

Similarly, the recreational landscapes of New York State receive a great deal of attention. Stradling describes the ways in which nature and culture interacted. In the romantic celebration of sublime landscapes and the rise of natural tourism in places like the Hudson River Valley, the Catskills, and the Adirondacks, Stradling detects the first stirrings of a preservationist mentality among New Yorkers. This popularly held attitude would never fully disappear and could be glimpsed even in the rhetoric of the environmental and historic preservation activists of the 1960s and 1970s who led the successful protest over the installation of a Con Ed pumped-water storage facility on Storm King Mountain in the Hudson River Valley.

For environmental historians, Stradling's greatest contribution with this book is the notion that place matters. He acknowledges he partially wrote this book to demonstrate the utility of using "a state as a unit of study" when so much of environmental history eschews political boundaries in favor of regions or ecosystems (6). Stradling's monograph places New York State firmly at the center of many of the themes that concern environmental historians, and he shows how so much of the political, social, and cultural history of New York was dependent upon environmental conditions, both locally as well as statewide. "Every place has a story," Stradling writes, and he tells New York State's story exceptionally well (241).

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George M. Fredrickson. *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xi, 156. Notes, index. Cloth, \$19.95.)

Abraham Lincoln's positions on race and slavery remain a persistent tension for any student of Lincoln. Was Lincoln the Great Emancipator or was he an opportunistic white supremacist? The best answer is that Lincoln was wholly neither and yet, to an extent, he was both. Into this contentious arena comes distinguished historian George M. Fredrickson, in this publication of his 2006 W.E.B. DuBois Lectures at Harvard University. Regrettably for the

historical community, Fredrickson passed away the week after the publication of *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent*.

This is a slender tome and would be smaller still if not published in a pocket-sized format. Yet it is an important book in which students and scholars alike will find much fodder for discussion. Fredrickson poses questions rather than offering concrete answers, and, in particular, he poses hard questions about Lincoln and race. He asks if we should reconsider the Lincoln of Gettysburg and whether we have read into his famous words our own desires to see Lincoln as the emancipator. Fredrickson argues that Lincoln was a complicated and inconsistent man, but ultimately he was susceptible to reason, argument, and circumstance and was capable of changing his mind accordingly.

Fredrickson starts with the admission that his thirty-year-old contention that "Lincoln's racial views remained essentially unchanged until his dying day" was "debatable" (ix). In revisiting the subject, Fredrickson self-consciously takes a "middle ground" between great emancipator and white supremacist, recognizing that Lincoln's beliefs "were formed in an intensely racist environment," and that as a politician "he had to be responsive to such attitudes, or at least give them lip service" (x, xi). This is unabashedly morally relativistic, but it remains reasonable to argue that the life of any political figure need not be viewed simplistically, in search of one definitive answer, but should be separated out into discrete categories of inquiry. For example, race and slavery are not necessarily linked issues, as "one could be against the bondage of African Americans and still consider them innately inferior" (8). Equally, it would be foolish not to recognize that the act of appealing to an electorate intrinsically compromises principle in favor of expediency. To view Lincoln as other than a product of his times and profession would be ahistorical.

The first of Fredrickson's three chapters is an excellent, brief primer on the contentious subject of Lincoln's views on race and slavery. Fredrickson concisely summarizes the work of numerous scholars over eighty years or more. From this literature, he extracts two poles: the Allen Guelzo–Richard Striner interpretation that Lincoln was "not only a long-standing and fervent proponent of emancipation, but also a principled advocate of equal rights for blacks" (11); and the Lerone Bennett–Michael Lind interpretation that Lincoln was "a die-hard racist" whose actions against slavery were motivated either by political expediency or an expression of white racist nationalism (27). Fredrickson gently adds a middle path, albeit an obvious one, that "Lincoln's attitude towards blacks and his beliefs about race may have changed significantly during the war years" (28).

