

Collaborators for Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and Owen Lovejoy

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Review

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Moore, William F. and Moore, Jane Ann. *Collaborators for Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and Owen Lovejoy*. University of Illinois Press, \$38.00 ISBN 9780252038464

Reexamining Lincoln's Relationship with Abolitionism

The Catholic writer G.K. Chesterton once said that, "To very great minds the things on which men agree are so immeasurably more important than the things on which they differ, that the latter, for all practical purposes, disappear." William and Jane Moore, "co-directors of the Lovejoy Society" and the authors of *Collaborators for Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and Owen Lovejoy*, investigate the relationship between Lincoln and Lovejoy (the brother of Elijah Lovejoy, the abolitionist newspaper editor killed by a mob in Illinois in 1837) as a microcosm for examining how Lincoln and the abolitionists worked together more broadly, arguing that "Lincoln was a radical pragmatist and Lovejoy was a pragmatic radical" (p. 8). In short, they emphasize that the main thing on which Lincoln and Lovejoy agreed – the moral necessity and practical possibility of ending slavery in antebellum America – far outweighed their differences.

After a short introductory chapter focusing on the historiography of Lincoln and abolitionism, the Moore's trace in chronological fashion the Republican Party's formation in Illinois and key areas of agreement between Lincoln and Lovejoy: they both "regarded the repeal of the Missouri Compromise as a mistake;" they both "denounced the way Douglas and the southern Democrats abused the concept of popular sovereignty;" they both "valued compromise and cooperation;" they both "went to the root of the problem when they made it clear that it was wrong to reduce persons to property as southern laws did" (pp. 27-28). The authors maintain that abolitionists in the western United States were more pragmatic and "reasonable" than Garrisonians in the east and for this reason, despite their disagreements over important matters such as whether the Fugitive Slave Law should be repealed, Lincoln and Lovejoy "stood together

nobly" on the fundamental issue of ending slavery, no matter how long it took to do so. Indeed, in language similar to that employed by Lincoln, Lovejoy told white southerners "that you must emancipate your slaves. It belongs to you and not to us. You must transform them from slaves into serfs, and give them homes, and protect and guard the sanctity of the family. We shall not push you. *If you say that you want a quarter of a century you can have it; if you want half a century you can have it. But I insist that this system must ultimately be extinguished*" (pp. 94-95, emphasis mine).

Once Lincoln attained the presidency in 1861, he and Lovejoy (a Republican member of the House of Representatives from Illinois and perhaps one of the most radical members of Congress) continued their collaboration to help bring about the emancipation of the slaves, with Lovejoy frequently defending Lincoln from his critics: "The wonder is not that he should make mistakes," he told an audience at Cooper Union in New York, "but that he should make so few" (p. 137). Although Lovejoy lived to see the first step on the road to the extinction of slavery, he died in May 1864, about a year after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. In a beautiful letter eulogizing his radical friend, one that serves as the epigraph to the Moore's book, the president said that: "My personal acquaintance with him commenced only about ten years ago, since when it has been quite intimate; and every step in it has been one of increasing respect and esteem, ending, with his life, in no less than affection on my part. It can be truly said of him that while he was personally ambitious, he bravely endured the obscurity which the unpopularity of his principles imposed, and never accepted official honors, until those honors were ready to admit his principles with him. Throughout my heavy, and perplexing responsibilities here, to the day of his death, it would scarcely wrong any other to say, he was my most generous friend. Let him have the marble monument, along with the well-assured and more enduring one in the hearts of those who love liberty, unselfishly, for all men."

Collaborators for Emancipation is a useful corrective to those historians and others who have overemphasized Lincoln's cautious temperament at the expense of his radical leanings, or his alleged timidity regarding emancipation, or his substantive disagreements, such as they were, with abolitionists. For these reasons, this is a book worth reading and pondering. Still, the volume does have some shortcomings. Although the Moores have admirably situated their dual biographical study within the historiographical debates about Lincoln's relationship with the abolitionists, there is a puzzling oversight in that they do

not use James Oakes's recent work *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (2012), or his *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery* (2007), both of which would have buttressed their overall argument and given it some needed nuance (was Lincoln, for example, really a "firm supporter of black civil rights" in Illinois in 1855?). In addition, there are parts of the book that could have used better editing. But, these issues do not detract from the overall achievement of their work in showing how these two men shared what Lincoln called a love of liberty, and how they successfully collaborated to end the pernicious institution of slavery in their lifetime.

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