



# Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America

*Allen C. Guelzo*

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## **Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America** Allen C. Guelzo

One of the nation's foremost Lincoln scholars offers an authoritative consideration of the document that represents the most far-reaching accomplishment of our greatest president.

No single official paper in American history changed the lives of as many Americans as Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. But no American document has been held up to greater suspicion. Its bland and lawyerlike language is unfavorably compared to the soaring eloquence of the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural; its effectiveness in freeing the slaves has been dismissed as a legal illusion. And for some African-Americans the Proclamation raises doubts about Lincoln himself.

*Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation* dispels the myths and mistakes surrounding the Emancipation Proclamation and skillfully reconstructs how America's greatest president wrote the greatest American proclamation of freedom.

## **Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America Details**

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# **From Reader Review Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America for online ebook**

## **Tim says**

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation is a sturdy defense of both Lincoln and the importance of the EP (versus a raft of historical and other dismissals of its importance, including Hofstadter's "the moral grandeur of a bill of lading."). Guelzo points out both Lincoln's hatred of slavery and the constraints he felt he was operating under in freeing the slaves during wartime (keeping the Border states in the Union, court challenges, public opinion among others). It wades fairly deeply into the debates, I did not need quite so much convincing.

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## **Skye says**

As my education in history always ended around the less controversial War of 1812 or so and surely pussyfooted even there, this fine book has been my entire edjamacation so far about the politics of the Emancipation Proclamation and it is thrilling to learn about--- though I fear it is not so much this book that is thrilling but the events it describes.

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## **Nathan Albright says**

Wading into the argument of Lincoln's Emancipation proclamation, noted Lincoln scholar Allen Guelzo [1] seeks to place this most notable and prosaic of Lincoln's pronouncements into a sound historical context and manages to do so. In the process, he reveals the tension between Lincoln's words and deeds, and the way that slavery was ended in the United States [2] and the long-term consequences and repercussions of the choices that Lincoln made and refused to make. Throughout the book, the author shows Lincoln to have been motivated by a strong sense of prudence and pragmatism of an enlightened kind that was deeply concerned not with appealing to grand heroic gestures and soaring prose, but to making meaningful and lasting change, ultimately to end slavery in the United States in a way that would do the most good as possible and the least harm to society as for. To our age prudential morality and prudence in general is not viewed in a particularly noble light, but Lincoln's prudence was well-founded and the author validates the approach of the Emancipation Proclamation through the perspective of history.

As is frequently the case, this particular book is written in chronological order and takes about 250 pages to cover five reasonably long chapters and a short post-script. After a lengthy and eloquent acknowledgements section and an introduction that questions the harsh criticism the language of the Emancipation Proclamation has endured over the course of the 20th century and places Lincoln firmly in the place of a rational Enlightenment political philosopher, the author digs deeply into both the text and context of the Emancipation Proclamation. First showing the four possible routes to freedom for enslaved blacks, the author makes a strong defense of Lincoln's approach given his fears of military coups and his well-placed mistrust in the courts. Later chapters show the delicate process by which Lincoln prepared the nation for the Emancipation Proclamation and showed himself to be an instrument in God's hands, if an often misunderstood one. The author then notes the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation in serving as an encouragement to slave states to engage in gradual and compensated emancipation, which was not a very

popular proposition and notes the increasing despair in which many blacks feel about the United States and their resulting negativity towards Lincoln himself.

This book has a lot to say about the Emancipation Proclamation and is an essential book for those wishing to know the document and its importance better. The author makes a convincing case that Lincoln sacrificed his usual gift for eloquence in order to attempt to make a declaration that would be as immune as possible to legal challenges while the Civil War was ongoing. His mistrust of the legislative solution to slavery in light of probable court challenges was shown to be reasonable in light of the dismal record of the Reconstruction and Gilded Age Supreme Court in defending the rights of freedmen. Without seeking to pander to contemporary progressives, a common fault among people who write about Lincoln and his behavior towards slavery, the author gives a sound historical argument that demonstrates Lincoln's political savvy as well as his unusual but distinctive view on justice and the way it can best be approximated in this fallen world. For those who want to understand how a prosaic and seemingly mundane piece of writing that dramatically and decisively increased the scope of Union war aims and brought blacks en masse into the United States military and made their civil rights a matter of national honor and moral debt, this book is an excellent volume.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

