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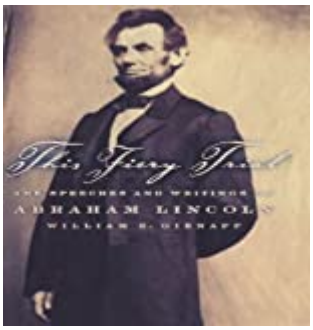

William E. Gienapp, ed. *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. xvii + 236 pp. $26.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-515106-0; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-515101-5.

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Reading Lincoln Readers

Picking and publishing writings by America's sixteenth president is a time-honored tradition among historians and book publishers. Lincoln documentary readers abound. A recent entry in the Lincoln reader genre is this volume, *A Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by the late Harvard professor and award-winning historian William E. Gienapp.

This Fiery Trial was published in conjunction with Gienapp's entry in the equally prolific field of Lincoln biographies, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America: A Biography* (2002). These companion volumes–biography and documentary reader–may be read as a set, or as stand-alones. The biography does not need the documentary reader to succeed as an excellent "short" Lincoln biography (less than 250 pages). Gienapp sprinkles the text with enough of Lincoln's own words to give readers a feel for the president's thoughts and attitudes. Readers, however, will enhance their enjoyment of the biography and enrich their understanding of Lincoln and his times if they pursue the companion reader as well.

Gienapp's documentary reader has much to commend it. It is reasonably brief–in the number of pages (236, excluding prefacing material); in the number of selections (113); in the length of selections (ranging between a 3-line telegram and a 10-page speech, with most selections running from 1 to 3 pages); and in the length of each document's introductory paragraph. With the exception of a prefacing autobiographical sketch written by Lincoln for the 1860 presidential election, the selections are presented chronologically, giving readers a sense of how Lincoln confronted issues and circumstances–not in neatly divided discreet, manageable topics conveniently arising one-at-a-time, but simultaneously and in relentless, jumbled confusion. Readers would benefit from reading the companion biography for background, but the minimal introduction to each selection provides enough context for readers to understandably proceed without the biography at hand.

In selecting among Lincoln's writings, Gienapp does not ride a single hobby-horse. Perhaps because he was selecting with an eye to complement his biography, he devotes almost one-third of the selections (thirty-three

documents) to items pre-dating Lincoln's election as president, including items of human interest and revelatory of Lincoln's personality that are sometimes excluded in similarly sized readers. To the extent Gienapp emphasizes themes, they are those that he sees as central to Lincoln's experience and his national importance–primarily his wielding of power as a wartime president, and also his evolving opinions and attitudes about slavery and race relations. Military matters and correspondence with generals make up a significant amount of the collection, reflecting the corresponding time and energy Lincoln expended on such things. Lincoln the calculating politician is also clearly reflected in selections regarding his rivalry with Stephen Douglas, patronage issues, and his relations with cabinet members, Congress, newspaper editors, critics of the war, and other shapers of public opinion.

The selections range not only in scope of topic, but also in variety of format–including working notes to himself, personal letters to associates, public letters for publication, speeches, newspaper reports, formal state papers, proclamations, executive orders, and telegrams of inquiry and response. For the most part Gienapp does not abridge documents. Only several of Lincoln's longer state papers (such as annual messages to Congress) and reports of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates are abbreviated. Neither does Gienapp engage in historical documentary editing in the formal sense; there are no footnotes annotating the selections. There is no index.

For purposes of authoritative citation, students will need to refer to one of several "comprehensive" compilations of Lincoln's writings. For fifty years, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (1953, 1974, 1990) has been the definitive source on Lincoln texts. (Gienapp used it as the textual basis for his reader.) Thanks to the Abraham Lincoln Association, the *Collected Works* is searchable online at www.hti.umich.edu/l/lincoln. Though not as comprehensive as the *Collected Works*, Don E. Fehrenbacher's edited *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings* (1989) makes corrections and additions to the *Collected Works* and is often preferentially cited if a document is contained in both. Both will eventually be superseded, however, by the *Papers of Abraham Lincoln*, a comprehensive collection of all known texts written by or to Lincoln that is being compiled and annotated by an editorial team directed by Daniel Stowell under the auspices of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Some "large" (eight-hundred-plus pages) single-volume Lincoln compilations have reappeared during the last decade including Da-Capo Press's reissuing of Roy P. Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* (1990), and the Modern Library Edition of Philip Van Doren, ed., *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (1940, 1999).

