



BOOK REVIEWS

EDITORIAL OFFICE: Elliott Hall IV, Ohio Wesleyan University;
Delaware, OH 43015. Telephone: 740-368-3642. Facsimile: 740-368-3643

E-MAIL ADDRESS: brhistor@owu.edu

WEB ADDRESS: <http://go.owu.edu/~brhistor>

EDITOR

Richard Spall

Ohio Wesleyan University

REGIONAL SUB-EDITORS

Douglas R. Bisson
(Early Modern Europe)
Belmont University

Susan Mitchell Sommers
(Britain and the Empire)
Saint Vincent College

Betty Dessants
(United States Since 1865)
Shippensburg University

Paulette L. Pepin
(Medieval Europe)
University of New Haven

SENIOR EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Alyssa DiPadova

Jackson Hotaling
Kelsey Heath

Kyle Rabung

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

Amanda Hays
Haley Mees
Jonathon Obershlake

Jason Perry
Christopher Shanley

Amanda Sisler
Henry Sloan
Merritt VerSteeg

WORD PROCESSING: Laurie George

institutional constraints fall away, and presidents are guided by past practice, the counsel of their advisors, and the shadow of future political, judicial, and historical judgment.

Presidents respond differently in these circumstances. Bruff frequently grounds variation in presidential constitutional interpretation in presidential personalities—their “character and experience” and “political values and priorities”—as well as in the “practical problems of the day” (3). Many presidents untimely bow to the pressure of the office and opt for expansive definitions of their powers, taking the initiative and finding out later whether their actions were ratified or rejected by Congress or voters.

But Bruff also argues that there is a kind of precedent at work in the White House. He takes his title from a 1790 letter from George Washington to English historian and radical Catharine Macaulay in which the new president notes the potential precedent-setting nature of his actions. But presidential precedent works differently than judicial precedent, especially in how it interacts with the party system. Presidents certainly appear less constrained by prior legal interpretations, and during party transitions they may even feel obligated to explicitly break with the past. In this way, presidents are as much at risk of creating antiprecedent as they are of establishing norms that will be followed in the future. In addition, when defending controversial conduct, presidents will be inclined to reach for analogies from their predecessors from the opposition party, thereby disarming their most potent critics. Presidential precedent, then, is duly fraught: a source of anti-influence, or a tool easily picked up by the enemy.

The incidents that Bruff discusses are well known, and there are some missed opportunities, such as a more thorough exploration of the role of legal advisors to the president. Nevertheless, the volume usefully contextualizes two-and-a-quarter centuries of presidential constitutional interpretation and will be of interest to students of the US presidency and executive power.

University of Virginia

Michael A. Livermore

Lincoln's Ethics. By Thomas L. Carson. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xxvii, 427. \$32.99.)

Abraham Lincoln's morality has been a disputed question at least since the publication of James G. Randall's biography and the debunking treatment of Lincoln by Richard Hofstadter. More recent criticism includes the description

of Lincoln as an unrepentant white supremacist who was indifferent to slavery and interested only in the preservation of the Union and the depiction of Lincoln as a statist tyrant by Thomas DiLorenzo. Works by Allen Guelzo, George Fredrickson, Eric Foner, Mark Neely, and Mark Grimsley are more nuanced and have given detailed and largely sympathetic treatment to controversial uses of power by Lincoln, such as the suspension of habeas corpus and the suppression of newspapers. Two recent studies by William Lee Miller have provided a comprehensive and discriminating narrative of the major incidents and themes of Lincoln's moral life.

In the book under review, Thomas L. Carson makes a distinguished addition to the tradition of Lincoln scholarship best represented by William Lee Miller's two recent volumes *Lincoln's Virtues* [2003] and *Abraham Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* [2008]. What is special about Carson's book is the intellectual precision and nuanced discrimination he brought to the book as a trained philosopher.

This new study covers a wide range of disputed topics concerning Lincoln both as a statesman and as a man. Concerning Lincoln as a politician and commander in chief, Carson provides a cogent and historically literate defense of Lincoln's prewar compromises with slavery (his choice, despite his opposition to slavery, which sought to limit the expansion of slavery into the western territories rather than to achieve the destruction of slavery where it already existed) and a careful reconciliation of Lincoln's dual roles as savior of the Union and emancipator of the slaves. The author provides a thoughtful vindication of the Emancipation Proclamation, with all its limitations, as the only realistic blow against slavery that Lincoln was in a direct position to strike, and one he could not have struck much earlier than when he did. And Carson provides reasoned and thoughtful accounts of Lincoln's courses of action about habeas corpus, colonization, the treatment of civilians, and the treatment of prisoners.

