

ing infrastructure of the General Assembly, making sense of a sometimes labyrinthine system that spawned stenographers, pages, clerks, and porters. Professionalization of the legislature is a recurring theme, as twentieth-century reformers created a reference department and bill drafting services.

The book does not ignore the personality of the legislature, and here, in fact, one can find the book's most memorable passages. Anecdotal accounts of the rituals of the General Assembly (e.g., seating of members, opening prayers, end of session antics) provide a flexible framework for the more clinical analyses of policy and procedure (e.g., apportionment, rural-urban voting). Gold introduces us to the men and women who made this body work, sometimes in spite of themselves. From Vern Riffe, the powerful, efficiency-minded Speaker of the House from 1975 to 1994 to Gus Kasch, a "perpetual rebellion expert" who "finally left his fellow lawmakers in peace when he died in 1946," the

author's selective use of individuals as illustrative of larger institutional trends is masterful.

A handful of mistakes should have been caught by a sharp editor. The author denies that Jacob Cox, governor from 1866 to 1868, served in Congress. Cox actually had a turn representing Ohio's Sixth District from 1877 to 1879. A brief citation to "Democratic governor Myers Y. Cooper" belies the fact that this governor was a Republican.

Nonetheless, Gold has produced as close to a comprehensive look at these "institutions of democracy" as is possible. Intensely readable, interspersing a wide-ranging synthesis (part-time rough-and-tumble body to full-time, professional institution) with highly specific anecdotes, *Democracy in Session* is a valuable contribution to the study of U.S. politics.

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*Our Lincoln*  
*New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World*  
 Edited by Eric Foner

(New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Pp. 336. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

*Our Lincoln* is a collection of eleven essays viewing Lincoln in the historical context of his times. The essays, written by leading scholars of Lincoln and the nineteenth century, demon-

strate that there remain fascinating areas for inquiry into the life of this complex American icon. In the introduction, Eric Foner identifies the theme that links all the essays to Lin-

coln's contemporary environment. Each author seeks to explain an aspect of the "complex interrelationship between the man and the times in which he lived" (p. 11). It should be expected in an essay collection that some will have a stronger connection to the general theme than others, but all the essayists have made an effort to tie their respective subjects to the world that surrounded Lincoln.

The essays by James McPherson and Mark Neely provide a synthesis, with some new perspectives, of their larger book-length treatments of Lincoln as commander in chief and Lincoln's use of presidential power. In another essay, Sean Wilentz proposes that Lincoln accepted many of the political ideas of the Jacksonian Democrats. Lincoln's commitment to a strong central government reflects, according to Wilentz, the nationalistic views of both Jackson and Lincoln. The idea that Lincoln would abandon his strong Whiggish opinions may seem a bit of a stretch, but Wilentz does place Lincoln in the political environment of the first half of the nineteenth century, and from that perspective the essay is worthwhile.

Lincoln's family is the subject of Catherine Clinton's essay. Clinton provides a straightforward narrative describing the generally accepted story of the Lincoln family relationships and shows Lincoln in the traditional nineteenth-century domestic environment. Two other essays by Andrew Delbanco and Richard Car-

wardine also emphasize the personal side of Lincoln. Carwardine's thorough analysis of Lincoln's religion provides an insightful and valuable interpretation of Lincoln's spirituality. A number of books, including Douglas Wilson's *Lincoln's Sword* (2006), have examined Lincoln's use of language, but Delbanco takes a different look, emphasizing the sacramental content.

Eric Foner's essay is a careful examination of the African colonization movement and Lincoln's engagement with this widely accepted nineteenth-century solution to America's racial dilemma. James Oakes also addresses the racial tensions that confronted both Lincoln and the nation when he discusses states' rights and the rights of citizens.

*Our Lincoln* contains a collection of worthwhile essays that enrich our understanding of Lincoln's relationship to the world in which he lived and the people he influenced. Lincoln's character was certainly influenced by the social fabric of the early and mid-nineteenth century. These essays contribute to our understanding of the atmosphere and the political and social institutions of the period. *Our Lincoln* provides both new and old interpretations of Lincoln and his era by a group of acknowledged scholars.

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