[2] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2017...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2014...>

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## **Matt says**

**“If all that Lincoln said and was should fail to carry his name and character to future ages, the emancipation of four million human beings by his single official act is a passport to all of immortality that earth can give. There is no other individual act performed by any person on this continent that can be compared with it. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, were each the work of bodies of men. The Proclamation of Emancipation in this respect stands alone. The responsibility was wholly upon Lincoln; the glory is chiefly his. No one can now say whether the Declaration of Independence, or the Constitution of the United States, or the Proclamation of Emancipation was the highest, best gift to the country and to mankind.”**

- George S. Boutwell, American abolitionist and politician (1888)

**“[B]y virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free...”**

- Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863

Surely the Emancipation Proclamation is among the most misunderstood and unappreciated of the world's great documents. At the stroke of a pen, Lincoln turned a fundamentally conservative war, meant to restore the *status quo ante*, into a revolution that would forever change America. Yet it has seldom been given the respect it deserves. Marx derided it as an example of the “ordinary summonses sent by one lawyer to another.” The historian Richard Hofstadter (he of the “paranoid style of American politics”) sneered at the Proclamation as having the “moral grandeur of a bill of lading.” In his magisterial recounting of the Civil War, Shelby Foote dismisses the Proclamation as empty politics, a gesture of impotence that attempted to free people where the Federal Government currently had no authority.

In *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, historian Allen C. Guelzo attempts to restore Lincoln's wartime order to its proper place as a world-historical moment. He does so by examining the context in which the Proclamation was delivered; the motives behind its creation; and the actual effects it had on slaves and slavery. Guelzo dives into Lincoln's legal authority to issue such a proclamation, which also serves to explain the unadorned and legalistic style that Lincoln employed. (Marx was correct that that the Proclamation echoed an ordinary legal summons; it was, in point of fact, a legal document, one that would eventually have been scrutinized by a federal court, if not for the Thirteenth Amendment).

The title of Guelzo's book is a bit of a misnomer. Certainly, the Emancipation Proclamation is the central feature around which everything is organized. But this is not a monograph. Instead, Guelzo uses the Proclamation as a vehicle to explore Lincoln's views on slavery. He disagrees that Lincoln was, in the words of Greeley, “a growing man,” a man in progress towards racial enlightenment. Rather, Guelzo argues that Lincoln knew from the outset that “his administration was the beginning of the end of slavery and that he would not leave office without some form of legislative emancipation policy in place.”

When we discuss the Civil War, we often confuse the cause of the war with the motivations of those who fought it. Slavery caused the Civil War. The South seceded from the Union because of the fear that Lincoln would (as he promised) stop the spread of slavery to the western territories. This was a huge issue, one that the U.S. had been grappling with since its inception, and one that had taken on new urgency in the years leading up to 1861 (the Kansas-Nebraska Act, “Bleeding Kansas”, and *Dred Scott*, among other things, set the momentum towards conflict). The South believed that if slavery could not spread, it would eventually die, no small matter since slaves represented billions of dollars in assets. The simple mathematics of representation (each new free state created two new senators and a handful of representatives) doomed them to being surrounded by political enemies.

Though slavery caused the war, Lincoln did not initially prosecute it in order to end slavery. This is what we are told, at least. Instead, his stated reason was to preserve the Union. For Lincoln, the preservation of the Union was tantamount to the preservation of democracy, not just here, but everywhere. This “save-the-Union” mindset is most famously captured in Lincoln's August 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, in response to Greeley's *The Prayer of Twenty Millions*. In this letter, Lincoln announced that if he could restore the United States without freeing a single slave, he would do just that. This letter tends to embody the conventional wisdom of Lincoln as a man who only gradually came to the light of freedom.

(Of course, by the time Lincoln contacted Greeley, he had already written the Emancipation Proclamation. He even gives a hint of that in the letter, writing “if I could save [the Union] by freeing some [slaves] and leaving others alone I would also do that.” That is exactly what the Emancipation Proclamation did, freeing the slaves in those states that were in open rebellion, and where federal courts were no longer in operation).

