

Reviews

Carl F. Wieck, *Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002. x + 214 pp; ISBN: 0-87580-299-0; \$36.00, cloth.

'If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.' When Abraham Lincoln penned these famous words to *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley in August of 1862, as Carl F. Wieck points out, the president had already completed a first draft for an emancipation proclamation. This circumstance points to the complexity of Lincoln's relationship to the abolitionist cause, a relationship that is the main focus of Wieck's interesting and thoroughly researched little book, *Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg*.

Wieck's main thesis is that Lincoln in fact had considerably stronger ties to abolitionism than has previously been suggested. This was due, largely, to the influence of one man, Theodore Parker, the renegade Unitarian minister and staunch abolitionist. True, several other Lincoln biographers, reaching right back to Lincoln's former Illinois law partner William H. Herndon, have pointed to Parker as the chief inspiration for the Gettysburg phrase, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people.' Remarkably, however, with the partial exception of Garry Wills, the possibility that Parker's role might have extended beyond that one phrase has not been seriously contemplated by historians, and even Wills, like other Lincoln authorities, generally ascribes Daniel Webster a greater role than Parker.

Why this surprising scholarly neglect of Parker? For one thing, Lincoln and Parker never communicated directly with each other. Whereas Parker did, in fact, maintain personal ties with such politically prominent New Englanders as Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, John Hale, and Horace Mann, as well as with William Seward of New York, he never exchanged letters with Lincoln; indeed, Parker's name went completely unmentioned by the future president. In the heated political atmosphere of Illinois, as Wieck suggests, a direct link with a New England abolitionist would in all probability have been disastrous to Lincoln's political career. Instead, Parker's voice reached Lincoln through William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, who between 1854 and the theologian's death in 1860 corresponded eagerly with the latter and received several of Parker's printed sermons. According to Herndon, those sermons, along with other sources focusing on the slavery question, formed the basis of long discussions between himself and Lincoln.

Paradoxically, William Herndon himself actually constitutes another reason for the neglect of Parker in historical works on Lincoln. Not only did Herndon overestimate

the importance of Daniel Webster to Lincoln, but by highlighting only one instance of Parker's direct influence on Lincoln, namely in the case of the Gettysburg phrase (where Herndon's account actually turns out to be flawed), Lincoln's former law partner contributed to blinding researchers to other possible links to Parker, especially because the one Parker sermon that Herndon did name had little else to offer Lincoln than precisely his foreshadowing of the Gettysburg phrase. Hardly helping matters, when the Herndon-Parker correspondence was published in 1910, the editor omitted several words of praise that Herndon had actually showered on Parker, thus contributing to muting notions of Parker's powerful intellectual impact at least on Lincoln's law partner.

Wieck builds his case for Parker's influence on Lincoln by meticulously comparing two of Lincoln's most famous and celebrated orations, the House Divided speech (1858) and the Gettysburg Address (1863), with sermons by Parker, particularly his 'Dangers which Threaten the Rights of Man in America' (1854). Through a remarkable piece of philological detective work that goes all the way from discussing the creases and folds and pencil marks in the documents, via an analysis of the occurrence of specific words, phrases, and rhetorical techniques there, to reflections on their overall philosophical content, Wieck endeavors to demonstrate just how profound an influence Parker exerted on Lincoln. Even if the future president was an eclectic who supposedly stored scraps of paper with ideas for his speeches in his hat, Wieck suggests that whereas Lincoln limited his borrowings from Daniel Webster to the latter's vocabulary and some of his rhetorical flourishes, in the case of Parker the future president also took over whole philosophical concepts, particularly in the Gettysburg Address in which on several counts '...Lincoln parallels in form, thought, and often in specific phrasing Parker's "Sermon on the Dangers which Threaten the Rights of Man in America"' (148).

Of course, the question of 'influence' is tricky, as Carl Wieck in his somewhat elevated language is the first to acknowledge: 'Seldom is it simple to come to categorical conclusions concerning questions touching on the often-enigmatic subject of "influence," and the task can be daunting in connection with hallowed figures or the well-nigh sacred documents we have inherited from them' (7). Generally speaking, however, Wieck's finely tuned analysis convincingly establishes an intellectual link between Parker and Lincoln. On occasion, however, it would appear that Wieck in his sheer eagerness to demonstrate that connection resorts to rather speculative arguments. Is it really necessary to base a nine-page discussion of some of the qualities in Parker that might have appealed to Lincoln on a 1959 essay by Jacques Barzun and an 1899 piece by Thomas Wentworth Higginson (82-90)? What consequences for Parker's sway over Lincoln flow from the circumstance that both men supposedly were strongly independent, distant, and not unconscious of their gifts and abilities; that the writing style of both of them was characterized by a kind of 'Americanism;' that each of them depended on deliberate, logical tactics in treating the question at hand; that they were both aware of the rhythm in their writing?

Similarly, Wieck's investigation of possible specific links between Daniel Webster's 1825 Bunker Hill speech, Parker's Rights of Man sermon, and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is not completely unproblematic. One cannot help but wonder whether the use by Webster and Parker of (fairly) similar images of strength really merits mention in Wieck's book: what can one learn from Webster referring to the country as a 'monument' and Parker to God as a 'pyramid' (171)? Moreover, what is the lesson to be derived from all three men referring to 'our fathers,' all three employing forms of the word 'noble,' not to speak of all three invoking God towards the end of their orations (in all fairness, Wieck notes that many orators of the time asked the blessing of God)? To be sure, Wieck does not draw many conclusions from these circumstances, nor from the fact that each of the three speakers used triple formulations toward the end of their speeches (170). So, too, we may add, does Wieck himself in closing his own argument, referring on the last page of his conclusion to 'the dream Daniel Webster held high...; the dream to which Theodore Parker made such a powerful appeal...; the dream to which Lincoln himself was turning...' (178). Finally, the circumstance that both Parker and Lincoln in '[s]eeking guidance with regard to the future... were harking back to the fathers as the best sources of direction in confronting the unknown (173),' hardly establishes a particularly strong link between the two, besides their being Americans: in the words of Richard Hofstadter, after all, 'the United States was the only country in the world that began with perfection and aspired to progress.'

These minor matters should not, however, detract from the importance of Wieck's work: overall, he has successfully managed to 'unlock a door that has effectively been sealed for almost a century and a half, in order to bring the reader face-to-face with a heretofore hidden Lincoln' (11). As Wieck himself acknowledges, in this essay-like little book his has not been the task to fully open that door; in the future however, Wieck's discovery of Lincoln's sympathies for Parker's thinking may well inspire full-scale reinterpretations of the relationship between Lincoln's day-to-day pragmatism and his higher ideals.

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Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement, 1945-1965*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press / University of Copenhagen, 2002. 333 pp.; ISBN: 87-7289-809-7, DKK 248, paper; 87-7289-720-1, DKK 398, cloth.

Professor Bjerre-Poulsen's book on the emergence of the American Right could hardly have been better timed. The conservative political philosophy that has facilitated Republican triumphs since Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 seems to have become hegemonic. Despite Clinton's victories in two presidential elections during the 1990s, there was no realignment, no clear shift back to a Democratic majority. Indeed, it could be argued that however personally successful Clinton may have been,