Carson's treatment of the necessity and morality of the Civil War itself and of the detailed conduct of the war by Lincoln is telling and persuasive. In both areas, he notes that the philosophical defenses of Lincoln's course are different at different stages of the war. The defensibility of the war itself, for example, is weaker at the beginning of the war than at the end of it, but the defenses of specific war measures become weaker as the outcome of the war becomes more certain.

The author notes also that different philosophical traditions might weigh the evidence differently. He endorses a utilitarian interpretation of Lincoln's conduct (or more specifically, he adopts foreseeable-outcomes utilitarianism, which

weighs the cost of benefits that Lincoln could have foreseen, rather than weighing the actual outcomes). Here Carson discriminates between what strikes him as Lincoln's rather weak argument that the dissolution of the Union would portend ill for the future of democracy generally and the rather stronger argument that the secession of the Confederacy would have strengthened the position of slavery throughout the hemisphere.

Slightly different cases on the political issues, with different weaknesses and strengths, Carson notes, could have been built on the basis of just-war theory, particularly as articulated by Michael Walzer, with its emphasis on the moral necessity of the ends, the proportionality of the means, and the discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate targets of force. That tradition of argument does not treat weighing outcomes as the only consideration, as utilitarianism does, and gives greater deference to such things as fulfilling one's duty to God and the keeping of promises than utilitarianism does. Although the arguments Carson most strongly endorses derive from the utilitarian tradition, he argues that Lincoln himself could only be seen as a utilitarian in a rather qualified sense, since Lincoln often made arguments on the basis of deontic theories as well as on a utilitarian basis. But utilitarian and nonutilitarian lines of argument converge on most of the same conclusions.

Carson also provides a careful account of Lincoln's private morality as well, including his behavior as a suitor, as a husband, and as a parent; his relationships with his friends; his personal contempt for political opponents early in his career (and his striking magnanimity later on); his mercy and honesty; and, what is most important, his striking absence of self-righteousness.

Of particular interest is Carson's treatment of arguments that Lincoln's racial views evolved over his life and that his occasional racist pronouncements (such as during the Charleston debate during the 1858 campaign against Stephen Douglas) are often seen as carefully hedged strategic concessions rather than positive statements of racist conviction. Carson concedes this but adds considerable nuance to the argument by using the current philosophical literature to distinguish nine different species of racism (each of slightly different moral gravity from the others). He provides detailed and discriminating arguments, on the basis of the historical evidence, about which kinds of racism of which Lincoln was definitely free, which kinds he probably did suffer from (but differently at different points in his career), and which kinds of racism the evidence does not enable us to decide about one way or the other.

Carson's ability to see Lincoln's policies in the light of different philosophical traditions and his ability to make fine but telling distinctions between

different developments of the key themes mark his book as the work of a historically literate philosopher and bring to the discussion the precision and intellectual discipline that only a philosopher could provide.

Brandeis University

John Burt

Franklin D. Roosevelt: Road to the New Deal, 1882–1939. By Roger Daniels. (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. xiii, 522. \$34.95.)

The life story of Franklin Roosevelt affords many readers the pleasures of an often-told tale rich in dramatic incident—the early life of privilege, the illustrious presidential cousin made uncle-in-law, service to Woodrow Wilson’s doomed internationalism, the love affair, polio, the return to politics, the New Deal enacted and thunderously ratified in 1936, and the fight against fascism. Encountering a new biography of Roosevelt is like seeing another production of a great Shakespeare play; readers largely know what will happen but want to see whether a shift of emphasis will render the moral slightly different, and maybe whether a beloved lesser episode—the 1924 convention, the gold-buying program of fall 1933—will be highlighted, or perhaps cut in the interest of pace. Above all, readers want to know how the lead will play his part: blithe spirit blandly skating by on charm and luck; wily manipulator bent on power; planner, improviser, failure, success?

Roger Daniels stages the story as a mystery, asking how Roosevelt “managed to achieve liberal results in peace and war in a nation whose people were far from liberal and with a Congress that was increasingly conservative” (xiii). The author focuses on the president’s public utterances—press conferences and speeches. The complete press conferences are newly available on the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library’s website, and make an especially rich resource. Using them, Daniels shows how the president used misdirection, wit, erudition, and sometimes irritation to guide reporters toward the stories he wanted them to write for his constituents.

The answer to Daniels’s question is, Roosevelt managed his successes through great shrewdness and care. The author appears impatient with the commonplace, if careless, assessments that Roosevelt was an intellectual flyweight. He quotes Walter Lippmann’s 1932 remark that Roosevelt was “a highly impressionable person, without a firm grasp of public affairs . . . a pleasant man who, without any important qualifications for office, would very much like to be President” and declares it is “the most famous—and perhaps the most fatuous” sketch of