

About This Volume

Robert C. Evans

This volume, like all the others in the *Critical Insights* series, is divided into several major sections. The opening section, for instance, offers a comprehensive introduction to Abraham Lincoln as a writer, speaker, and cultural figure, describing both the impact of his culture on the man and the impact of the man on his culture. This introduction is written by David S. Reynolds, a preeminent scholar of nineteenth-century American literature. Reynolds describes his own growing fascination with Lincoln and responds to a number of queries about Lincoln's significance and about various approaches to Lincoln and his works. According to Reynolds, Lincoln's "finest rhetorical style . . . embraced all Americans while, at all cost, avoiding the kind of name-calling or abusive rhetoric that, he knew, would only intensify political tensions." Reynold's essay is then followed by a brief survey of Lincoln's life.

Critical Contexts

The next major section of the book—Critical Contexts—uses four essays to examine Lincoln from several distinct points of view, involving, respectively, history, the history of criticism, a specific "critical lens," and, finally, a comparative approach. The historical essay, by Stephen Cushman, explores Lincoln's relationship with Ulysses S. Grant, the great Union general. Cushman suggests that Grant learned a great deal from Lincoln about how to think and write effectively. For example, Cushman argues that Grant may have learned from Lincoln's contributions to the famous "Lincoln-Douglas debates" how to "argue and produce evidence and rebut" and also "how small moments of humor could help buttress larger, more precarious constructions." The ensuing essay, by Robert Evans, offers a quick overview of scholarship dealing with Lincoln as a writer before then focusing in detail on two examples of such scholarship in particular—a book by Fred Kaplan and another book

by D. Leigh Henson. Henson himself offers a very comprehensive survey of scholarly approaches to Lincoln's rhetoric.

The third of the four "Critical Contexts" essays is by Nicolas Tredell, who uses a "critical lens" that focuses clearly on Lincoln the rhetorician. Tredell praises Lincoln's "finely honed and tempered words," calling them "weapons in a formidable arsenal." Tredell's essay first "considers Lincoln as an orator before the Civil War; it goes on to explore four key themes of his pre-war rhetoric: Union, slavery, violence and compromise; and it concludes with the vision of the future he evokes at the end of his first inaugural address as President." Finally, in the last of the "Critical Contexts" essays, Michael Anderegg adopts a comparative approach, exploring Lincoln as a reader and passionate admirer of the works of William Shakespeare. According to Anderegg, "Lincoln was especially drawn to the playwright's tragedies and histories, plays where the machinations of overly powerful and ambitious aristocrats were clearly revealed, and the tragic outcomes of illegitimate rule graphically illustrated."

Critical Readings: I

The next major section of the book is devoted to numerous and different "Critical Readings," each pursuing a distinct approach to Lincoln's works and to works about Lincoln. The first of these essays, by the late John Alvis, argues that "Lincoln read very carefully . . . the King James version of the Bible"—an influence evident especially in his second inaugural address. By studying Lincoln's debt to the King James version we "can learn," Alvis contends, "how Lincoln combines plainness with dignity by drawing upon the moral principles and language made familiar to his American audience from their study and worship in the word of God as rendered in that seventeenth century translation." The ensuing essay, by David Hirsch and Dan Van Haften, is an autobiographical memoir describing how the authors became captivated by Lincoln's fascination with Euclid, the ancient Greek mathematician and logician. Lincoln himself emphasized his deep interest in Euclid, and Hirsch and Van Haften argue that

many of his speeches follow, step-by-step, the distinct elements of Euclidian logic.

In another essay on Lincoln’s rhetoric, John Channing Briggs emphasizes Lincoln’s efforts to *identify* with his audiences, suggesting that in “this process of identification, Lincoln often risks his arguments and himself. In our contemporary nomenclature, he presumes to know a good deal about what American sentiments are, how Americans—as Americans and human beings—are thinking and are capable of thinking” Nevertheless, “through identification he involves himself in what he is asking others to do, as though vulnerability were part of his argument as well as a means to a greater end.” Robert Bray, author of the standard book on Lincoln’s reading, looks here “at two texts, one always closely associated with the political Lincoln, the other, I believe, never before considered as possibly formative.” Both, he thinks, influenced Lincoln “in a particularly emotionally-charged and intellectually exhilarating time in his self-education, the later teenage years: the Declaration of Independence and Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751).” The former helped define Lincoln’s basic political views; the latter appealed to his underlying and pervasive sense of melancholy.

