

The Global Lincoln

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Review

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Travelling the World with Lincoln

A series of international conferences on Abraham Lincoln's legacy abroad were held in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and India during the commemoration of Lincoln's bicentennial birth. So far two books have resulted from these conferences: *Abraham Lincoln Without Borders. Lincoln's Legacy Outside the United States*, edited by J. Tripathy, S. Rath, and W. Pederson (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2010), and the book under review. These books join two earlier volumes on the topic published in Asia: *The Universal Lincoln*, edited by Y. Lew (Taipei: Lincoln Society, 1995) and *Creative Breakthroughs in Leadership: James Madison, Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi*, edited by W. Pederson and F. Williams (Delhi: Pencraft International, 2007). In a sense, these books form the latest frontier in Lincoln studies—his legacy outside the United States.

By its title alone, *The Global Lincoln*, raises expectations. It is based on a conference with the same title that was held at St. Catherine's College, Oxford in early July 2009. Because of its location the book has a Western European orientation. In fact, the volume seems caught between one primarily on Western Europe and one that wants to be global.

Apart from the editors two introductory and concluding charters, the volume consists of nine "case studies" from Europe and four from the non-European countries. There are none on the Middle East, eastern Europe, Eurasia, Australia, and Oceania. A chapter on the American South seems an anomaly in the collection, yet the essays are interesting and readable. The Eurocentric direction is reflected in the excellent appendix by George Scratcherd on "Foreign Language Biographies of Lincoln," which finds some 650 biographical works in

more than 50 languages. Unfortunately, the fourth largest column in the bar graph of biographies broken down by language is the "other" column without noting the languages. Other empirical indices might have been used, such as a postage stamp index, a statue (art) index, a street index, a school index, etc. Any one of these might mislead but a composite would likely present a fuller picture of Lincoln's legacy outside the United States. Obviously, this would take field work.

The significance of the nine case studies from Western Europe show that some scholars are moving from the comfort zone of their academic era to considering Lincoln across cultures and eras. In his typical balanced approach, Harold Holzer surveys prints during the Civil War era demonstrating that Lincoln was better received on the Continent than in Britain. Moreover, Holzer tells the story of some 40,000 French peasants who donated to make a keepsake for Mary Lincoln after the assassination. Eugenio F. Biagini covers Germany and Italy during the Civil War era. Michael Vorenberg does the same for France and extends his coverage to 1871, when he suggests interest in Lincoln waned. He repeats the Mary Lincoln keepsake story in moving detail. Yet he misses that this was at the same time that Lincoln Rue was named in downtown Paris and more importantly that France has the only constitution in Europe which explicitly employs Lincoln's definition of democratic government. Lawrence Goldman's essay deals with the British media during the Civil War. He largely blames *The Times* for misleading public opinion. Yet this does not equate with the views of French peasants, the Irish, Karl Marx, and San Marino at that time. To the author's credit he admits at the end that one needs to "proceed with caution" on this topic (120).

The other five European chapters move all the way into the twentieth century. Adam I. P. Smith's "Lincoln in the English Imagination" argues that English radicals stressed Lincoln's rise from the "plough to the presidency" more than emancipation, whereas conservatives saw him as a nation-builder (127). He also argues that John Drinkwater's play "Abraham Lincoln" was a more effective popularizer than Lord Charnwood's biography but that Winston Churchill replaced both in the postwar era. The values of Empire are rather endemic to the British.

Kenneth O. Morgan's essay on Wales reveals deep links between Lincoln and the Welsh, especially with the rise of its best-known politician, David Lloyd George. The author points out that Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Wilson all

admired Lincoln but Lloyd George looked down on Wilson's racial views despite the fact that Lloyd George shared closer ties to Theodore Roosevelt's neo-colonialism. The author admits it was perhaps Clemenceau, "the French 'tiger'" with an American wife, who was most sympathetic to Lincoln (149). Yet even that tentative conclusion is somewhat misleading since Woodrow Wilson went from "a man without a country" during his Confederate youth to becoming a pro-Lincoln expert as a professor. His first wife was very sympathetic to African Americans. He did not enter World War I until convincing himself that "this was what Lincoln would do." African Americans took a secondary place to "making the world safe for democracy."

Kevin Kenny's essay on the Irish is a similarly useful contribution to a volume which brings Lincoln further into the twentieth century. After some eight centuries of English colonialism, the Irish gained their independence for the most part. Éamon de Valera emerged as the twentieth-century Abraham Lincoln in England's backyard. He became Ireland's first durable democratic leader. If one uses a "print-statue index" de Valera would score well since the author notes he kept a large photo of the Lincoln Memorial and a bust of the Great Emancipator in his office suite. Kenny goes on to point out that "Dev" knew Lincoln's definition of democratic government. Though the author does not use a "street index," it would show that the Irish have the oldest Lincoln street (1862) in Europe.

