

Look At Lincoln: Original Intent: A Candid Look At The Other Thirteenth Amendment

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Feature Essay

Fall 2016

Williams, Frank J. *Look at Lincoln: Original Intent: A Candid Look at the Other Thirteenth Amendment.*

Lincoln & The Politics of Slavery: The Other Thirteenth Amendment and the Struggle to Save the Union By Daniel W. Crofts **Publisher:** University of North Carolina Press **Retail Price:** \$35.00 **ISBN: 9781469627311**

On March 2, 1861, the thirty-sixth Congress of the United States adopted this joint resolution to be sent to the states for ratification: Article XIII. No amendment shall be made to the Constitution which will authorize or give to Congress the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State.

Although this proposed Thirteenth Amendment was never ratified, four years later another Thirteenth Amendment in contradiction to the original proposed Thirteenth Amendment was adopted by the House and Senate that would end slavery forever.

As this new book points out, the “original” Thirteenth Amendment intended to give comfort to slave states so they could remain in the Union. After all, the election of Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln four months earlier had caused tumult in the South. Seven slave states from South Carolina to Texas had already seceded and had begun to form a separate government.

President-Elect Lincoln endorsed the original proposed Thirteenth Amendment. It was never ratified by more than a handful of states because the Civil War, which it was designed to prevent, began in a month and a half.

Crofts points out that the prospective amendment of 1861 reminds us that there were no Americans on the eve of the Civil War who expected emancipation. Even Lincoln thought “the peculiar institution” would last until 1900. Republicans believed they had no authority to emancipate and had no

inclination for doing it.

While Lincoln always hated slavery, he also believed that it was legal and constitutionally protected. He never imagined that he would have to preside over a war to end it.

Crofts discusses the background story, especially the backroom politics, behind the attempt to pass this amendment. It is fascinating to read a candid portrayal of America's most cherished president. Crofts is clear in his refusal to accept some historians' view that the evolution of the war's aims from reunion to reunion and emancipation began before Fort Sumter. While Lincoln did become the "great emancipator" it did not begin before he took the oath as the 16th president. Only from the friction and abrasion of the Civil War did Lincoln evolve and change the war's aims from reunion to reunion and final freedom.

Daniel Crofts deserves praise for his detailed research on how Lincoln and other political leaders made every effort to keep the slave states of the Upper South in the Union. No other book describes the efforts made to pass the "original" Thirteenth Amendment. It is fascinating to see the author's discussion of the view that once the Constitution was adopted in 1787, that an amendment such as this could never be changed. The author also investigates the "tension between history as it actually unfolded and history as it is remembered." Americans "...tend to read back into history what we'd like to find there...."

Crofts performs a service in, yet again, warning against judging the past based on current "values."

Frank J. Williams is the Chair of the Lincoln Forum and author of Lincoln as Hero, and is a contributing columnist for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.