

Lincoln and Liberty: Wisdom for the Ages

Edited by Lucas E. Morel

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. Pp. 369. Notes, index. \$40.00.)

In *Lincoln and Liberty*, Lucas E. Morel has assembled fourteen essays and organized them into four thematic sections written by scholars from various academic disciplines with a particular interest in Abraham Lincoln's understanding of personal liberty. Morel writes in his preface that "our task should not be to remake him in our image but to render an accurate portrait of him in his age." His contributors seek "to teach subsequent generations lessons to address the abiding questions that face a free people" (pp. x, ii). All of the essays address these objectives in thoughtful and provocative ways, providing nuanced points of view that stimulate interest in further inquiry.

Each essay focuses on some aspect of Lincoln's complex and highly developed sense of personal liberty, addressing the dilemma that confronted Lincoln and the nation as he sought to reconcile his belief in the Constitution with the need to abolish the institution of slavery. When viewed as a whole, the essays improve our understanding of Lincoln's remarkable appreciation of personal liberty and more particularly his commitment to transforming America's understanding of natural human rights.

Most of the essays, including a passionate and personal introduction by Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, emphasize Lincoln's belief that the Declaration of Indepen-

dence defined personal liberty as a sacred right of all people regardless of race, national origin, or individual beliefs. Thomas's introduction connects his personal experiences with Lincoln's determination to repeal the Kansas-Nebraska Act and repair the damage done by the Supreme Court's *Dred Scott* decision. Over the years commentators have tried to reconcile Lincoln's pragmatic political rhetoric relative to slavery with his pronounced hatred of the peculiar institution and his view that the Constitution provided the framework for protecting liberty in a free democratic society. The essays in this book expand that discussion and extend our understanding of Lincoln's lasting contributions to the American political system.

Section one includes essays by Fred Kaplan and John Briggs, who explain the significant impact of literature on Lincoln's worldview during his formative years on the Indiana frontier. The final essays act as a book-end to the first section, addressing the lasting contributions of Lincoln and his presidency to the American political experience.

Essay collections written by scholars from different disciplines sometimes challenge readers with distinctive keywords and phrases, as well as inconsistencies. Each of these essays stands well alone. As with any collection, some are more interesting and

provocative than others. All these essays, however, confirm Lincoln's legacy as the greatest defender of American principles in the history of the nation.

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The Life and Death of Gus Reed: A Story of Race and Justice in Illinois during the Civil War and Reconstruction

By Thomas Bahde

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014. Pp. 226. Illustrations, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$79.95.)

Thomas Bahde's well-researched, eloquent book offers a valuable examination of African Americans, race, and the criminal justice system in Illinois from the antebellum period through the early twentieth century. His analysis focuses on the capital city of Springfield and on Hancock County in western Illinois. Bahde uses the experience of a Civil War-era African American migrant from Georgia, Gus Reed, to trace alterations in understandings of race in Illinois in the Civil War and Reconstruction, but also to examine the persistence, if reshaping, of notions of black inferiority in the tumultuous transition from the antebellum to the postbellum period.

The book uses the case of Gus Reed, who would die at the state penitentiary in Joliet in 1878, bound to a cell door, with a gag strapped in his mouth, as a way to organize discussion of the shifting configuration of African American life and the role of race in Illinois's legal system in the nineteenth century. Bahde's method

works remarkably well, given how little is known of Reed's life besides his frequent encounters with the local and state criminal justice systems, a relationship that would eventually prove fatal to him. Reed's death provoked national press attention and calls for reform of the Illinois penitentiary, led by the innovative warden, Robert W. McLaughry, who sought to professionalize the facility; ultimately, only low-level prison employees would take the blame for the death of Reed. The use of Gus Reed's experience as a framing device works well, although at times the reader yearns to know more about Reed than Bahde's sources are probably capable of revealing.

The book is highly useful in tracing perspectives on race in Illinois during the war years among both Democrats and Republicans; the legal history of the state's racially discriminatory Black Laws (repealed in 1866) which criminalized black migration into the state and which denied blacks rights as citizens;