

The Global Lincoln

Edited by RICHARD CARAWARDINE and JAY SEXTON

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The essays edited by Richard Carawardine and Jay Sexton represent a noteworthy addition to our understanding of the international dimensions of the American Civil War. Taking us beyond the politico-diplomatic history of the 1860s they explore the wider significance and legacy of the 16th president himself, and do so over a broader canvas than just 'the usual suspects' of Great Britain and France. In doing so they use the image of Lincoln to raise important questions about modernization and the development of popular politics.

Lincoln was a protean figure not only for Americans themselves but also for political movements around the globe and over a surprisingly long period of time. These essays examine his image even in the post-Cold War period ~ a time when it was rather less significant than formerly but nevertheless still functioned as a symbol of democratic or nationalist government for emerging states or for independence movements of varying political character. As Richard Carawardine reminds us in his opening contribution, Lincoln's commitment to popular government had a strongly nationalistic character, but since American values were (in his mind) universal ones, it also represented an abiding belief in the morality of human freedom and progress.

The subsequent essays examine contemporary European understandings of Lincoln ~ in France, Germany, Spain, Italy and particularly the British polity (with separate studies of the British elite, the Welsh and the Irish) ~ and those subsequently to be found in Latin America, Asia and Africa. A concluding contribution from David Bright examines Lincoln's image in the 'forgotten abroad' of the American South. We should not be surprised that both his admirers and detractors were often ignorant of the president's actual policies or opinions and instead interpreted him in the light of their own circumstances, but nevertheless it must still be shown how and why Lincoln appealed to foreign audiences as a political symbol.

Lincoln's democratic republicanism could be challenging for European political elites, but his commitment to law and order and to constitutional government recommended him to conservatives, particularly once he was safely dead. As Adam Smith shows in a wide-ranging essay on his legacy in British political culture, Lincoln the nationalist and anti-imperialist could nevertheless be adopted as an ally of the British Empire in its fight against fascism in a subsequent century, even when earlier ideas of racial Anglo-Saxonism had largely been abandoned. For Welshmen Lincoln embodied the moral and ideological creed of nonconformity, and his life-long opposition to slavery and political elitism echoed their anti-establishmentarianism (of all kinds). They even claimed for him a royal Welsh descent (as presumably they did not for Jefferson Davis!). Even more potent was Lincoln's image in early 20th century Ireland, where he appealed to both nationalists and (British) unionists who used him to

advance arguments with radically different ends. The American-born Éamon de Valera in particular was enthusiastic for what he took to be Lincoln's moral conception of national unity and its connection to a particular idea of democracy.

It was Lincoln's unionism that especially appealed to nationalists down the ages, to Italians and Germans in the 19th century and to anti-colonial movements in the 20th, but even this was not without its complications. Latin Americans in their own post-independence era saw in Lincoln a great nation-builder or (in the case of Cuban revolutionary José Martí) the embodiment of authentic populism. However, as American imperialism became dominant in the hemisphere, he was increasingly idealised as a symbol of a kind of co-operative internationalism and republicanism that the United States itself had abandoned ~ the last heir of the Founding Fathers, now re-born as a symbol of human values rather than specially American ones. In Africa (as described in Kevin Gaines's essay) the image of Lincoln the emancipator, significant to the generation that had fought for national independence and which looked to the USA as an anti-colonial power, was replaced during the Cold War with a more critical view that noted Lincoln's ambivalence on race and, insofar as America remained a positive influence, preferred African-American models. (The Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah could nevertheless find in Lincoln's unionism a model for his own revolutionary pan-Africanism.)

For 19th century Spanish reformers seeking the moral regeneration of their country's antiquated political and cultural institutions, Lincoln was an emblem of the power of self-education and democratic social mobility, but in the 20th century he was largely overlooked by radical socialists, who had little time for his constitutional liberalism. (It was in fact latter-day Francoists who publicly celebrated Lincoln's patriotic resistance to secession and his belief in law and order.) However in the radically different Confucian political culture of East Asia, the few references to Lincoln largely ignored his actual politics and achievements in government, and mention of him by revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen and Mao Tse-tung was mostly rhetorical or confined to diplomatic exchanges.

Lincoln's symbolic function was not merely a passive one ~ sometimes his image was used more actively in order to justify a foreign government's policy to an American audience, as when in 1913 German ambassador Count von Bernstorff explained the process of unification under Bismarck as being analogous to Lincoln's commitment to national federal government. Of course American governments could play the same card too, as when during the Cold War the U.S. Information Agency found the 19th-century president to be one of the more acceptable symbols of the American way of life for foreign audiences. Only in our own time has Lincoln faded into history, perhaps to be replaced by the more contemporary, and more culturally appealing (if superficial), John F. Kennedy.

The editors have done a great service in producing a collection of essays which take a relatively narrow subject ~ the image of Abraham Lincoln ~

and skilfully use this to analyse and discuss a number of significant themes of transnational and diplomatic history, U.S. foreign relations, and the impact of American cultural power on the modern world. The continuous re-imagining and re-interpretation of Lincoln in so many contexts amply justifies Edwin Stanton's claim that he belongs to the ages.