Despite this avowed purpose, everyone understood that once a war began over slavery, the end of slavery was a possible – if not probable – result of a Union victory. Just look at General George B. McClellan, the ill-starred commander of the Army of the Potomac until November 1862. When you study McClellan, a pro-slavery War Democrat, you find a man incredibly preoccupied with maintaining the South’s “domestic institutions” and property. One of his hobbies was writing Lincoln manifestos in which he opined on this very issue. It sometimes seemed more a concern of his than actually achieving victory.

Guelzo traces Lincoln’s thinking and actions on this matter in some detail. He spends, for instance, a lot of time investigating Lincoln’s efforts to convince the Border States to go along with a plan for compensated emancipation. Frankly, I had not read much about this, and it was really eye opening. One of the favorite criticisms of Lincoln-loathers is that he continually exceeded his Constitutional authority. Nevertheless, Lincoln personally felt himself constrained by the Constitution, and tried his best to operate within its parameters. Compensated emancipation was one of his work-arounds, a bottom-up scheme to end slavery at the state legislative level. As Guelzo admits, this did not satisfy members of his own party. But it shows Lincoln charting his own path to that same destination.

(In presenting his concept of remunerative emancipation to Congress on December 1, 1862, Lincoln famously wrote: **"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free - honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of Earth."**)

Obviously, the heart of *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation* is the titular document itself. Guelzo covers it from all the angles, from the legal basis (the War Power clause) upon which it was issued, to Lincoln’s stylistic choices (Guelzo compares the various drafts, and includes them as an appendix). One of the more interesting topics is the political blowback to the Proclamation’s issuance. As Guelzo shows, the Proclamation proved very unpopular, at least among the people with the loudest voices. It angered Democrats by going too far, and angered Republicans by not going far enough. It led to electoral losses and no small amount of dissent, including within the turbulent high command of the Army of the Potomac. This will likely hearten those who love to point out that the North could be as racist as the South (except for not owning black people as chattel); at the same time, it makes it a lot harder to claim that Lincoln’s decision lacked a profound moral component. (And yes, before you ask, Guelzo thoroughly covers Lincoln’s dalliance with colonization).

Allen Guelzo is one of my favorite Civil War historians. His book on the battle of Gettysburg (*Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*) is one of the best I’ve read, not just on Gettysburg, but on history in general. He has a remarkable ability to shift seamlessly between disciplines. His work here encompasses not only military and political history, but social history as well. To that end, he concludes with an overview of Lincoln’s evolving place in our memory, and specifically, of Lincoln’s standing in the black community. It is fascinating to see the dizzying heights and nauseating lows experienced by the reputation of the greatest President in United States history.

On April 14, 1876, eleven years to the day after Lincoln was fatally shot, Frederick Douglass gave a speech at the unveiling of the Freedman’s Memorial in Washington, D.C. The oration is captivating in its bluntness, its complexity, and its nuance. Lincoln “was preeminently the white man’s president,” Douglass said, “entirely devoted to the welfare of white men.” Compared to true abolitionists, Lincoln was “tardy, cold,

dull, and indifferent.” Yet, Douglass continued, if you measured Lincoln against “the sentiment of his country...he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.” He was also, Douglass acknowledged, the necessary man to nudge forward the wheel of history:

**“But now behold the change: the judgment of the present hour is, that taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln.”**

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### **Patrick T says**

Allen C. Guelzo proves yet again, that he is one of the best historian on Lincoln. Great information on The Emancipation Proclamation and his point of views. People always forget that this was not just for temporary freedom of the slaves but this was also for military necessity to win the civil war.

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### **Samantha says**

guelzo does a great job following and explaining lincoln's trains of thought and the endless political shimmeing (spelling? word?) to somehow sneak emancipation into law by virtue of the executive war powers. not exempted from the account is the fact that lincoln was a huge racist who really just wanted to kick the blacks out of the country altogether. and after compensated emancipation falls through with the loyal border slave states and the actual war is nothing but mceclan ordering more suupplies and the confederates winning, lincoln decides that god has ordained emancipation and signs it into law. not exactly the prettiest picture of it, but it's the ends that count, not the means, right?