Poor Spain—it lost its colonies in the New World in the mid-19th century and then more as a result of Teddy Roosevelt's colonialism. Carolyn P. Boyd's chapter does a good job showing that Abe did not have a chance. A lot of Lincoln talk but Spain remained divided. It is unfortunate that her chapter does not assess whether its present constitutional monarch ever read a Lincoln biography. Lincoln biographer Jorg Nagler does a nice job showing how Willy Brandt emerged as the Great Reconciler in the Lincoln tradition. Though JFK stole the media credit in the United States, Brandt is surely the Lincoln on the Continent. Most Americans have missed this. Nagler might have reinforced this with the considerable presence of Lincoln found at the grassroots level from graffiti art on the Berlin Wall, Lincoln streets, schools, etc. He does point out the Lincoln bust in Brandt's office. A "stamp index" would reveal that Germany was the only large Western European nation to ever put a Lincoln reminder on one of its postage stamps after World War II.

The four “non-European” chapters amplify the limitations and possibilities of “the Global Lincoln” project. Nicola Miller ends up with the unenviable (galactic) task of covering all of Latin America (South America, Central America and the Caribbean). It is unfortunate because Latin America is the most Lincoln-prone region in the world despite the repeated blunders of U.S. foreign policy. Getting off to a shaky start, she notes there are Lincoln streets “in most Latin American cities” and two towns with his name without giving a citation or context. Actually, there are more Lincoln streets in Latin America than any other area of the world and the only *three* countries with cities named for Abraham Lincoln outside the United States are found in Latin America. Her assertions that “Lincoln did not actually do a great deal to help Latin America” and his “role as emancipator has not at any stage been the main focus of interest in Latin America,” are questionable if one looks at a stamp index, art index, etc (216-217).

Similarly, Kevin Gaines’s essay on Africa deals only with a very small part of the world’s second largest continent. His focus on the independence leaders Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe should have cited the work of A. B. Assensoh. Gaines treats Nelson Mandela too briefly without noting that Mandela quoted Lincoln before his imprisonment and read his first biography of him during his 27-year imprisonment. In a volume which focuses on biography this is unfortunate. The best book that captures Mandela’s leadership style is the insightful *Invictus* by John Carlin. Though Lincoln remains unmentioned, it reveals democratic leadership at its best. Lincoln-like lawyer-statesmanship is easily spotted since it is atypical. When American foreign policy fails and turns the United States into a target, Lincoln suffers as a result but, as the Mandela case suggests, democracy does not stop.

The two chapters on Lincoln in Asia are more focused in part because they deal with just three country studies rather than an entire continent. Vinay Lal contains many insights on Mohandas Gandhi (esp. during his time in South Africa) and his Dalit rival B. R. Ambedkar. Lal points out influences on Jawaharlal Nehru but misses the painting of Lincoln that Nehru kept in his study apart from the bronze replica of the Great Emancipator’s hands. Also, missing are the Lincoln stamps, statue, street and buildings Indians have created in his honor. Lincoln is embedded in India’s modern democratic culture. It is unfortunate that the partition is avoided since its major participants respected Lincoln, including M. A. Jinnah. Indians admire Lincoln as the Great Emancipator because he was not a racist and held the nation together. Nehru

adopted Lincoln's rational leadership but was as unable to prevent the partition as Lincoln could not prevent the Civil War. De-min Tao has an equally interesting essay on China and Japan, especially Sun Yat-sen and the division between Marxist Mao and anti-Communist Chiang. His discussion of Japanese biographies of Lincoln is a welcome addition to the international Lincoln legacy. Though FDR was more successful than his distant uncle TR, Franklin lacked a genuine understanding of Japanese culture. The Asian Exclusion Act of 1924, surely undermined the Lincoln legacy among the Japanese. The author acknowledges his use of the Tokyo Lincoln Center but fails to tell the heroic story of the businessman who left his collection to Meisei University making it the finest Lincoln collection in Asia. That individual and the students at Tiananmen Square waving banners with Lincoln's words are the twentieth century heroes in East Asia.

Jay Sexton's concluding essay deals with the use and misuse of Lincoln's legacy, especially by politicians from the United States during the 1959 sesquicentennial. Are historians too nationalistic and specialized to look beyond their own cultures and eras? It may be too early to conclude "that Lincoln's heyday in foreign lands" is over (293). Lincoln's real meaning is a "soft power" approach which is hard to measure but endures in the United States and abroad. Lord Charnwood wrote the best one-volume Lincoln biography up to his time in part because it borders on a psychohistory of leadership. "The Global Lincoln" is also a pioneering effort as the latest European look at Abraham Lincoln's legacy outside the United States. The editors/authors and contributors deserve praise for a volume which expands this topic.

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