Critical Readings: II

Nicolas Tredell, in a second essay, explores the famous story according to which Lincoln, upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, supposedly said, “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war!” Although Tredell cites recent work that casts doubt on the credibility of this alleged encounter, he goes on to explore significant similarities and contrasts between Lincoln’s writings and Stowe’s novel, especially concerning “three key issues: abolitionism, ethnic mixing, and separatism.” Following Tredell’s article come two related surveys by Evans. The first examines how poets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries wrote about Lincoln—the common themes and phrasing they used as well as any especially distinctive approaches. In the succeeding essay, Evans explores how various African

American poets, almost all of them born in the nineteenth century, responded to Lincoln. He seeks to show the common traits of their verse while also “especially emphasizing any unusual features of particular poems.”

Brian Yothers, in an essay devoted to a very recent book of poems about Lincoln—Maurice Manning’s *Railsplitter* (2019)—suggests that “Manning’s collection of poems in Lincoln’s voice captures Lincoln’s own humor and melancholy in its dramatic monologues, but it also captures consecutive chapters in the history of poetry that first shaped Lincoln, and then became shaped by him.” According to Yothers, the “echoes of Pope, Gray, Burns, Poe, Melville, and Whitman, along with Lincoln’s own public speeches, serve to make *Railsplitter* a truly symphonic volume of poetry. Lincoln’s own voice becomes distinctive precisely because of the multiplicity of voices that spoke through him and with which he was in dialogue.”

The next essay, by Steven D. Ealy, surveys Robert Penn Warren’s various encounters with Lincoln throughout Warren’s career. Ealy suggests that although “Warren’s comments on Lincoln are generally brief, the overall portrait Warren paints is rich and complex. It is a portrait in shadow and light, . . . with the first strokes applied in November 1929 and the last added in December 1980.” Jordan Bailey, in a survey of responses to Steven Spielberg’s 2012 film *Lincoln*, reports that positive reviews “were far more common than negative assessments, and highly laudatory reviews were even more common than merely positive ones.” Bailey suggests that “students, teachers, regular viewers, and even literary scholars (interested in the details of Tony Kushner’s screenplay) can all profit from viewing the film and seriously thinking about it.” Finally, in a closing essay, Steve Gronert Ellerhoff explores a major recent work about Lincoln by an important living writer. This work is George Saunders’s experimental novel *Lincoln in the Bardo*. According to Ellerhoff, “Saunders’s Lincoln is archetypal in the sense of analytical and archetypal psychologies, in that reading through” Lincoln’s grief as depicted in the novel “summons . . . an array of unconscious qualities related to grief, war, and national identity. The character

presents readers today an opportunity, through radical compassion sparked by narrative empathy, to experience and then reflect upon what it means to lead, to command, to doubt, and to lose—in this case, to lose a child.”

Resources

This book closes with a variety of resources, including a chronology of Lincoln’s life, a selective listing of works about Lincoln, a bibliography of Lincoln’s own works, information about the editor and contributors, and a comprehensive index.

CRITICAL
CONTEXTS

Lincoln Teaches Grant to Write

Stephen Cushman

At the end of July 1866, thirty-year-old Samuel Langhorne Clemens found himself becalmed aboard the *Smyrniote*, sailing from Honolulu to San Francisco in twenty-five days. In a notebook entry for Monday, July 30, he jotted, “This is the fifth day of dead, almost motionless calm—a man can walk a crack in the deck, the ship lies so still. I enjoy it, and I believe all hands do except the d—d baby. I write two hours a day & loaf the balance.” On assignment for the Sacramento *Union*, Clemens was putting his writing hours toward journalism, to which the Hannibal *Journal* and a few other periodicals had introduced him in the early 1850s.¹

Three years before his pen name appeared on a title page, however, Samuel Clemens was doing more than writing for two hours and loafing the better part of twenty-two. He was thinking, and in particular he was thinking about what he called eloquence. In the same notebook, under the heading “Simple or Touching Eloquence,” he cited an example: “Eloquence Simplicity—Lincoln’s ‘With malice toward none, with charity for all, & doing the right as God gives us to see the right, all may be well.[.]’—Very simple & beautiful.” Clemens’s imperfect recollection of the last sentence of the Second Inaugural Address, delivered a year before he left San Francisco for Hawai’i and not yet polished by public repetition into civic scripture, may sound comically truncated, as though Tom Sawyer had suddenly mangled it; yet even his imperfect recollection, out in the Pacific “at least as smooth as the river is when ruffled by a very light breeze & swelling with a few dying steamboat waves,” testifies with an eloquence of its own.