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### **John Young says**

This is perhaps the best book I have ever read about the Civil War era. Sandburg's books on Lincoln were excellent, and Shelby Foote's books on the Civil War were great for their breadth and military content. However, this book by Allen Guelzo provides a detailed discussion of the end of slavery and arguments about its constitutionality, moral aspects, legal aspects, and how Lincoln responded to all of the criticisms from all of these viewpoints. It also provides more insights into Lincoln's personality than most books, and shows some very vivid reactions of enslaved people to the Emancipation Proclamation. Great book!

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### **Brian Anton says**

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America, a Lincoln Prize winner, was written by Allen C. Guelzo and published in 2004. In the book, he argues that President Abraham Lincoln, through the use of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, was effective in freeing the slaves. His argument differs from others that have examined the argument pertaining to the Emancipation Proclamation and whether it did, or did not, effectively emancipate slaves during the Civil War. On the opposite side of his argument are those who do not see Lincoln as the “Great Emancipator” and argue that the executive order did not actually

free the slaves in the broadest term but only those who lived in states that were declared in rebellion. Therefore, those slave states that were not formally in rebellion to the United States did not have to free their slaves because of the Proclamation leaving millions of them in involuntary servitude. Because of the differing viewpoint of others, Guelzo offers a significant contribution to the field of study pertaining to Lincoln, slavery, and the Civil War.

Guelzo's general argument that Lincoln foresaw his presidency as the beginning of the end of slavery is based on what he calls prudence. According to the author, Lincoln thought that slavery was wrong but needed to wait until the proper time to take the first strike against the institution. He also knew that when he decided to take action it would be a huge political gamble. For that reason, he favored voluntary gradual abolition with just compensation for the slaves as property. The book outlines the problems that he faced while pushing for that cause, mostly because of the lack of state support. Lincoln saw slavery as the next step in the progress of the United States. Surrounding Guelzo's overarching argument, he lays out four questions that he explains are asked in every conversation pertaining to the Emancipation Proclamation.

The first of the four questions, he explains comes from Richard Hofstadter who asked, why is the language of the Proclamation so bland and legalistic? Guelzo argues that Lincoln left it that way because it needed to be legalistic and had to stand up in front of the Supreme Court. It could not be wordy and eloquent simply because it was in fact a piece of legislation. The issue of constitutionality was at the front of Lincoln's decision whose presidency could not have handled his basic platform from being overturned by Judicial Review. For this reason, he had to gain support for the abolition of slavery before writing it into law, and had to turn the public's perceptions in his favor. The second question, is the most important pertaining to the argument at hand: did the Proclamation actually do anything? Guelzo argues that it did and points out the argument of those on the other side. Although Lincoln was not responsible for freeing all of the slaves, he was responsible for taking the first step in their emancipation. As proof for his argument, he points out that no slave freed by the Proclamation ever returned to slavery.

The third argument pertaining to the Proclamation pertains to whether or not the slaves freed themselves. According the law, if they could travel successfully to a state in the Union, they would become free. Therefore, the only way that they could attain freedom was by making the troublesome and dangerous journey to the North. Lincoln did not free anybody based on the document but only those who were able to travel to the North successfully. No slave was freed immediately based on the Proclamation but had to earn it. Guelzo argues that without Lincoln's Proclamation, those slaves who fled North would not have remained free but would have been sent back to their previous servitude rather quickly.

The final, less related argument that Guelzo addresses is the thought that Lincoln issued the Proclamation to keep European countries from intervening in the war or to inflate the morale of the Union who took huge losses in the months prior to its inception. The author argues against that the Proclamation could have easily forced the hand of European intervention, an assumption and weakness of the book. In regard to morale, he points out that many believed, along with Lincoln, that fighting against slavery was moralistically correct and would put the higher being on their side, creating a moralistic cause for the Union soldiers. Therefore, if morale were the primary justification for the order, he would have done it sooner.

