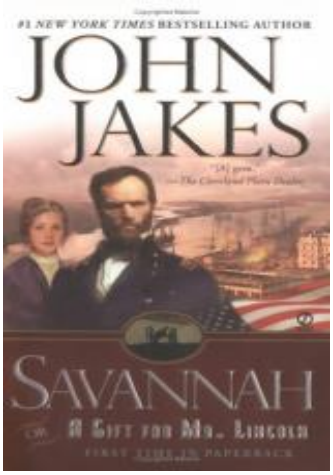
Savannah: Or a Gift for Mr. Lincoln

by John Jakes



About the Book

The author of sixteen consecutive *New York Times* bestsellers, called by the *Los Angeles Times* "the godfather of the historical novel," now brings to life an almost-forgotten moment in the Civil War.

Georgia, 1864: Sherman's army marches inexorably from Atlanta to the sea. In its path, the charming old city of Savannah, where the Lester ladies--attractive widowed Sara and her feisty twelve-year-old daughter Hattie-struggle to save the family rice plantation. When Sherman offers the conquered city to President Lincoln as "a Christmas gift," Hattie and the feared general find themselves on a collision course that will astonish both of them.

In this rousing new tale, John Jakes tells a story of battlefield danger, wartime romance, and indomitable courage. The rich cast of characters includes a corrupt judge who positively exudes Dickensian wickedness, a fast-talking piano-playing reporter from New York, a pair of thwarted young lovers, a raffish Indiana cavalryman, a valiant former slave who practices bird calls with surprising results, and a whole bagful of rascals, rebels, and real soldiers who marched with Sherman.

Together they bring to life a season of simmering hostilities, rising hopes, and empty stockings-perhaps the most strife-torn yet heartwarming Christmas in all of American history.

Discussion Guide

1. John Jakes acknowledges Charles Dickens to be "the greatest novelist in the English language" and in **Savannah** respectfully and artfully pays homage to him.

2. Can meaning be found in any of the names of the fictional characters in **Savannah**? Do you find that some are descriptive? Ironic?

3. Like some of Dickens's novels, **Savannah** has an alternative title, **A Gift for Mr. Lincoln**. Which title do you prefer? Can you think of other possible alternative titles?

4. In the 1860s, Dickens wrote contemporary fiction while Jakes writes historical fiction set in the same period. To the present-day reader, both writers are relating history. Describe each writer's advantages and disadvantages in telling his story from his perspective in time.

5. What characters in **Savannah** can be said to have a heritage from characters in Victorian literature? (i.e., the wrongfully accused back from prison, the wicked judge, etc.)

6. There are numerous acts of treachery in **Savannah**. By degrees of venality of their nature and their transgressions, how would you order the dastardly trio of Judge Drewgood, Professor Marcus, and Isaiah Fleeg? Explain your decision.

7. Conversely, there are numerous acts of bravery and goodness in this novel. How are the good deeds of Alpheus Winks, Stephen Hopewell, and William Tecumseh Sherman similar? How are they different? Each, it could be said, is rewarded for his actions. Are the rewards incremental to their actions?

8. Nearly every character in this novel undergoes significant change from the time the reader is first introduced to him or her to the time that character exits the novel. In your opinion, which character's journey was the most profound?

9. Jakes has created numerous colorful characters in **Savannah** with only brief appearances in the story. What characters would you have liked to have learned more about? Why?

10. At the conclusion of the novel, future happy endings are suggested, but not posited, for some of the characters. In your own sequel to **Savannah**, what might happen to the major characters in the novel as the war ends and the Reconstruction begins?

Author Bio

John Jakes was the bestselling author of CHARLESTON, the eight-volume *Kent Family Chronicles*, *The North and South Trilogy*, ON SECRET SERVICE, CALIFORNIA GOLD, HOMELAND and AMERICAN DREAMS. Descended from a soldier of the Virginia Continental Line who fought in the American Revolution, Jakes was one of the most distinguished authors of historical fiction. He passed away in 2023 at the age of 90.

Critical Praise

"He is quite simply, a master of the ancient art of storytelling."

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