What is clear from his 1866 notebook is that Mark-Twain-in-the-Making was spending the enforced maritime suspension thinking hard about the kind of writer he wanted to become, about such things as voice and tone and the various effects and techniques and devices that fall under the category of rhetoric, a word he used

rarely and then only pejoratively. The notebook makes explicit that Clemens admired Abraham Lincoln's simple eloquence; it also makes explicit he believed there are "factitious aids—surroundings & circumstances which often make a passage thrillingly eloquent which inherently possesses no such attribute—for instance, how Gen. Grant's simple response to Buckner who had asked about what terms he would stipulate or agree for the surrender of Fort Donaldson used to rouse the multitude in the fierce days of the rebellion. 'Unconditional surrender! I propose to move at once upon your works!'" Again, as in the case of Lincoln's Second Inaugural, Clemens's recall is not quite perfect. What Grant actually wrote to Brigadier General Simon B. Buckner, from "Camp near Donelson, Feb.y 16th 1862," was "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works." Clemens's exclamation marks annotate the thrill stirred in him by Grant's compressed understatement. Although the future creator of the two most famous boys in American literature could not know in 1866 that he would go on to publish the Civil War general's memoirs, he did know that both Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant had used language in ways he admired greatly.²

Learning Simplicity

Lincoln's eloquence has been studied extensively, but where did Grant learn his? When Charles L. Webster and Company brought out the two posthumous volumes of *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, the first at the end of 1885, the second at the beginning of 1886, reviewer consensus was that in addition to the interest inherent in recollection by the preeminent soldier on the victorious side, the literary achievement of Grant's work was superlative. What made it superlative, most agreed, was the simplicity of its style. In *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, William Dean Howells observed, "But these *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, written as simply and straightforwardly as his battles were fought, couched in the most unpretentious phrase, with never a touch of grandiosity or attitudinizing, familiar, common, even homely in style, is a great piece of literature, because great literature is nothing more nor less

than the clear expression of minds that have something great in them, whether religion, or beauty, or deep experience.”³

Howells was a close friend of Samuel Clemens, and his literary judgment was authoritative. Writing privately to Clemens in December 1885, Howells anticipated his review in *Harper's*, though he spoke in this instance not of Grant's simplicity but of his naturalness, a quality implicitly synonymous: “I'm reading Grant's book with a delight I've failed to find in novels. I hope you are still as much aglow over him as you were when I saw you last. I think he is one of the most natural—that is, *best*—writers I ever read. The book merits its enormous success, simply as literature. It is very handsome, too.” Clemens liked Howells's assessment enough to copy the first, third, and fourth sentences into his notebook.⁴

Clemens's notebooks also contain the name of another important reviewer of Grant's memoirs, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Colonel of the First South Carolina Volunteers, Higginson is known to Civil War readers as the author of *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (copyrighted 1869, published 1870) and to poetry readers as the correspondent and editor of Emily Dickinson. Reviewing the first volume of Grant's memoirs in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Higginson sounded the same note as Howells while adding touches of his own: “These memoirs . . . have the first and highest quality both of literature and manhood, simplicity. Without a trace of attitudinizing or a suspicion of special pleading, written in a style so plain and terse that it suggests the reluctant conversation of a naturally reticent man, they would have a charm if the author had never emerged from obscurity except to write them.” Six months later, when Higginson continued his essay on Grant with a review of the second volume, simplicity again reigned supreme: “The most conspicuous quality manifested by the second volume of these memoirs is the same simplicity which was shown in the first.” Repeating the now familiar judgment that Grant “never poses or attitudinizes,” Higginson singled out Grant's undramatic treatment of an especially dramatic moment: “When he describes that famous interview between himself and General Lee, in which was settled the permanent destiny of the American nation,

the tale is told far more quietly than the ordinary reporter would describe the negotiations for a college rowing match.”⁵