Gienapp's documentary reader falls in the category of "small" (four hundred pages or less) single-volume Lincoln compilations designed for students and classroom use, and for general readers who want to sample Lincoln's most important or representative writings in a relatively unabridged format but in a manageable dose. This "small" reader field is crowded. For several decades, Don E. Fehrenbacher's edited volume *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait through His Speeches and Writings* (1964) was the gold standard in "small" Lincoln readers. Richard N. Current's edited volume *The Political Thought of Abraham Lincoln* (1967) was also useful, though more narrow in scope than Fehrenbacher's reader. These volumes are now out of print and relatively hard to come by, especially for classroom purposes.

Of the 113 documents in Gienapp's reader, four are unique to it: an April 29, 1860, letter to Lyman Trumbull admitting "the taste [for the presidency] is in my mouth"; a May 26, 1863, letter to Isaac Arnold reacting to political criticism of his military appointments; a June 29, 1863, letter to William Kellogg regarding the problem of wartime profiteering; and an August 10, 1863, letter to Gen. William S. Rosecrans soothing feelings and pleading for action. These illustrate the broad range of topics Gienapp touches on.

Readers will inevitably quibble over some of Gienapp's inclusions and exclusions. Regarding exclusions, some may wonder at the absence of Lincoln's May 7, 1837, letter to love-interest Mary Owens; his February 22, 1842, "Temperance Speech"; an example of Lincoln's attempt at poetry, such as his 1846 composition "My Childhood Home I See Again"; his December 22, 1847, Congressional "Spot" Resolutions attacking President James K. Polk's decision to go to war with Mexico; his remarks in Congress on January 10, 1849, supporting abolition in Washington, D.C.; a version of his "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions" delivered in several places from 1858 to 1860; or his September 13, 1862, reply to a delegation of Chicago clergymen regarding emancipation (including his famous "Pope's bull against the comet" remark). But this is picking at the margins. Gienapp's mix of selections is judicious and reflects the relative importance of varying aspects of Lincoln's personality, experiences, and challenges.

A comparison of Gienapp's book with other "small" Lincoln readers published since 1990 (excluding the Dover edition and Holzer's children's book) certainly documents–if any documentation is needed–that historians have a hard time forming a consensus. Of the entire corpus of Lincoln's writings, only nine selections made it into every reader: the "House Divided Speech"; the two Inaugural Addresses; two messages to Congress (July 4, 1861, and March 6, 1862); the August 22, 1862, letter in response to Horace Greeley's "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," wherein Lincoln declares that whatever he does about slavery is for the purpose of saving the Union; a November 10, 1864, response to a serenade following his re-election wherein he urges unity of purpose; the final Emancipation Proclamation; and the Gettysburg Address. Each reader had at least one selection from the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates, but no one single debate of the seven made it into every one of the readers.

Since the early 1990s, however, a plethora of new Lincoln readers have appeared. In 1990, HaperCollins published to much acclaim *Lincoln on Democracy*, edited by Mario M. Cuomo and Harold Holzer. Being on the big end of the "small" reader spectrum (400-plus pages, with 142 documents interspersed with 9 essays by prominent Lincoln scholars, including Gienapp), the Cuomo and Holzer reader has interpretative ambitions beyond a mere documentary collection. Selections are biased toward a theme of "democracy" focusing on the issues of liberty, equality, and self-determination, prompting the editors to abridge some selections more than is common in most other readers, certainly more than in Gienapp's reader. The two books have sixty-three selections in common; many of the fifty Gienapp selections not in Cuomo and Holzer tend to be related to military, war, and reconstruction matters. Like Gienapp's, Cuomo and Holzer's work is strictly chronological, but it has an index and a more expansive Lincoln chronology than Gienapp's.

