Description

Though Abraham Lincoln was not a political philosopher per se, in word and in deed he did grapple with many of the most pressing and timeless questions in politics. What is the moral basis of popular sovereignty? What are the proper limits on the will of the majority? When and why should we revere the law? What are we to do when the letter of the law is at odds with what we believe justice requires? How is our devotion to a particular nation related to our commitment to universal ideals? What is the best way to protect the right to liberty for all people? The contributors to this volume, a methodologically and ideologically diverse group of scholars, examine Lincoln’s responses to these and other ultimate questions in politics. The result is a fascinating portrait of not only Abraham Lincoln but also the promises and paradoxes of liberal democracy.

The basic liberal democratic idea is that individual liberty is best secured by a democratic political order that treats all citizens as equals before the law and is governed by the law, with its limits on how the state may treat its citizens and on how citizens may treat one another. Though wonderfully coherent in theory, these ideas prove problematic in real-world politics. The authors of this volume approach Lincoln as the embodiment of this paradox—“naturally antislavery” yet unflinchingly committed to defending proslavery laws; defender of the common man but troubled by the excesses of democracy; devoted to the idea of equal natural rights yet unable to imagine a harmonious, interracial democracy. Considering Lincoln as he attempted to work out the meaning and coherence of the liberal democratic project in practice, these authors craft a profile of the 16th president’s political thought from a variety of perspectives and through multiple lenses. Together their essays create the first fully-dimensional portrait of Abraham Lincoln as a political actor, expressing, addressing, and reframing the perennial questions of liberal democracy for his time and our own.

ISBN
9780700622160

Publication Date
2016

Publisher
University Press of Kansas

City
Lawrence

Disciplines
American Politics | Ethics and Political Philosophy | Law | Military History | Political History | Political Theory | United States History

Comments
Description, cover image, and reviews courtesy of University Press of Kansas.

Subject Areas
Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865 -- Political and social views; Lincoln, Abraham, 1809-1865 -- Philosophy; United States -- Politics and government -- 1861-1865; Philosophy -- Democracy

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Series Information
American political thought

Reviews
"This is no ordinary collection of essays. Buccola has provided a volume that exemplifies the hallmark of American political thought in its eclectic and interdisciplinary approach to perennial questions of ultimate significance. The quality of the essays, the eminence of the contributors, and the importance of studying Abraham Lincoln make this a first-rate book." - S. Adam Seagrave, author of Liberty and Equality: The American Conversation

"An unusually wide range of weighty scholars provide through this volume an unprecedentedly deep and rich interpretative guide to Lincoln as a political thinker. An essential book for all future teaching and scholarship on Lincoln." - Thomas L. Pangle, co-author of The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders

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