Guelzo's book has received mixed reviews from both sides of the argument that has been discussed previously. He is applauded from some because of his examination of The Emancipation Proclamation in a more conclusive light than seen before and because he uses primary sources to prove his points. His viewpoint is currently unique because many question whether Lincoln actually pushed for the country to move quickly toward the abolition of slavery or not, most see him as regressive instead of progressive in though on the subject. Most of these arguments are based off the aforementioned Hofstadter's views of the

president, who questioned his significance to the abolition of slavery. Also, on a positive note, the reviewers appreciate Guelzo's format and approach to the topic and point out that he tells the story of the Proclamation in an understandable narrative that places it in the context of the Civil War and Lincoln's struggles in grappling with the issue of slavery. With those positives though, others are critical of his work because of his stance and approach in other ways. Guelzo is criticized repeatedly by reviewers for his explanation that Lincoln had abolition in mind from the onset and was prudent in his push for that cause. Some reviewers who point out that Lincoln did not run for the presidency on the platform of abolition and shoot holes through Guelzo's argument. They point out that Lincoln said the opposite in speeches previous to the Proclamation and claim that Guelzo, by lack of coincidence, ignored those statements.

Overall, Guelzo offers a good argument for his thesis that the Emancipation Proclamation was a bold step taken by a bold and prudent president who was filled with the ideas of the Enlightenment. There is something to be said of Guelzo's argument in the fact that Lincoln, was probably progressive in thought and saw slavery as an issue that was holding back the republican ideals that the United States was founded on. The book is well-written and is easy to follow. The author's use of the narrative style provides a vast amount of context that gives depth to the argument that Lincoln was taking a bold step toward the abolition of slavery, and knew exactly what he was doing. He had to know that he was moving the country forward when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation and effectively took the first step toward the end of slavery in the United States. His actions would later be justified with later congressional action and amendment to the Constitution that effectively ended slavery permanently. Even critics of Lincoln's move should understand that the Proclamation may not have been the all to end all in regard to abolition, Guelzo points out that it was still a bold initial step toward that goal in a period when it was not well accepted by half of the United States' population. If not for the Civil War, Lincoln probably would not have had the support that would have allowed it to be accepted but the fact that he took executive action in that critical time should be noted.

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### **Colleen Browne says**

This book deserves all of its accolades and more. It is clear, concise, and provocative. It explains the road Lincoln took to issuing the Proclamation, the difficulties he encountered along the way, the reasons for the style he chose to use, and its ultimate success. Those who choose to believe that the Emancipation Proclamation did not free anyone do not understand it or the law; those who choose to cast Lincoln as a lukewarm abolitionist who dragged his feet and failed to free all the enslaved people at once, do not understand the Constitution as he did and the constraints it put on him in this regard. Lincoln was very careful to stay within the bounds of Constitutional acceptance so as not to give the courts a reason to overturn it. He was also working within the constraints of being the elected head of a country of racists. It has been a while since I have given any book five stars but this book truly deserves it. I urge anyone with an interest in CW or the history of this country to read it.

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### **Jerome says**

A thorough and balanced book on the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's cautious approach to the issue of slavery. Guelzo thoroughly describes all of Lincoln's reservations and concerns on the issue: his uncertainty about the reaction of federal courts, the necessity of keeping the border states in the Union, and the divided opinion of the Northern public regarding the issues of emancipation and the place of blacks in

society. To circumvent these considerable obstacles, Lincoln proposed a system of compensated emancipation for the border states and explored the possibility of re-colonizing freed blacks to Central America or the western US.

As Guelzo reveals, Lincoln was reluctant to deal with slavery through anything resembling executive action, recognizing that this would meet strong opposition in the courts. Although emancipation initiatives such as the Confiscation acts, Benjamin Butler's "contraband theory, and the proclamations of Generals John Frémont and David Hunter originated without Lincoln's involvement and theoretically could have been used by Lincoln as more politically expedient methods, Lincoln ignored or reversed all of these developments--not because he was opposed to their aim, but because he was convinced that they would never hold up in federal court, especially with such pro-slavery jurists as Roger Taney at the helm. And although Lincoln's emancipation proclamation wasn't all that different from these initiatives, Lincoln at that point decided that he could no longer wait for state legislatures to catch up.

