

Lincoln Emancipated
The President and the Politics of Race

Edited by Brian R. Dirck

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007. Pp. xiv, 189. Notes, index. \$32.00.)

Many citizens and scholars have difficulty confronting unpleasant realities in U.S. history. A celebratory approach to the nation's story and the "great man" tradition all too often cast their spells, sowing confusion whenever the historical record falls short of idealistic expectations. This problem is especially acute in writings about Abraham Lincoln, for Lincoln has become, as James McPherson puts it, "the deity of American civil religion." It is likewise evident—but fortunately not dominant—in this volume.

Illustrating the problem, Allen Guelzo writes in the foreword that if Lincoln "was a white supremacist" then his "every other accomplishment . . . falls into discredit" (p. viii). Guelzo thus focuses on Lincoln's attitudes, anxious to show that Lincoln's thoughts or feelings were not racist. Similarly, an essay by Phillip Paludan labors awkwardly to put a favorable gloss on Lincoln's advocacy of colonization to black leaders in August of 1862. To ward off negative conclusions about Lincoln, Paludan also makes some sound observations about human complexity and the dangers of "essentializ[ing]" a person through narrow categories (p. 30).

Fortunately, most of this volume's contributors avoid the trap of trying to make Lincoln perfect. Kenneth Winkle acknowledges that although

Lincoln "rose above the deepest prejudices" of his day, "he never accepted the social and political equality of African Americans." He saw racial prejudices as "central to American society" and difficult to overcome (p. 10). Winkle's essay contains an admirably thorough description of slavery and race relations in pre-Civil War Illinois. Winkle also discusses Lincoln's opposition to abolitionism, his support of colonization, and his belief that containing slavery and giving blacks "basic if not equal rights" would put slavery in the course of ultimate extinction (p. 28).

James Leiker carries forward the analysis of Lincoln's views on civil and natural rights. In his view, Lincoln was "no champion of 'civil rights' in the contemporary sense," since nineteenth-century Americans saw "blacks, Indians, women, and others regarded as inferior" as unable to discharge the responsibilities of citizenship. Instead, Lincoln's "progressivism lay in his understanding of 'natural rights,' those that lay outside the realm of the state simply by virtue of being born human" (p. 75). Such "natural rights" entailed "the economic freedom of all humans . . . to compete in a fair marketplace" (p. 92). Leiker concludes that by applying "impossible standards" to Lincoln, we have failed to appreciate his accomplishments in extending

“work that the founding generation had left undone” (p. 98).

Essays by Kevin R. C. Gutzman and Michael Vorenberg deal substantively with Lincoln’s interest in colonization. Gutzman examines similarities in the racial thought of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. He also notes the importance to Lincoln of Henry Clay, a life-long colonizationist, and documents how consistently Lincoln advanced the idea. Though some scholars try to explain away Lincoln’s statements on colonization, Gutzman concludes that “It seems entirely likely that Lincoln continued to hold to the Jeffersonian view . . . that blacks were entitled to the self-government [of] the Declaration of Independence . . . but that . . . they could exercise it only ‘upon [their] own soil” (p. 72). Vorenberg, meanwhile, points out that Lincoln may have continued to be attracted to ideas

of gradual emancipation and colonization—even as events pushed him in a different direction. He argues for the relevance of Lincoln’s Whig background and shows that Lincoln’s support of education for African Americans was not entirely different from the priority placed on education by some of today’s advocates for reparations.

An essay by Brian Dirck about the effect on Lincoln’s emancipation policies of possible opposition by the Supreme Court, and an analysis of the tangled politics of emancipation in Missouri by Dennis Boman, round out this useful volume.

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Lincoln and the Decision for War The Northern Response to Secession

By Russell McClintock

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Accounts of the secession crisis of 1861 focus mostly on what Southerners did to secede (the most recent example being William W. Freehling’s *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant* [2007]) rather than what Northerners did to oppose it. Our primary accounts of the Northern response are limited very largely to David M. Potter’s early *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (1942)

and Kenneth M. Stampp’s *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-61* (1950). But neither of those outstanding works paid more than fleeting attention to that Northern response outside the limited circle of Abraham Lincoln, the Republican party’s leadership, and the editors of prominent newspapers. This has not been a particularly fashionable way of doing political histo-