

# Book Reviews



**David H. Leroy.** *Mr. Lincoln's Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.* New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Press, 2009. 194p. alk. paper, \$49.95 (ISBN 9781584562443). LC2009-003733.

On August 27, 1858, Freeport, the county seat of Stephenson County, Illinois, took center stage. The second debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas was set to begin. Lincoln opened the contest by responding to a series of seven questions Douglas had posed the week before at Ottawa. Then the former Congressman put his prosecutorial skills to work. "Can the people of a United States territory (territories)," the gangling Lincoln asked, "in any lawful way, against the wishes of any citizens of the United States, exclude slavery from their limits prior to the formation of a state constitution?" Douglas immediately took the bait. Famous for his support of *popular sovereignty*, a doctrine that granted settlers of federal territorial lands the right to decide the question of slavery, the mercurial and hard-drinking Senator from Illinois replied that local legislatures were indeed empowered to disallow slavery. The peculiar institution was, after all, a local issue.

This exchange accomplished two things: it assured Lincoln's defeat in the Illinois Senate race and, concomitantly, it smashed Douglas' credibility below the Mason-Dixon Line. Legend has it that Lincoln's brain trust counseled him not to play to Douglas' strengths. Allowing the "Little Giant" to expound on popular sovereignty would sink Lincoln's senatorial aspirations. Lincoln rejected such timid advice. "Gentlemen," he allegedly replied, "I am killing larger game. If Douglas answers, he can never be President." Lincoln was thinking ahead.

The sixteenth President's political skills were legendary. His former law partner, William Herndon, warned Lincoln's fans and detractors that "any man who took

*Lincoln* for a simple-minded man would very soon wake up with his *back in a ditch*." Beneath the image of humble rail splitter and bumbling militia captain lay a gifted politician with sharp elbows and shrewd ambition. Lincoln's ambition and his ability to exploit the right political opening are the topics of David H. Leroy's *Mr. Lincoln's Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*.

*Mr. Lincoln's Book* offers a familiar storyline. While campaigning in 1858 for Illinois' Senate seat, contender Abraham Lincoln amassed a scrapbook of news accounts reporting the seven debates between himself and incumbent Senator Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln's political instincts advised him that his performance against the better known Douglas had been well received and that additional national exposure could only help his cause. To print and distribute his words around the nation seemed politically cost-effective.

The scrapbook began with a clipping of Lincoln's famous "House Divided" speech, which he gave at the close of the Republican state convention when he had been nominated to run for the U.S. Senate. Keenly aware that the partisan nature of the press could lead to inaccuracies, Lincoln had his speeches clipped from newspapers sympathetic to the Republican Party (*Chicago Press & Tribune*) and the speeches of Douglas clipped from the Democratic press (*Chicago Times*). Additionally, the future president occasionally made notes in the margins when he felt the story required further explanation. The scrapbook, after at least one false start, found a publisher in Follet, Foster, and Company of Columbus, Ohio. The published scrapbook, entitled *Political Debates Between the Hon. Abraham Lincoln and the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas in the Cel-*

ebred Campaign of 1858, in Illinois, sold nearly 50,000 copies. More important, it accomplished all Lincoln expected. It appeared in the presidential election year of 1860, enhanced his national reputation, and propelled him into the nation's highest office.

Like myriad books found in the Lincoln canon, this one deserves praise and criticism. To its credit, *Mr. Lincoln's Book* is the first book-length treatment of Lincoln's famous scrapbook (Howard Holzer's *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* devoted two pages to this subject). The work offers exciting details about Lincoln's behind-the-scenes involvement in the book's publication, chronicles the accidental loss and recovery of the original scrapbook, and raises the possibility that a second scrapbook exists. Mr. Leroy is at his best when he offers a cogent explanation of how *Political Debates* might have turned the election for Lincoln in the six states in which the book was published and sold locally. The timing of the publication, Leroy observed, trumped the numbers of copies sold. Additionally, bibliophiles would also find useful David Leroy's painstaking census of all known signed copies of the Lincoln-Douglas' *Political Debates*.

*Mr. Lincoln's Book*, however, has its problems. The author's failure to cite selectively and his eagerness to interject long passages and images breaks up the narrative, congests our understanding of the subject matter, and probably doubled the size of the monograph. The question of whether Lincoln was the book's author, to which Mr. Leroy devotes considerable attention, seems tangential; and the reproduction of political cartoons from 1860 is not truly germane to the book's central subject. Moreover, some of this information (transcriptions of Lincoln's correspondence, political cartoons, and photographs) is supplied, once again, in the book's accompanying CD-ROM.

The idea of a short history detailing the publication of Abraham Lincoln's scrap-

book is a welcome one. *Mr. Lincoln's Book: Publishing the Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, however, would have benefitted from more critical analysis of the political climate leading to the Lincoln-Douglas debates, additional information on the public's response to the published scrapbook, and more discriminating use of Lincoln's extensive body of primary sources.—José O. Diaz, *Ohio State University*.

***The Bibliography of Appalachia: More Than 4,700 Books, Articles, Monographs and Dissertations, Topically Arranged and Indexed.*** Comp. John R. Burch, Jr. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland (Contributions to Southern Appalachian Studies, 25), 2009. 222p. alk. paper, \$55 (ISBN 9780786441334). LC2009-000693.

Appalachia has received a lot of attention lately: first with the 2008 presidential election, followed by the January 2009 TVA coal sludge disaster, and more recently with Diane Sawyer's ABC documentary and the four-part PBS series. In 1965, bibliographer Robert F. Munn documented the four major (re)discoveries of the region and the upsurge in bibliographic production during these periods and its decline between them. Perhaps we are now being rediscovered again. The timing seems most auspicious for the appearance of new reference works focused on the region.

The bibliography of Appalachia goes back to at least 1921 and Olive Dame Campbell's 250-citation bibliography concluding her husband John C. Campbell's *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. It was followed the next year by LC Chief Bibliographer H.H.B. Meyer's 161 citations in *List of References on the Mountain Whites*. The first book-length Appalachian bibliography was the 830 citations compiled by Everret E. Edwards as *References on the Mountaineers of the Southern Appalachians* in 1935 and published by the United States Department of Agriculture. The next major bibliography on the region produced by Munn in 1961, *The Southern*