

Look At Lincoln:

Frank J. Williams

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Feature Essay

Winter 2017

Williams, Frank J. *Look at Lincoln*:

Lincoln's Ethics By Thomas L. Carson **Publisher:** Cambridge University Press **Retail Price:** \$33.99 **ISBN:781107030145**

Most people describe Abraham Lincoln as a genuinely good man. The author treats Abraham Lincoln through the lens of the private man and the public Lincoln. Lincoln emerges ethically unscarred. Like William Lee Miller's *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography*, Lincoln's statesmanship was based on what Miller called "moral realism." And Carson's book, too, comes to the same conclusion. A philosopher, Carson, an expert on moral relativism, concludes that Lincoln was a good and morally virtuous person even with honest errors of judgment.

The author uses hundreds of Lincoln's own sentiments to prove his case and the author is not afraid to address objections and charges against Lincoln. There is a long list of Lincoln's "moral sins," his slow evolution for abolition, his vehement support of the fugitive slave law for political reasons (he did not want to hurt the fledgling Republican Party), and colonization of freed blacks to Africa.

Yet, the author judges Lincoln's admirable qualities – kindness, humor, generosity, and most notably, mercy – against his personal failings as husband, father, and son.

Not to be missed is Carson's examination of Lincoln's views on slavery and race. For the attacks against Lincoln on these issues, the author gives a spirited and highly credible defense.

Those who are interested in Lincoln will be going back to this book time and time again.

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.