Guelzo thoroughly describes the resistance of the border states and how US military commanders dealt with the issue of slaves escaping to their lines--some allowed the refugees to remain protected within their lines while others excluded them from camp. Eventually, the War Department made it a criminal offense for Union soldiers to assist the rebels in recovering their slaves. Some Union soldiers did whatever they could to aid these refugees, while others took them on as servants or abused them verbally, physically, and sexually. Guelzo also describes the "confiscation acts" that authorized Union commanders to shelter slaves within their lines and forbade them assisting in their return to their masters.

Guelzo explores what effect the proclamation had on the union, the Confederacy, free blacks, slaves, the international community, and the conduct of the war. Critics have long repeated the myth that the Proclamation did not free a single slave because it applied only to areas the Union did not control and exempted areas occupied by Union forces. But those areas had to be excluded in order to sustain the argument that military necessity demanded emancipation: there couldn't be a "military necessity" in areas controlled by the Union; besides, the Proclamation actually did include some Union-controlled areas as well. Guelzo explores all of the legal issues involved, and argues that the Proclamation was ultimately, the single most important factor in slavery's destruction.

Although Guelzo's writing occasionally contains such oddities as "Fresh whispers of slave insurrections rose like the smell of decay in the mangrove swamps," this is, in all, a well-written and interesting study of this important and too often misunderstood event.

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## **Erika says**

This book was a very good read and its a good read for anyone interested in Lincoln and the politics in play during the civil war. Very eye opening for me.

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## **Robin Friedman says**

Abraham Lincoln issued the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Near the end of that year, the artist Francis Carpenter determined to paint "a historical picture of the first reading of the Proclamation of Emancipation". Carpenter spent six months in the White House beginning in February,

1864, created a historically important painting of the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation to the cabinet, got to know Lincoln, and wrote a book detailing his experiences. Carpenter wrote that Lincoln told him regarding the Emancipation Proclamation: "It is the central act of my administration, and the great event of the nineteenth century".

Professor Allen Guelzo tells the story of the Carpenter painting (p. 220-21), includes a photograph of the painting in the book, discusses Lincoln's statement to Carpenter (p. 186) and includes much more in his detailed study, "Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America" (2004). This book is a worthy successor to Professor Guelzo's recent study of Lincoln's religious and political beliefs in "Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President".

Professor Guelzo takes issue with a historical interpretation of the Emancipation Proclamation beginning with Richard Hofstadter (1948) that argues that Lincoln had little concern with the status of black Americans and issued the Emancipation Proclamation only from reasons of prudence to protect the interests of white workers. Guelzo also approaches the Emancipation Proclamation to address recent arguments by African-American scholars skeptical of Lincoln's role and pessimistic about the future of race relations in the United States.

Professor Guelzo agrees that Lincoln approached the question of Emancipation cautiously. He offers several reasons for this caution. One major reason was Lincoln's fear of the reaction of the Federal courts to an attempt by the Executive to emancipate the slaves. Lincoln had good grounds for this concern as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Roger Taney, was the author of the notorious Dred Scott decision. Lincoln also had to act with the concerns of the border states in mind as these states were critical to the Union war effort; and he had to contend with generals and a substantial portion of the population of the North that would oppose any attempt to turn the Civil War from a war to preserve the Union to a war to free the slaves. To circumvent these obstacles, Lincoln proposed a system of compensated emancipation and asked the border states to adopt such a plan with Federal financial assistance. He also wanted to explore voluntary colonization efforts under which the freed slaves would be colonized in central America or in a location in the Western United States.

Professor Guelzo describes how the border states resisted any notion of compensated emancipation. He also describes Federal legislative efforts, and efforts of some Union commanders, to protect former slaves making their way to the Union lines. These slaves were described by the term "contraband" and Congress enacted two limited statutes, called "Confiscation Acts" providing freedom for the "contrabands."

In 1862, Lincoln told Secretary of State Seward and, ultimately, the rest of the cabinet, that he had determined to free the slaves in the rebellious states. Although not a believer in any traditional sense, Lincoln stated that this course was forced upon him by God and Providence. He issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 22, 1862 and the final Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

Professor Guelzo describes the origins of the Proclamation, and the effect of its issuance on the Union, the Confederacy, the free blacks, and the slaves. He also describes the impact of the Proclamation on the foreign affairs of the United States and on the conduct of the War -- as is well known, following the Proclamation the Civil War changed in character to total warfare. He describes the precarious legal basis for the Emancipation Proclamation and points to Lincoln's courage and determination in the face of doubt. Although some scholars have argued that the Proclamation had, in fact, no legal effect and freed no slaves, Professor Guelzo argues persuasively that it was and remains the pivotal event of the Civil War and the single most important factor in the destruction of slavery.

