



**James Tackach.** *Lincoln and the Natural Environment*. Concise Lincoln Library Series. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. Illustrations. 160 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3698-2.

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When thinking of America's sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln's relationship with the natural environment is not the first thing that comes to mind. In *Lincoln and the Natural Environment*, James Tackach challenges this preconception by demonstrating that the natural environment continued to be a part of Lincoln's life from his frontier beginnings through his presidency and the passage of the Yosemite Valley Grant Act (1864). Tackach asserts that although Lincoln tried to avoid the natural environment due to the hardships that he experienced early in his life, he continued to be influenced by the natural environment.

Tackach begins by noting that while few details are known about Lincoln's younger years, it is clear that Lincoln and his family faced significant adversity during this period. The natural environment proved to be challenging for Lincoln and his family, from having to overcome natural barriers as midwestern farmers to losing his mother, Nancy, from milk sickness. According to Tackach, the loss of his mother may have taught Lincoln a lesson that "nature can be cruel, even deadly poisonous" (p. 13).

Although Lincoln eventually escaped the hardships of being a frontier farmer by becoming a lawyer and later a politician, the natural environment remained a significant element in his life. In the second chapter, Tackach explores Lincoln's

support of internal improvement projects. While serving at both the state and federal levels, Lincoln advocated for the advancement of several internal improvements, including a plan to make the Sangamon River more navigable. By examining Lincoln's role in the expansion of railroads and canal systems, Tackach places Lincoln's efforts within the national context of humans attempting to reshape the natural environment. Lincoln advocated for the construction of these internal improvements as he recognized the economic value that this infrastructure held not only on a state level but also at the national level.

Referencing several of Lincoln's speeches, poems, and letters, Tackach demonstrates how Lincoln incorporated the theme of the natural environment within his writings. He includes one of Lincoln's poems, "My Childhood-Home I See Again," in which Lincoln discusses the beauty of nature as well as the challenges that the environment presents. By including a selection of Lincoln's writings within the manuscript, Tackach asserts that even if Lincoln had tried to separate himself from the natural environment, he never was able to complete that task successfully. To strengthen his argument, Tackach cites several examples within Lincoln's speeches and writings in which Lincoln invoked "environmental imagery," or the use of analogies and metaphors that refer-

enced the natural environment (p. 56). Additionally, Tackach suggests that Lincoln incorporated agricultural references into some of his speeches not only because he recognized that rural audiences personally could relate to these allusions but also because Lincoln himself held previous experience with this information during his time on the family farm. During the American Civil War, Lincoln continued to make agricultural references and analogies in his writings and speeches. Tackach contends that although Lincoln did not use specific environmental references in his famous Gettysburg Address, he still alluded to the process of the natural world. Citing the works of Gabor Boritt and Garry Wills, Tackach notes that Lincoln mentioned the concepts of birth, death, and rebirth in his address.[1]

In the fourth chapter, Tackach examines the relationship between the natural environment and the Civil War. Acknowledging the recent shift in Civil War studies to examining the relationship between the natural environment and warfare, the author references several of the important ways the Civil War transformed the natural environment, including deforestation, loss of crops and livestock, lead poisoning of soils, polluted waterways, and the spread of disease. While Tackach refers to larger military campaigns, such as General Ulysses S. Grant's siege of Petersburg, he does not include a discussion of how smaller modifications, such as the construction of fortifications, entrenchments, and encampments, as well as skirmishes, also affected the environment. Tackach makes an important point in the chapter by noting that the environmental legacy of the Civil War carried beyond the conflict with the regrowth of towns, farmlands, forests, and infrastructure.

During the Civil War, Lincoln also made several policy decisions related to the natural environment. Among the actions taken by Lincoln during this period included signing the Morrill Act (1862), the 1862 Homestead Act, the Yosemite Valley Grant Act (1864), and a bill to reorganize the Department

of Agriculture. Each of these policies held long-lasting effects beyond Lincoln's presidency that continue through the present-day. Tackach notes, however, that not all the decisions made by Lincoln during this period led to positive changes. Projecting beyond Lincoln's administration, Tackach indicates that as Americans moved west through the Homestead Act, their migration later contributed to overfarming in the Great Plains, which led to the depletion of vital nutrients in the soil and eventually the Dust Bowl. While Lincoln supported internal improvements during his political years, future infrastructure projects, such as large oil pipeline, posed their own potential threats to the natural environment. Finally, while Lincoln helped to make the Department of Agriculture a more prominent organization within the federal government, this department later made the decision to use dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) as an insect repellent, which led to increased cancer rates and soil pollution. Despite these outward projections, Tackach concludes that Lincoln's decision to incorporate aspects of the natural environment into his policies helped contribute to the beginning stages of the conservation movement and the concept of preserving and managing the natural environment.

Although Lincoln and the natural environment are not subjects that one typically associates together, Tackach does a good job of allowing readers an opportunity to explore an underexamined aspect of Lincoln's life. Throughout the book, he effectively demonstrates the continual ways the natural environment sought to shape Lincoln's life and Lincoln's responses to this influence. Ultimately, *Lincoln and the Natural Environment* serves as an important contribution to the ever-growing number of works that focus on the various facets of Lincoln's life.

Note

[1]. Gabor Boritt, *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 120; and Garry Wills, *Lin-*

*coln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 172.

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