

LOOK AT LINCOLN: A Nuanced Glance Into Lincoln's World

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Feature Essay

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Williams, Frank J. *LOOK AT LINCOLN: A Nuanced Glance into Lincoln's World.*

The Annotated Lincoln

Edited by Harold Holzer and Thomas A. Horrocks

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Of the more than 16,000 books about Abraham Lincoln, none touch a more responsive chord than these which extract his words.

The publisher provides readers a large and gorgeous book consisting of more than 100 selections with nearly 200 illustrations – most in color – including photographs, lithographs, and paintings. Though the selections are all from the nine volumes of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, the fact that they were picked by two eminent Lincoln scholars who add superb and substantive annotations ranks this volume among the best.

The book highlights Abraham Lincoln's unique role in the development of the United States. He transformed the nation. His empathy, resilience, and effectiveness shine through these selections. They are a reflection of his depth.

This book spans 30 years of Abraham Lincoln's life – from his first political campaign for the state legislature in 1832 to his final speech on Reconstruction on April 12, 1865. Both personal and political letters, his poetry, speeches, presidential messages and proclamations greet us at every turn. The annotations give us Lincoln's thoughts on secession, civil liberties in wartime, slavery, emancipation and the suffering endured by the people – North as well as South.

The editors' commentary runs side by side with the text of Lincoln's words. A pragmatic, political, realistic Lincoln emerges rather than, as William Safire complained, "A votive candle on a shelf." For example, one sees this in his comments to the people of Charleston, Illinois during the Lincoln-Douglas debates, "I have never seen to my knowledge a man, woman, or child who was in favor of producing a perfect equality, social and political, between Negroes and white men."

We see the President and Commander-in-Chief struggling with the great challenges that any Chief Magistrate would have to confront. With the challenges came both disingenuousness and humor. Lincoln was not afraid to use humor at the expense of his enemies but Lincoln eventually practiced the politics of inclusion and became very effective in making dissidents his friends or, at least, bringing them around to his policies.

One wishes that there were more selections.

What could be better than Abraham Lincoln's words supplemented by informed and elegant writing about them?

This book is not only for students of Lincoln, but for all readers who enjoy good writing. All of this brings Abraham Lincoln's writings to a much more comprehensive appreciation of his thoughts and life.

Frank J. Williams is the Chair of the Lincoln Forum and author of Lincoln as Hero, and is a contributing columnist for the Civil War & Reconstruction Sesquicentennial.