

Paul Finkelman, Donald R. Kennon, eds.. *Lincoln, Congress, and Emancipation*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016. 276 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8214-2228-1.

Reviewed by Martin P. Johnson

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Commissioned by Caryn E. Neumann (Miami University of Ohio Regionals)

This excellent collection of ten essays (plus introduction) is the fourth book in the helpful and timely series *Perspectives on the History of Congress, 1801-1877*, a collaborative enterprise between the United States Capitol Historical Society and Ohio University Press edited by Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon. The three previous volumes focused on sectionalism, slavery in the national capital, and the crisis of the 1850s. True to this lineage, the current volume moves from the 1850s into heart of the Civil War with a strong emphasis on the politics of slavery and emancipation, mainly as they played out within and between Congress and the Lincoln administration.

Although these essays are not generally path-breaking or transformational, they do provide well-crafted, broadly framed surveys of many of the key issues of Civil War politics, many of them written by the most respected scholars in their fields. In "Legislators and Peoples: Emancipations in Comparative Perspective," Seymour Drescher, Distinguished University Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh, very usefully places emancipation in a comparative context to argue that "a pervasive racist consensus" inhibited abolition in the United States (p. 34). Instead, Southern demands (aggressively enforcing gag rules and fugitive slave laws, for example) led to a Northern reaction to protect established civil lib-

erties. In "The Ranchero Spotty: An 1848 Perspective on Abraham Lincoln's Congressional Term," Amy S. Greenberg, the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of History and Women's Studies at Penn State University, explores Lincoln's politically hazardous opposition to the Mexican War to suggest that it was part of a larger movement that, at least on the margins, curtailed President Polk's wider ambitions. "Lincoln's single congressional term was no failure," she concludes. "On the contrary, Congressman Lincoln deserves commendation for the role he played in helping to bring the bloody and contested U.S.-Mexico war to a conclusion" (p. 60). In "Disunion ... Is Abolition," James Oakes, Distinguished Professor of History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, demonstrates that Republicans in the years before the war had crafted a program for indirect and gradual action to bring about emancipation within the confines of the Constitution. Lincoln and others, for example, supported the Fugitive Slave Law only with guarantees of due process that would have rendered it virtually unenforceable, thus weakening slavery everywhere it existed (p. 74).

In "Lincoln, Secession, and Emancipation," Orville Vernon Burton, Creativity Professor of Humanities at Clemson University, reviews the crucial months just before Lincoln's inauguration. In "Stevens, Sumner, and the Journey to Full Eman-

cipation,” Beverly Wilson Palmer, a documentary scholar and editor, traces the way Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, so different personally, contributed to “the journey to full emancipation” (p. 105). L. Diane Barnes, Professor of History at Youngstown State University, in “Frederick Douglass and the Complications of Emancipation” defends the great orator and activist from charges of opportunism, arguing instead that “above all, Douglass was a pragmatist” (p. 142). In “Abraham Lincoln: Reluctant Emancipator?”, Michael Burlingame, Chancellor Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Professor at the University of Illinois, Springfield, focuses on the pre-presidential Lincoln to show that he was personally committed to antislavery since the 1830s, at least. Similarly, in “The Road to Freedom: How a Railroad Lawyer Became the Great Emancipator,” Paul Finkelman, senior fellow at the Penn Program on Democracy, Citizenship, and Constitutionalism at the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrates that Lincoln was an eager, if prudent, emancipator who acted as soon as conditions permitted. In “Double Take: Abolition and the Size of Transferred Property Rights,” Jenny Bourne presents a fascinating study of the value of labor stolen from the enslaved as part of a discussion of reparations. And in “Mr. Spielberg Goes to Washington,” Matthew Pinsker finds that simplifications and misrepresentations decrease the classroom usefulness of an unquestionably effective movie.

The uniformly high quality of the contributions and the range of issues covered render this work particularly suitable for course assignment. There is enough variety of perspective and topics to provide fodder for open-ended discussions while still providing enough focus for deeper understanding of key issues. The material quality of the book also supports its use in classrooms. Ohio University Press is to be commended for putting the time and resources into this beautifully produced book. Not only is it a pleasure to read a book with actual footnotes, but the layout and color cover, combined with the high-quality paper

and sturdy binding, make this a volume that can be proudly owned and consulted for many years. With such illustrious contributors, quality production, and insightful essays, this book sets itself apart and reminds us of the great value and utility of the expertly crafted edited collection.

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