



**Stanley Harrold.** *Lincoln and the Abolitionists*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. vii + 155 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3641-8.

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This sharp and rapid survey by one of the foremost scholars of American abolitionism provides an illuminating review of Lincoln's on-again, off-again relationship with the persistent and demanding band of writers and activists who worked to end slavery and protect the rights of black Americans. Drawing upon decades of experience in the field, Stanley Harrold, a professor of history at South Carolina State University, argues that abolitionists "fundamentally influenced" Abraham Lincoln's "evolving political orientation" and that, in the end, "he influenced them, as well" (p. 3). Beyond this, Harrold presents a sustained argument that Lincoln was far more the protector of the rights of whites than a crusader for justice for people of color.

Harrold begins by arguing that Lincoln and abolitionists inhabited "different worlds" but that Lincoln had especially far to travel in their eventual convergence. Northeastern abolitionism was rooted in religion and the Declaration of Independence; Lincoln's view on slavery derived from "slaveholders Thomas Jefferson of Virginia and Henry Clay of Kentucky," who endorsed "only very gradual emancipation schemes, rejected black equality, and denounced abolitionists" (p. 5). Harrold depicts Lincoln following this path precisely and argues that Lincoln's whiggish nationalism and opportunism determined his early

course far more than moral antagonism to slavery. In the 1830s and 1840s, Lincoln was more likely to attack opponents for abolitionist principles than to embrace them himself. Instead, Lincoln "merely disliked slavery" and opposed its expansion not so much from moral revulsion but because it was not a beneficial labor system and because it was the basis of slaveholder domination of the federal government (p. 2).

Harrold then traces a "limited convergence" during which Lincoln in the 1850s more clearly spoke out against slavery. For Lincoln, this convergence was especially facilitated by his law partner, William Herndon, who furnished Lincoln with abolition journals and put him in second-hand contact with noted abolitionist Theodore Parker. In addition, Lincoln's sense of the legal injustice of the Dred Scott decision drove him to assert more openly that "colored people," as he said at Springfield in 1857, were indeed part of "the people of the United States" (p. 54). On the other side of the equation, Harrold also shows how some abolitionists from the late 1840s onward were more willing to move toward political action in support of allies like radical Republicans (a category that does not include Lincoln). Some even argued, along with Frederick Douglass, that the Constitution could be a shield of freedom as well as a sword of oppression.

Finally, Harrold recounts the “contentious relationship” between Lincoln and the abolitionists during the war, each supporting and bewailing the other in turns. Lincoln is portrayed as a compromiser who is willing to permit slavery to continue and to enforce the fugitive slave act (p. 77). It was “Lincoln’s policy of holding U.S. property in the South” that led to the attack on Sumter (p. 74), a formulation that illustrates Harrold’s tendency to minimize the role of Lincoln’s antislavery policy of non-extension as a cause of the war and that strips his government’s position of much of its moral standing. Still, “Lincoln seemed to draw closer to the abolitionists” across 1863 and beyond. He met with abolitionists, ceased to mention colonization publicly, and began to think of emancipation as possibly part of God’s will (p. 95). As throughout, the passages Harrold devotes to the diverse treads of abolitionism are especially strong, drawing upon his expertise and long experience with this complex material. Harrold shows how some abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison in particular, drew closer to the government, eventually forsaking others (such as John Frémont or Salmon Chase) and embracing Lincoln’s reelection. Wendell Phillips was never fully reconciled.

To a great extent, then, *Lincoln and the Abolitionists* presents the widely accepted picture of Lincoln as a man capable of moral and political development, even if Harrold sees Lincoln’s growth as somewhat stunted. But Harrold virtually ignores the Thirteenth Amendment and does not mention that it was a central element of Lincoln’s reelection platform. Similarly absent is Lincoln’s direct role in the creation of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which sought to protect freed people, and his eventual open support for voting rights for some African Americans. Instead, Harold emphasizes the contrast between the abolitionist ideals of “universal emancipation and black rights” and Lincoln’s “apparent racism” and “expressed willingness to preserve slavery as the price of reunion” (p. 113). One can only agree with Harrold in concluding that the “stressful evolving relation-

ship” between Lincoln and the abolitionists certainly does reveal “complexities” (p. 114).

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