Abraham Lincoln may have pored over the Bible and Shakespeare to learn some of his eloquence, studied and practiced law to learn more of it, and thrown in a few humorous anecdotes in the vernacular mode of Artemus Ward to complete the package, but Ulysses S. Grant could be simply natural, simply straightforward, simply himself. Or one might think so, reading the comments of Howells and Higginson. As it turns out, Grant had to learn simple eloquence, too. Consider this voice: “I spent something over a day in N. Orleans, and its being a tolerably large place, and my Bump of Acquisitiveness prompting me on to see as much of the place as possible, the result was that I went over the town just fast enough to see nothing as I went, stopped long enough at a time to find out nothing at all and at the end found found myself perfectly tired out.” Spelling and proofreading aside, this well-balanced, well-coordinated sentence, which culminates in the three-part parallelism loved by classical rhetoricians and their English-speaking descendants—William Shakespeare, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln among them—sounds as though it came straight out of Mark Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi* (1883). It did not; Samuel Clemens was eight and a half when it appeared. Or it could have come from the pen of Charles Dickens, whose North American tour of 1842 resulted in the publication of *American Notes for General Circulation*, which reached the United States in November of that year and was widely excerpted in newspapers. But Dickens did not visit New Orleans on this trip; Richmond, Virginia, was the farthest south he traveled in the east and Cairo, Illinois, in the west.⁶

Whatever his preparatory reading, the author of this sentence was twenty-two-year-old Ulysses S. Grant, brevet second lieutenant in the Fourth Infantry Regiment. The date was June 4, 1844; the place of writing Camp Salubrity, three miles from Natchitoches, Louisiana; and the recipient of the sentence eighteen-year-old Julia Boggs Dent of White Haven Plantation, Gravois, Missouri, near St. Louis. In her memoirs, which include remarks on “the comforts of slavery” that “passed away forever” with the Rebellion, Julia noted

that she did not see her young suitor again until 1848, “when the army returned from Mexico.” “In the meantime,” she continued, “I received by every mail long letters from him, many written on the field after he went to Mexico.” Letters between lovers belong to a genre of their own, and there is no reason why someone proficient in that genre as a young man should not also master the memoir genre as an older one. Proficiency in one does not preclude proficiency in the other. What the 1844 sentence shows is that there was nothing naturally or inevitably plain, simple, or terse about the writing of Ulysses S. Grant. Between 1844 and the composition of his memoirs, Grant had a lot to learn about how to write. Fortunately for him, he found a first-rate teacher.⁷

Lincoln’s First Lessons

In chapter forty-six of *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, which covers the first months of 1864, when Grant received orders to travel to Washington and receive the new rank of lieutenant general, he meets Abraham Lincoln for the first time. “I knew him, however, very well and favorably from accounts given by officers under me at the West who had known him all their lives.” But Grant did not know Lincoln only from second-hand accounts. “I had also read the remarkable series of debates between Lincoln and Douglas a few years before, when they were rival candidates for the United States Senate.” The adjective “remarkable” is not extravagant; yet it is one of a small handful of adjectives in the paragraph, and the others—few, rival, great—are not as remarkable as the hard-earned “remarkable” was for Grant. This was no empty, formulaic, overblown effusion; it meant that the seven Lincoln-Douglas debates of August, September, and October 1858 left an impression deep enough to warrant a rare descriptor reserved by Grant for something uncommon. What makes their effect on Grant even more important is that his appraisal of their quality—Lincoln’s side of them in particular—did not come from uncritical partisanship. “I was then a resident of Missouri, and by no means ‘a Lincoln man’ in the contest; but I recognized then his great ability.”⁸

CRITICAL READINGS

On Lincoln's Second Inaugural and the King James Bible

John E. Alvis

One book Abraham Lincoln read very carefully was the King James version of the Bible. We can learn something from Lincoln's reliance upon its language in his well-known address delivered on the occasion of his Second Inauguration as President. We can learn how Lincoln combines plainness with dignity by drawing upon the moral principles and language made familiar to his American audience from their study and worship in the word of God as rendered in that seventeenth-century translation.

Lincoln's speech occurred as the Civil War still lingered, although the war's outcome in victory for the Union had been pretty much assured. So, Lincoln spoke as Commander-in-Chief intent upon animating the North to persist in the effort and sacrifice necessary to conclude the struggle. Yet he was also mindful of another responsibility opposite in character, of the need to move his countrymen both North and South to a renewed peace that would not betray sacrifice by vindictiveness. He knew he owed gratitude to those still fighting for the Union as well as to those whose kinsmen had suffered and died in the struggle, knew that to them he owed a reaffirmation of the cause for which they had given and continued to give so much. Yet even in victory the cause might yet be lost if Lincoln did not do all he could to induce the South at least to accept if not more positively embrace the Union that would be imposed by force of arms. How to begin this effort of healing the wound without dishonoring those, North and South, who had endured so much whether in victory or in defeat?

