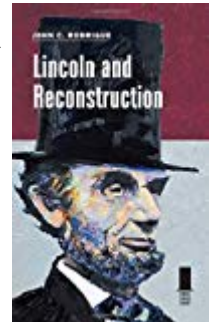


John C. Rodrigue. *Lincoln and Reconstruction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. x + 163 pp. \$19.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3253-3.



Reviewed by Michael Smith

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Commissioned by Christopher Childers (Pittsburg State University)

John C. Rodrigue, the author and editor of several previous works on Reconstruction, with this new work has produced a streamlined analysis of the crucial role of Abraham Lincoln in that contentious process, despite the apparent incongruity that the sixteenth president of the United States died essentially before the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War even began. But of course Lincoln oversaw wartime Reconstruction efforts in occupied Southern states, which led to bruising battles with congressional members of his own party, and helped set the stage for the political conflict to come.

Rodrigue, drawing primarily on Lincoln's own writings and speeches as his evidentiary base, contends that historical accounts focusing on Lincoln and Reconstruction have tended either to focus on ultimately unanswerable what-if questions about how the Rail Splitter would have handled affairs in the postwar period had he not been murdered (true, though he himself includes a cogent epilogue on this very topic), or simply treated wartime Reconstruction only in the context of

various measures intended to promote Union military success. The author prefers to focus on the evolution of Lincoln's thinking about the issue, from his initial plan for minimal requirements to be met before the seceded states could quickly be restored to their rightful status in the Union, to growing recognition that other changes would have to be demanded of the states of the Confederacy in order to ensure the eradication of slavery and the full fulfillment of Union war aims, which came to include emancipation as well as reunion.

A key step in Lincoln's changing thinking about Reconstruction came, the author asserts, with the issuance of the final Emancipation Proclamation. By dropping his earlier linkage of emancipation with the colonization of former slaves outside of the United States or with compensation for slaveowners, and with the provision that African Americans could now enlist in the Union military, Lincoln recognized that the fundamental role of black people in America, and the social and labor structures of the Southern states, would have to be altered substantially, perhaps

even to an extent that could be considered revolutionary.

Lincoln's initial model for how Southern states would rejoin the Union--the somewhat self-explanatory "Ten Percent Plan," requiring one-tenth of prewar voters to pledge loyalty as a prerequisite to creating new state governments--was widely seen as extremely conciliatory to the South and somewhat conservative, particularly compared to some competing proposals pushed by congressional "radical" Republicans like Benjamin F. Wade in the Senate and Henry Winter Davis in the House. Rodrigue suggests another way of looking at it, however. By requiring the new states to adopt emancipation before being politically reintegrated back into the Union, Lincoln was adopting a conservative, constitutional process intended to carry out a fairly radical program. As Rodrigue notes, this program advanced rather slowly under Lincoln's leadership, with the fledgling Reconstruction state governments in Louisiana and elsewhere struggling to gain support and recognition. Still, they did at least look toward a time when stable governments which banned slavery would exist in states where they previously had not. Even in his last public speech, Rodrigue argues, Lincoln remained conflicted over Reconstruction, maintaining his conservative position that the Southern states should be restored swiftly to their proper status within the Union--but also suggesting the radical and still-controversial policy of suffrage rights for African Americans as an appropriate step in this process.

Lincoln and Reconstruction is a forcefully and intriguingly argued work on a topic that remains relevant and controversial. Rodrigue's book could usefully be assigned for undergraduate courses on the Civil War and Reconstruction, or general courses on U.S. history, and should be of considerable interest to scholars of the period, as well.

previously done so

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