In 1991, Dover Publications issued *Great Speeches: Abraham Lincoln*, with historical notes by John Grafton, as part of its Dover Thrift Editions series. If the Cuomo and Holzer volume represents the long end of "short" Lincoln readers, the Dover volume is the quick-and-dirty, stripped-down version at 113 pages, reproducing 16 unabridged documents, with brief historical introductions to each. All but one selection is a public speech or official pronouncement; there are no examples of private correspondence and nothing from the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Three of the sixteen selections do not appear in Gienapp–Fast Day and Thanksgiving proclamations (which were actually drafted in the Secretary of State's office) and a Congressional speech regarding the Mexican War. The Dover collection achieves simplicity and affordability at the expense of excluding much that reveals Lincoln's complexity and personality, and the diversity of challenges that he faced. Its brevity makes it more appropriate for high school use than for college use or for general readers who wish for a richer sampling of Lincoln's literary output.

In 1992, Bantam Books published *Selected Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, compiled by Herbert Mitgang, as part of the paperback Bantam Classics series. This selection of 98 documents comprising 324 pages is prefaced by an engagingly written essay by Mitgang, and presents the documents chronologically and unencumbered by introductions or explanatory notes. There is no index, bibliography, or chronology. Mitgang has fifty selections in common with Gienapp; he shares Gienapp's interest in Lincoln's military relations, but he includes fewer documents pertaining to slavery and race matters than Gienapp, particularly regarding political developments in the 1850s.

Also in 1992, London publisher J. M. Dent issued *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Letters*, edited by the late British professor Peter J. Parish, as part of its paperback Everyman series. Almost a third longer than Gienapp's reader at 300 pages, and with a third more documentary selections at 188 (75 in common with Gienapp), Parish includes more material from Lincoln's early life and more personal letters. As befits a British scholar, his is the only collection to include the president's condolences to Queen Victoria on the death of Prince Albert, and Lincoln's famous response to the gift of elephants from the King of Siam. This is also the only collection that includes excerpts from all seven of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Parish does not share the same preoccupation with Lincoln's racial views as do most of his American counterparts. Still, he includes enough documents pertaining to slavery and racial matters to give readers a good feel for Lincoln's views and attitudes and to alert readers to the importance of these issues. Parish divides the documentary selections chronologically into seven chapters, providing an introduction of several paragraphs to each. He does not, however, provide an introduction to individual documents (though he does provide occasional clarifying footnotes). He includes a Lincoln chronology, but no index. A major annoyance is that the table of contents does not list each of the 188 documents, so there is no handy way to access specific documents in the volume.

In 1993, Penguin Books published *The Portable Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Columbia English professor Andrew Delbanco, in its Viking Portable Library series. It is a bigger book than Gienapp's (341 pages) but has fewer documents (83), of which just over half (42) are also in Gienapp's. Delbanco's thoughtful introductory essay highlights Lincoln's literary power. He divides the collection chronologically into six parts with a brief contextual introduction for each. With the exception of three documents, however, individual selections do not have explanatory head notes, though Delbanco provides a Lincoln chronology at the beginning and short biographical sketches of Lincoln's correspondents at the end of the book. He includes an index. Of all the readers, Delbanco's is the only one to include the full transcript of a Lincoln-Douglas debate (the one in Ottawa, which was the first debate of the seven), including Douglas's entire speech and concluding rebuttal. There are no excerpts from any of the other debates, however. Some instructors may feel that Delbanco's mix of documents does not reflect themes such as military relations, racial attitudes, or wartime political dynamics as strongly as they may wish for certain pedagogical purposes. Still, readers of Delbanco's volume will come away with a deeper appreciation for Lincoln's literary merits.

