is one of the seminal statesmen in American history. *All the Great Prizes* is the grand book he so richly deserves." (Douglas G. Brinkley, author of *Cronkite*)

"One of the most intriguing political figures of the Gilded Age, Hay emerges in this beautifully narrated book as an astute, if sometimes unwilling, eyewitness to history. Making deft use of Hay's own letters, some only recently discovered, Taliaferro brings the man to life." (Martha A. Sandweiss, author of *Passing Strange: A Gilded Age Tale of Love and Deception Across the Color*)

"John Hay led more than one charmed life—yet endured more than his share of tragedy. John Taliaferro brings Lincoln's gifted secretary and biographer—and Theodore Roosevelt's accomplished secretary of state—back to vivid life in this page-turning account of an extraordinary eyewitness to, and maker of, American history. After generations of bewildering neglect, Hay needs a great biography no longer." (Harold Holzer, author of *Lincoln at Cooper Union*)

"At long last, John Hay has gotten the biography he deserves. From his youthful service at Lincoln's side to his late years as Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of State, this gifted writer, diplomat, and friend was a central figure in America's exciting journey from near-death to world power. John Taliaferro tells this remarkable life in rich and flowing detail." (David Von Drehle, author of *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year*)

About the Author

John Taliaferro is a graduate of Harvard College, a former senior editor at *Newsweek*, and the author of four previous books. He lives in Austin, Texas, and Pray, Montana.

Users Review

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Mary Crouch:

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Your reading 6th sense will not betray you actually, why because this All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt reserve written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who also read the book. Written throughout good manner for you, still dripping wet every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your personal hunger then you still doubt All the Great Prizes: The Life of John Hay, from Lincoln to Roosevelt as good book not simply by the cover but also by content. This is one book that can break don't judge book by its handle, so do you still needing yet another sixth sense to pick this specific!?! Oh come on your reading through sixth sense already said so why you have to listening to an additional sixth sense.

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