Lincoln confronted besides another problem—on the face of it seemingly unsolvable: How to appeal to the soon-to-be-vanquished, whose very opposition was grounded in their repudiation of that Constitution that had until the war united all sections of the country. Without dishonoring that Constitution Lincoln would have to

appeal beyond it, appeal to something beyond the Constitution yet consistent with the supreme law of the land, perhaps indeed appeal to an authority the national constitution might be thought to serve even if the legal document did not expressly avow such an intent to serve. What beyond, yet consistent with, the Constitution? Lincoln turned to the Bible, to the legacy bequeathed by the scholars a British King had provided to make a new translation for Protestants, including some who had just begun to colonize America at the time of its publication.

In his Second Inaugural Lincoln found his way through this double dilemma by drawing upon the Biblical faith shared by each side in the conflict now, after four bitter years, drawing to its close. He notes that common faith when he speaks of both sides having prayed to the same God for His help during the war. And near the midpoint of his speech he refers to the Bible by name, to the source of the common faith that instructs in those common prayers raised on behalf of incompatible purposes. The Bible to which Lincoln referred we know to have been the King James translation from the passage he cites from the 19th Psalm: “the judgments of the Lord are altogether true and just.” And we recognize the same translated language in the adapted quotation from the New Testament, from Luke 6:37: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged,” as well as in the exact quotation from Matthew 18:7: “Woe unto the world for offences; for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!” (367).

Even when he is not quoting scriptural passages Lincoln intends to evoke the Bible and especially the round phrasing and the cadences so conspicuous in the King James rendering. We see this in the somewhat archaic diction he employs subsequent to the more matter-of-fact first paragraph of the four that make up this terse but sonorous address. He uses metonymies: “sweat” for labor, “bread” for the meager recompense the slaves received for their labor; “blood” and “lash” for the pains inflicted upon slaves instead of just payment for their work; “sword” for military force; and “blood,” once more, for every form of destruction inflicted by war. These slight archaisms pay tribute to the language of the stylists

appointed by James, who, we are told, agreed to produce their work in a language even at that time somewhat remote from the colloquial idiom of their day. We hear running throughout the final three paragraphs a cadence, a rhythm of phrasing somewhat repetitive, somewhat balanced by antitheses: “All dreaded it [war], all sought to avert it.” “Neither party expected . . . Neither anticipated . . .” “Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray . . .” “With malice toward none, with charity for all . . .” Or note the words previously cited with respect to biblical diction, but this time in their context hearing the swing and balance of the word order: “Yet, if God wills that [the war] continue until all wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword . . .” (367–68). And, finally, tone is also important. Aside from narration of events, the tone of the most striking biblical utterances is that of a judge speaking from his judgment seat. Such is the tone of Jehovah, of his prophets, and of Jesus of Nazareth. Lincoln’s tone after the initial paragraph of narrative is that of prophecy and judgment, prophecy in its full sense combining judgment upon past transgressions with hope for a future of revived fidelity.

Yet the judgment itself is also prayerful and tempered with the charity Lincoln exhorts his countrymen to join him in displaying across their sectional divide. Lincoln’s genius lies in his combining clear insistence upon justice with sincere fellow feeling toward former adversaries now to be once more fellow citizens.

To achieve that combination of lucid head and magnanimous heart, Lincoln must confront and somehow overcome the dismay that we may suppose threatened believers in either biblical testament or both. For in the earlier Judaic prophets as well as in Jesus, not to mention in their followers, confidence in a just God must, after so much suffering, contend with dismay over apparent nonfulfillment of God’s mercy and providence. The course of human affairs does not seem to bear out divine promises nor manifest divine justice, at least not in the here and now.

Lincoln must contend with this dismay on the part of his audience but also, presumably, in himself. In himself because he has

made such a point of remarking that North and South read the same Bible and prayed to the same God. Lincoln, I have said, must appeal beyond the Constitution to the still higher authority of biblical religion. But has not biblical religion been brought into question by the war? Is it that the Bible is unclear with regard to the injustice of holding slaves? Or is it that though the word of God is sufficiently clear in the matter, the one side read their Bible wrongly? It has been said that slaveholding violates every one of the Ten Commandments. The South could hardly have thought so. But then Lincoln knew the story told of two men disputing a biblical passage, a story that concludes with one of the disputants placing a silver dollar over the passage under dispute and asking his opponent to read it. When the opponent admits he cannot, his adversary proclaims victory: self-interest obscures correct reading. But Lincoln does not make that argument on this occasion. He reads the Bible with the eyes of faith, giving witness while providing example for his countrymen to follow in summoning up their faith.