Following Lincoln's assassination, the Freedmen from the Southern states contributed funds for the

construction of a statue of Lincoln emancipating a slave. The statue stands in Lincoln Park in Washington, D.C. It was dedicated in 1872, with remarks by Frederick Douglass. (I was moved to visit Lincoln Park to see the statue after hearing Professor Guelzo speak last year at a conference in Washington.) Douglass described Lincoln as "a white man who shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the colored race." (p. 249) Yet he recognized that, in issuing the Proclamation Lincoln was "swift, zealous, radical, and determined." (p. 250) In Professor Guelzo's words, the Emancipation Proclamation was "an act of spectacular political daring" (p.249)

This is a thorough, well-balanced, yet inspiring study, of what indeed has fair title to be the Great Event of the Nineteenth Century. The book will help the reader understand where our country has been in securing racial justice and in bringing to pass and expanding upon the American dream.

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### **R.K. Byers says**

the writer's personal insights & asides make it far better than the dry read you might expect.

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### **Louis says**

An outstanding book, it takes the reader through the struggles that Lincoln dealt with in trying to end what he saw as a disgraceful practice, while trying to keep the Union together and fighting against subversion within his own ranks (his own head of the Army, General McClellan, actively worked to overthrow him and attempted to set up a military autocracy). It gives some facts that rarely come up in history lessons taught in schools, such as the fact that Lincoln was not an unbending ideologue, but attempted to phase slavery out over ten years by "buying" the slaves freedom from the owners, with the highest payout per slave coming in the first year and being reduced until the tenth year, in which the slaves would be freed with no compensation. An excellent read.

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### **Tonja says**

Is the academic world in need of yet another book on Abraham Lincoln? Well-known Lincoln scholar Allen C. Guelzo believes the answer to that question is a resounding, "Yes," but with a new approach to Lincoln's most famous document. Guelzo, author of five books on the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln and recipient of the Lincoln Prize for three of his books, including Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America, takes on Lincoln's war powers action to issue the Emancipation Proclamation by writing a biography of the man while primarily writing a biography of the Proclamation. Guelzo's position that it was Lincoln's prudence that guided the process for the eventual issuance and, most importantly acceptance, of the Proclamation, is a new interpretation of the president's political philosophy in attempting to rid the United States of slavery. Guelzo makes a convincing argument for his revisionist interpretation, one that is more congruous with Lincoln the man than previously historians have offered. However, along the way, he diminishes the importance of his revised view of the man and his Proclamation by invoking Providence as a key player in the enactment.

With prudence as the political philosophy of Lincoln's Enlightenment world view, Guelzo first explains the 19th century understanding of the term to set the stage for his argument. He comments, "The most important

among the Enlightenment's political virtues for Lincoln...was prudence." He likens prudence to shrewdness and coup d'oeil, the ability to "take in the whole of a situation at once and know almost automatically how to proceed (Loc 255). Guelzo describes in great detail Lincoln's prudence along the journey of his most famous presidential Proclamation in a manner similar to modern Change Management through extensive use of contemporary diaries, letters, newspaper articles, and congressional and military records.

Guelzo provides insightful accounts of Lincoln's revocations of martial law proclamations for emancipation by Fremont and Hunter, for his rebuff of the two legislative Confiscation Acts, and for his lack of endorsement for Butler's legal semantics of "contraband" theory. He deftly argues Lincoln's surficial appearance of support for slavery in not endorsing military and legislative attempts to end slavery was the result of his prudence rather than his validation of the South's "peculiar institution." Lincoln understood providing freedom to America's enslaved peoples needed to withstand legal challenges, anything less would do more harm than good, not only for slaves, but also for permanence in military and civilian positions on the end of slavery. Guelzo allows Lincoln to speak for himself on this important issue, and in doing so, provides the reader with an insider's view to the political world of the 1860s while granting access to Lincoln and his immense struggles during this period of his presidency.