The Lincoln who emerges in Fredrickson's second chapter is familiar to informed scholars. Although he personally disapproved of slavery, Lincoln's conservative constitutionalism limited his ability to express these sentiments politically. He was never inclined to radical abolitionism and clearly "could not readily envision a society in which blacks and whites could live in harmony as . . . equals" (54). Lincoln was very much a Whig in the mold of Henry Clay, supporting a program of colonization, returning freed slaves to Africa. For Lincoln, this idea was not ethnic cleansing so much as "an Exodus-like return of a captive people to its promised Land" (58). Lincoln's rise to national prominence in the 1850s brought to the fore the tensions in his positions on race and slavery: "Although Lincoln found slavery to be immoral and hoped for its demise, he made no comparable moral argument against political and social exclusion on grounds of race" (64). In short, in the 1850s Lincoln was a reasonably standard-issue antislavery, anti-equality, gently white supremacist Whig/Republican politician.

Continuing the familiar narrative into the third and final chapter, what changed in Lincoln's thought was the expediency of the wartime situation. The actions of slaves and Confederates compelled Lincoln to re-evaluate his position on slavery. Fredrickson's assessment of Lincoln is refreshing in that he takes the man's words at face value, rather than deconstructing them for deeper meaning. While this can be a dangerous approach with a politician, it does allow Fredrickson to argue in the case of Lincoln's August 1862 letter to Horace Greeley that he was being neither "deceptive [n]or Machiavellian" (100). Instead, he was honestly assessing the situation and outlining possible courses of action. If we accept the idea that Lincoln's ideas on slavery were in transition, then this makes sense. This also allows us to make sense of the dichotomy between the words of the Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862 and Lincoln's proposal of a constitutional amendment supporting colonization in December: his position on slavery was in flux.

Lincoln's position on slavery was reasonably clear before Fredrickson's book and remains so afterwards: he was moderately antislavery in peacetime and expediently abolitionist in wartime. Fredrickson clearly lays out this progression, but he does not change our interpretation of Lincoln and slavery. However, Lincoln's evolution on the question of race and equality is more problematic, not least due to his untimely death, and of more troubling concern to his advocates. For Fredrickson, while there are hints in the record that Lincoln was increasingly open by 1862 to the plight of African Americans, his continued conservative constitutionalism meant that his actions remained

constrained. While the Emancipation Proclamation could be based upon military necessity, and while the Thirteenth Amendment was a logical outgrowth of that position, it is far from clear what Lincoln's stance would have been, for example, on the Black Codes of Presidential Reconstruction.

In making his case, Fredrickson seeks to undermine the analytical concept of racism itself. He suggests that we might "acknowledge that 'racism' is an imprecise umbrella term and that there is a plurality of orientations . . . some of which may be more benign or less malignant than others" (41). Later, he argues that "there is actually a spectrum of attitudes that might legitimately be labeled 'racist,' ranging from genocidal hatred of the 'other' to mere conformity to the practices of a racially stratified society" (84). For Fredrickson, "Lincoln's personal attitudes . . . were much closer to racism as conformity than to racism as pathology" (84). Troublingly, his supporting footnote refers only to a single work of social psychology published in 1969.

Big Enough to Be Inconsistent offers significant opportunity for reflection. This little book confronts big ideas, and asks big questions of Lincoln students. Without saying so directly, Fredrickson challenges us to examine our own biases with respect to Lincoln and to return to the man's words and actions rather than to our preconceptions of them. While his attempts to redefine racism are underdeveloped and unsatisfying, Fredrickson reminds us that inconsistency is in fact a virtue after all.

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Jane E. Calvert. *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv, 382. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$99.00.)

John Dickinson has been an enigma for most historians of the American Revolutionary period, who have had a hard time reconciling his role as the "penman" of the American Revolution with his refusal to sign the Declaration of Independence. Further complicating matters was his active participation on the battlefield during the war, after he refused to call for