The faith to which he appeals is a trust in God's providence. He knows the peril of assuming providence accommodates itself to one's own will. As well, he knows the course of divine providence must proceed by perplexing meanders because God's agents are human beings. Human beings God has created free. Their freedom is at once the glory of the species and its frailty. They are free to follow divine law, but also to defy that law, or, alternatively, though intending to obey, they may fail to perceive how best to obey. Thus, trust in providence must emerge from a steady recognition of human fallibility both of mind and of will. That awareness Lincoln evokes through biblical language when in speaking of earning bread by sweat of the face Lincoln reminds his audience of Adam and the first fall. Slavery looms up as a second fall of man because it compounds Adam's sin against God with sin against neighbor since Lincoln's words speak of having one's bread from the sweat of other men's faces. Woe to him from whom such an offence has come. But from whom has it come? Lincoln does not say the guilt belongs to the South alone, though doubtless many of his audience would have preferred him to have said so. Instead, Lincoln assigns blame by the

most general of references, by identifying the perpetrators merely as “those by whom the offense came.” When he follows with the phrase “two hundred and fifty years” he extends the offense in time and space to charge the entire populace that had four-score and nine years before become a nation. The sin was general, as was the woe. The woe being proportionate to the sin Americans are entitled to join with the Psalmist in asserting “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Something less than two years previously when Lincoln had spoken at Gettysburg he had, in similarly biblical cadences, summoned citizens to renew their dedication to a nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (328). The war had tested that proposition. Such a radical proposition required testing and testing by such an ordeal as the nation had experienced and would continue to endure for yet awhile longer. It had been and continues to be no easy matter to grasp how liberty and equality are interdependent. The predictable success of Union arms would promise a practical resolution in terms of national law and policy. But force of arms, though it can compel, cannot convince. If the war proved anything it proved at most the high and stern resolve Lincoln had called for at Gettysburg. The human record as then it appeared might be thought to support a view that liberty when, rarely, it had been achieved had been gained at the expense of equality. Greece and Rome permitted slavery and perhaps depended upon the institution for such liberty as their free citizens enjoyed. From the other side, France had come by such equality as its Revolution managed only at the cost of diminishing liberty for everyone within its borders as well as beyond its boundaries for any nation France’s revolutionary armies could subdue.

Judaic law provided for a mitigated form of slavery, and St. Paul in his epistles may seem to say that human bondage is of little consequence either for the soul of the slave or for that of the slaveholder. Of course, the same Jefferson who had identified America with the proposition of equality had charged Britain with introducing slavery in the colonies. Thus, the human record both

in deeds and in principles contested Lincoln's confidence in the interdependence of liberty and equality.

It may be that to Lincoln himself we owe our confidence that freedom and equality are so intertwined that neither can be attained without the other. But we must emphasize that Lincoln's own words lean upon the authority of the Bible. In his public speeches Lincoln sees no confusion of testimony in scripture regarding slavery. In fact, he seems to identify biblical precept with the principles asserted in America's Declaration of Independence. He may do so from having understood Christ's teaching of charity to reconcile or rise supreme over all other precepts, Mosaic or Pauline. The King James Bible's rendering of the second of the two great commandments that Jesus said contained all the others instructs us to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). The parable of the Samaritan that follows makes clear that one's neighbor can be anyone without qualification. Lincoln could identify Christ's teaching with Jefferson's because to state this precept of charity in terms more strictly political is to say "all men are created equal." Put the other way around, Jefferson's following words—"and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights"—equate with Christ's "as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). At the time Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural he could rely upon an audience's recognizing such equivalences because they were about equally familiar with the words of the Declaration and the language of the Bible. In large measure this familiarity owed to similarity in the tone and diction of scriptural and Jeffersonian-Lincolnian speech, a similarity made the more conspicuous by the King James Bible. Such familiarity has in our day declined, has declined whether one looks to Jefferson, to Lincoln, or to the Bible. That decline should concern us, if, as seems likely, the very thought conveyed by America's chief moral teachers owes something to the very language employed to convey it.

Work Cited

Lincoln, Abraham. *Lincoln's Selected Writings*, edited by David S. Reynolds. Norton, 2015.