Guelzo's treatment of Lincoln's political maneuvering for a legislative solution of gradual emancipation through governmental buy-outs reads like a modern political operation. Although timid at first, Guelzo shows Lincoln becoming more comfortable in his position as president and freely exercising his muscle through the war powers of the Commander-in-Chief. His direct quotations of Lincoln's addresses to Congress on the subject highlight the president's expertise and command of language and astuteness in political persuasiveness. Guelzo comments that the worst thing for an opponent to do with Lincoln was to underestimate him because of his simple outward appearance and manner. Many opponents, Congress and military generals included with opposing counsels, felt the sting of Lincoln's political prowess. Despite his political genius, however, Lincoln was not able to forward any of his gradual emancipation strategies with border states, Congress, and the general population. In presenting Lincoln as a man trying diligently to do the right thing, yet not succeeding in his attempts at democratically initiated solutions to the slavery issue, Guelzo allows the reader to experience Lincoln's discouragements and frustrations along with him. In doing so, Lincoln becomes more identifiable as a man and the reader appreciates his perseverance in achieving his goal.

Guelzo emphasizes that issuing the Emancipation Proclamation as part of Lincoln's war powers, while seemingly a contradiction to his revocations of two previous martial law emancipations, was merely a gamble Lincoln felt comfortable taking. He explains that risk and prudence are not mutually exclusive, but rather, a studied gamble is an acceptable part of prudence. Unfortunately Guelzo places Lincoln's willingness to accept risk in the realm of Providence and the intervention of God. He comments that Lincoln had a "vague religious profile" (Loc 302) and as the "last Enlightenment politician" (Loc 243) approached his role as president with a distance from organized religion, a lack of the politics of passion, and a calculated reason. He subsequently veers from that assessment of Lincoln, and places Lincoln's reason and timing for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation on a promise he made to God.

Lincoln's reason for a deal with God was Robert E. Lee and his 39,000 infantry troops' presence 25 miles northwest of Washington D.C. in September 1862. Guelzo comments that Lincoln decided to test God "like Gideon of old" (Loc 3105) and that if McClellan repelled Lee's attack, Lincoln "would send the Proclamation after him" because he "made a solemn vow before God...[he] would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves" (Loc 3119). With the Union victory at Antietam, Guelzo continues Lincoln's journey of authoring and implementing his Emancipation Proclamation under his "solemn vow." With that shift, Guelzo shadows the remainder of his presentation and analysis with God always in the room as he writes. He makes reference to the Emancipation Proclamation as "scripture" and Lincoln as a "saint" (Loc 5056) being unnecessary for the document to regain an elevated status among historians, but he obviously does not believe what he writes. "Scripture" and "saint" are exactly the words Guelzo believes historians should use when analyzing Lincoln and his most famous Proclamation. It is a disappointing turn to

an otherwise well-crafted book as his thesis shifts from Prudence to Providence for Lincoln's ultimate execution of his most politically skillful application of war powers.

A second short coming of Guelzo's otherwise detailed and insightful work is the lack of narrative and analysis of the Emancipation Proclamation after its issuance. Perhaps Guelzo believes the story is the prudent and providential work leading up to and including its release, not the post-script of its proclamation. He does address the lack of desertion by Union troops as predicted, the legal strength it maintained through its predicted challenges, and Andrew Johnson's insufficiency in supporting a permanence of the extinction of slavery after war powers no longer prevailed. However, considering the legacy of the document in America's history and the resulting precedence for the use of war powers to change what legislation could not or would not change, he does not make sufficient effort for the reader to fully appreciate the impact this execution of war powers had on the country and on subsequent wartime presidents.

Guelzo's work illustrates the painfully, seemingly slow steps Lincoln took to bring an end to slavery in the United States. Yet when presented with the opportunity, through Prudence or through Providence Guelzo does not adequately resolve, Lincoln made good on his deep commitment, whether to himself or to God, to end slavery quickly with a single war power Proclamation. Guelzo's interpretation of the creation of the Emancipation Proclamation is a solid although inconsistent revised history of the document and worth the read to truly understand Lincoln's political genius in making it a reality.

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