



Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE SECOND AMERICAN REVOLUTION comprises seven essays drawn from lectures and papers McPherson presented on various occasions. To gather these into book form, as the author freely admits in his preface, runs the risk of redundancy. It is a risk that McPherson loses, as the essays frequently cite the same anecdotes, incidents, and quotations to make the same point. Simply put, there is material here for one excellent scholarly essay; there is not enough for a book.

Having said which, however, one must acknowledge McPherson's mastery of his topic—the change the Civil War effected in America's concept of liberty. Prior to the war, Americans thought of liberty as the restraint of government from tyrannizing over the individual (or state); after the war, liberty became the broadening of opportunity (particularly for its freed slaves), resulting from an extension of the power of the national government. McPherson's thesis is that this redefinition of liberty and the role the government must play in fostering it was a direct result of Abraham Lincoln's steady resolve, his genius as a communicator, and his recognition that the abolition of slavery had to be included along with the restoration of the Union as a war aim if the promise of the first America Revolution was to be fulfilled.

McPherson scarcely mentions the economic and social innovations or the political upheaval that mark the Civil War years, except insofar as they manifest the revolutionary increase in federal power, for his emphasis falls on the question of individual liberty. And this may be the great service this book of essays performs. McPherson quite rightly insists on the primacy of the issue of freedom in America in the years immediately before, during, and after the Civil War. He demonstrates how that issue preyed upon the mind of Lincoln, and how by dint of wit and courage that great politician handled it, turning it first into a weapon to win the war and finally converting it into an end in itself. For McPherson the Civil War is about liberty, the extension and protection of which, as Lincoln knew, the United States would be held responsible for in the court of international opinion, before the eyes of the liberty-hungry of future ages.

Sources for Further Study

America. CLXIV, March 2, 1991, p. 244.

American Heritage. XLII, May, 1991, p. 12.

Booklist. LXXXVII, December 1, 1990, p. 715.

Chicago Tribune. February 3, 1991, XIV, p. 6.

Forbes. CXLVII, March 4, 1991, p. 24.

Kirkus Reviews. LVIII, November 1, 1990, p. 1516.

Los Angeles Times Book Review. February 3, 1991, p. 6.

New York Times Book Review. XCVI, January 20, 1991, p. 13.

Publishers Weekly. CCXXXVIII, January 18, 1991, p. 40.

The Washington Post Book World. XXI, February 3, 1991, p. 6.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/abraham-lincoln-second-american-revolution-salem>