Also in 1993, Gramercy Books published *The Essential Abraham Lincoln*, edited by John Gabriel Hunt, as part of its Library of Freedom series. Hunt's reader is similar to Delbanco's in that it is heftier than Gienapp's (340 pages), but has fewer documents (81), 39 of which are also in Gienapp. Hunt's is the least satisfactory of all the post-1990 readers. Document texts are based on editor Arthur Brooks Lapsley's eight-volume 1905 (incorrectly cited as 1906) edition of *The Writings of Abraham Lincoln*. Therein lies the origin of many mistakes, such as a wrong date for the "Lyceum" speech (it was January 27, 1838, not 1837), a wrong date for the "House Divided" speech (it was June 16, not June 17, 1858), and the inclusion of the so-called "Lost Speech" delivered at Bloomington on May 29, 1856–based on an 1896 construction by Henry C. Whitney that has been broadly discredited. There are no introductory head notes or explanations and no Lincoln chronology–in short, there is a total lack of context for any of the documents. The value of the table of contents is reduced by the exclusion of dates for any of the selections. There is no index.

In 1998, Harlan Davidson published *Think Anew, Act Anew: Abraham Lincoln On Slavery, Freedom, and Union*, edited by Brooks D. Simpson. This volume has 205 pages and 64 documents. Simpson focuses on slavery and race in his selections, and includes no document predating the 1850s. He provides eight instructive introductory chapter essays in addition to a brief introductory paragraph for each individual document. Moreover, there is an index. Forty out of the sixty-four documents also appear in Gienapp's volume, indicating the importance that Gienapp also places on the racial topic. Gienapp even includes several documents that illuminate Lincoln's attitudes on slavery and race that Simpson omitted (e.g., Lincoln's March 3, 1837, protest in the Illinois Legislature regarding slavery [p. 8]; and the August 6, 1864, letter to John McMahon [pp. 201-202]). Still, Simpson's is a fine reader eminently suitable for its purpose, though Gienapp's similarly sized reader may be more satisfactory for readers with a more general interest in Lincoln's life.

In 2000, Harold Holzer edited *Abraham Lincoln–The Writer: A Treasury of His Greatest Speeches and Letters*, published by Boyds Mills Press. From its title, readers may not discern that this is a children's book. This slim 106-page volume contains very abbreviated excerpts from 42 documents (24 of which are also in Gienapp, though in much fuller form). Its truncated excerpts make it akin to the Lincoln "wit-and-wisdom" or Lincoln "quotations" collections (a huge genre in its own right). The work's many illustrations and graphic format make it suitable for the coffee table of families with middle-school children or younger.

In 2001, St. Martin's Press published *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches*, edited by Michael P. Johnson, as part of its Bedford Series in History and Culture. It is expressly designed for college classes, though general readers will also find it accessible. It is a larger collection than Gienapp's, containing 175 documents (358 pages). Johnson provides a ten-page opening essay explaining the importance of Lincoln's writing skill in exercising and expanding presidential power during the Civil War. Introductory paragraphs to individual documents tend to be longer (sometimes substantially so) than Gienapp's. Selections are divided topically for ease of classroom discussion–though for general readers this disrupts the chronological flow in several instances. Included is a list of twenty study questions and the most thorough index of any of the "small" Lincoln readers. Johnson includes eighty selections that are in Gienapp. The thirty-three selections peculiar to Gienapp tend to focus on Lincoln's personality–more important in a biographical sense for Gienapp's purposes than for Johnson's. To the extent Johnson has more documents, many tend to be wartime military correspondence (a document category

that Gienapp by no means ignores). Their convergence on such a large number of selections reflects their relative agreement on the topical importance of wartime leadership and racial issues; the simultaneity of the publication of these two readers–within a year of each other–suggests that together they constitute a reliable gauge of contemporary academic currents. Aside from a relatively small disparity in length, one is left to such subjective criteria as page format and ease of reading (Johnson's reader has smaller print and "busier" looking pages) in choosing between them.

All of these "small" Lincoln readers have their virtues–the chief being that readers will discover (or rediscover, as the case may be) the pleasure of reading Lincoln's words. They will be struck by the timelessness of much of what Lincoln had to say. His remarks to William Herndon, for example, in a February 1848 letter regarding the consequences of a president's power to make war (pp. 19-20), or his observations in an August 1864 letter to John McMahan regarding the peril of racial judgments in a racially diverse society (pp. 201-02)–either could be mistaken for having come from one of today's newspapers. Reading Lincoln will never lack relevance.

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