

Though instructors of African-American history and the American church at all levels of higher education will find the work useful, it is an excellent resource also for use in secondary-level classrooms for units on African-American history and literature or for assigned reading during Black History Month.

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Glenn M. Linden, ed. *Voices from the Gathering Storm: The Coming of the American Civil War*. Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 2001. Pp. xxxii, 236. Cloth, \$60.00; ISBN 0-8420-2998-2. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-8420-2999-0.

Voices from the Gathering Storm brings to life in variegated vignettes the swirling ideological and material contradictions suffusing the United States in the roughly fifteen years preceding the Civil War. Primary sources—letters, diaries, editorials, and more—document the thoughts and sentiments of a mostly familiar cast of characters, including Lincoln, Sumner, Douglas, Truth, Davis, and many others.

The book is organized into three general sections, with equal selections for both the North and South: 1) The “Growing Rivalry” between the sections, from 1846 to 1854, largely covers the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso, the 1848 election, the Compromise of 1850, the Fugitive Slave controversy, and the Election of 1852; 2) The growing sectionalism of the decade in the crucial years of “Southern Successes and Northern Anxieties,” between 1854 and 1857 gives attention to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the emergence of the Republican Party, as well as the election of 1856; 3) “The Union Comes Apart” deals with the period from 1857 through 1861, and focuses on the Dred Scott decision, John Brown’s raid, and secession.

The selections themselves, for the most part, are brief and accessible to undergraduate students. Also brief, but generally inclusive, are historical sketches of the figures covered. Quite useful from both the teacher’s and student’s perspective is the division of primary source material into separate “Northerner” and “Southerner” sections. This makes the work especially useful for instructors who wish their students to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the essential reasoning put forth by both North and South in the pre-war years. But the regional sections are not always thematically monolithic. Students will also doubtless notice the inclusion of selections from a varied lot from each section, such as small townsmen and casual observers, as well as prominent politicians and national spokesmen for each side.

Some of the documents seem especially striking. Several of Lincoln’s free soil speeches, as well as his aborted 1849 attempt to introduce a bill providing for compensated emancipation, are included. Horace Mann’s maiden speech on the House floor linked the poverty of education for whites to the existence of African-American slavery. Of course there are several sections from southerners supporting slavery. One of the most provocative is William Gilmore Simms’s 1854 article in *Putnam’s*

Magazine. Simms asserted that even if slavery was morally wrong (certainly not one of the typical pro-slavery positions that linked slavery with a strong moral and religious certitude), the issue of regionalism superseded it. States' rights trumped issues of morality. "If slavery be the sin and evil they conceive it to be, it is all ours," Simms wrote.

Serious students will not gain many new revelations. But Linden's general organization of materials and the precise attention given to details in the documents, embellish and deepen the reader's understanding of the "Gathering Storm." The historical vignettes preceding each document also help to provide what Stephen B. Oates has called the "warmth of a life lived" during those critical years.

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Clarence E. Walker. *We Can't Go Home Again: An Argument about Afrocentrism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. 172. Cloth, \$25.00; ISBN 0-19-509571-5.

The factual flaws in much of the writing about Afrocentrism have been exposed in the past. Clarence Walker does so again in *We Can't Go Home Again*, and does so effectively. In this regard he focuses particularly on the Afrocentric assertion that Egyptians were black and the wellspring of Western civilization. He makes very clear that the modern concept of race as identity simply does not apply to the variegated population of Egypt and would not have been understood there. The importance of his book, however, does not lie in renewing and expanding the critique of the factual and analytical content of Afrocentric literature.

Walker refers to Afrocentrism as "therapeutic mythology" asserted as a way to promote the self-esteem of African Americans (a term he does not like) "by creating a past that never was." He understands it as black nationalism; in fact he argues that the origins of Afrocentrism lay in black nationalism of the Romantic era, but rejects it as history. Were Afrocentrism a means of creating African American community and thus empowering a minority, it would be comparable to such mythologies used by other minorities. Such mythologies, however, have been grounded in historical thought, while Afrocentrism is factually errant and theoretically flawed.

By urging black Americans to seek empowerment in a misconstrued Egyptian history, Afrocentrists not only mislead, opening their students to ridicule, but they also assert that culture is "transhistoric"—that is, it can be transferred through time and space intact. Culture, Walker asserts, is always changing and will be different as a result of any transfer, willing or unwilling, on the part of those living it. African Americans have created a culture of their own—a culture of which to be proud, but not an Egyptian or African culture. To Walker's way of thinking, Afrocentrism turns African Americans into helpless victims whose ancestors created a glorious culture and then for thousands