

## Teaching History

On the other hand, Fritzsche notes that the longer that the Nazis were in power in Germany, the more the German people were forced to rationalize their behaviors. The bullying of Jews and vandalizing of their homes and businesses in 1931 could be dismissed by some diarists as simply the work of bad kids. When the government started to create stricter and clearly racist anti-Jewish laws, Germans wrote that the Nazis were simply addressing some of the wrongs of the Treaty of Versailles, restoring German pride, and ending German suffering.

Fritzsche makes a powerful assertion early in the book that sets the framework for the remainder of the work. He states that "National Socialism exerted strong pressure on citizens to convert, to see the credibility of the people's community, and to recognize one another as 'racial comrades.'" This caused the German people to grapple "with questions about the importance of fitting in, the convenience of going along, and the responsibilities the individual owed to the collective."

I found this work to be a very engaging and important study of a very controversial topic. It has added to the discourse on the subject and will certainly find a home in many classrooms. As a professor of German history, specializing in the Nazi period and World War II, I highly recommend this book for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in this period. Alone it will provide a useful reading assignment and will certainly spark some heated and interesting debates. I will use it in conjunction with the other books mentioned in this review. It should not, however, be used as an introduction to the Third Reich or Nazi social history.

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**Ronald C. White, Jr. *A. Lincoln: A Biography*. New York: Random House, 2009. Pp. 796. Hardback, \$35.00; ISBN 978-1-4000-6499-1.**

Writing in 1936, historian James G. Randall questioned whether there could be anything new about Abraham Lincoln. Over seventy years later and as the bicentennial of his birth wanes, it is abundantly clear that the answer is a resounding, yes! While dozens of books have appeared in recent years touting some novel or revisited perspective of Lincoln's life, only Ronald C. White, Jr. attempted to write a full-length, single-volume biography. His task was a daunting one to be sure. Previous works, from Benjamin Thomas's *Abraham Lincoln* (1952) to Stephen Oates's *With Malice Toward None* (1977) to David Donald's *Lincoln* (1995), met with varying degrees of acclaim, the latter winning the Pulitzer Prize for biography. White's *A. Lincoln* (the title taken from the manner in which Lincoln signed his correspondence) will be no exception and, in some respects, will be hailed as the best.

White's rhetorical expertise is clearly evident as he weaves a life tapestry through the words of Lincoln, from well-known letters and speeches to random thoughts scribbled on scraps of paper to the recently released *Lincoln Legal Papers*.

## Book Reviews

While there is not much new in some aspects of Lincoln's life, such as his bouts of melancholy, White provides a great many intimate details in a wonderful, flowing narrative. In this regard, this biography surpasses Donald's largely academic work. But make no mistake, *A. Lincoln* is not just for the casual reader. It should be on the shelves of every high school and college library in America.

One of the book's themes is Lincoln's personal and intellectual development, from the limited opportunities in the frontier wilderness of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois to his iconic status as America's greatest president. Struggles are seen as the key to Lincoln's maturation—whether they were private, including family, women, and religion, or public, the Civil War. For example, Lincoln became estranged from his father yet doted over his own children. He never joined a church nor left a written statement of conversion yet believed in the divine will of God and mentioned God fourteen times and cited four biblical passages in his second inaugural address. With only a few weeks of military experience and seeing no actual combat during the Black Hawk War, Lincoln became the nation's first modern commander-in-chief during the Civil War, transforming and enlarging the powers of the executive branch. And at a time when the tide had turned and Union victory seemed assured, Lincoln displayed reserve and humility, avoiding the pronoun "I" in the 272 words of the Gettysburg Address. Thus, White presents Lincoln as something of a paradox: humble yet confident, curious yet pragmatic, compassionate yet resolute, common yet extraordinary. In short, he was a simple yet complex man whose moral integrity became his life's foundation.

White states that Lincoln is "one of the few Americans whose life and words bridge time." Past generations have attempted to define him, claim him. Ronald White has provided the twenty-first century with the opportunity to do the same. *A. Lincoln* can be summed up best by recasting Edwin Stanton's April 15, 1865, final declaration of the slain president this way—It belongs to the ages.

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**James W. Loewen. *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks & Get Students Excited About Doing History*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2009. Pp. 264. Paper, \$21.95; ISBN 978-0-8077-4991-3.**

Since 1995, James W. Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me* has enjoyed phenomenal success in both sales and influence. Nobody who has read it can look unskeptically at a history textbook again. Loewen's *Lies Across America* (1999) proved a worthy successor, inviting readers to look critically at the historical plaques and monuments that litter the American landscape. More recently, Loewen turned his attention to the forgotten heritage of structural racism in small-town America, in his 2005 book *Sundown Towns*. Now, in *Teaching What Really Happened*, Loewen