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 ***Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: Echoes of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer (review)***

Patricia Ann Owens

Civil War History

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Elmore, a professor of English and law at Athens State University in Alabama, offers a close study of the Gettysburg Address by examining its words and ideas and how President Lincoln was influenced by the King James Bible and the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer. In ten chapters he meticulously scrutinizes significant key words and phrases such as “conceived,” “brought forth,” and “consecrate ” and reveals their places within the sacred texts, often telling the reader how many times the word appears in the Bible. Elmore reminds readers that Lincoln’s audience was exceedingly familiar with the King James Bible and that many of its members, like Lincoln, had grown up memorizing sizeable portions of it. Lincoln did not have to tell them the source for his allusions and words; they knew. Modern readers, products of today’s standardized-test-driven schools and quick internet searches, have no such predilections.

Lincoln was careful in the preparation of his speeches and of his written works. He extracted words, thoughts, and ideas from his vast memory and utilized writings that were known to many people on which to build and craft his own product. Thomas Jefferson borrowed from John Locke to write the Declaration of Independence, including the words so precious to Lincoln, “all men are created equal.” Lincoln did the same with his references to the Bible and to portions of the Book of Common Prayer.

A fascinating segment of this book is Elmore’s discussion and explanation of Lincoln’s familiarity with the Book of Common Prayer. Citing Mary Lincoln’s attendance at an Episcopal church, Elmore also reveals that the numerous people around Lincoln, including William Seward, were members of that church. Another astounding fact is that a large number of Confederate government officials and army officers were Episcopalian. They too would have understood Lincoln’s words and allusions in the Gettysburg Address.

Not only does Elmore dissect the words of the address, he analyzes Lincoln's style, examining five areas: clarity, rhythm and musicality of the words, the joining of words in unexpected ways, allusion, and Lincoln's metaphorical style. Elmore provides numerous examples from the address and cites other authors who have written books related to these topics but points out how his research and conclusions exceed all previous studies of the address by placing Lincoln in the context of the times and within the minds of the people. **[End Page 414]**

This is a thought-provoking book, filled with scores of details, written and organized with a lawyer's skill for building a solid case. All who admire Lincoln and who seek to know him better will want to read this book.

Patricia Ann Owens
Wabash Valley College

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: Echoes of the Bible and Book of Common Prayer. A. E. Elmore. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8093-2951-9, 266 pp., cloth, \$32.95.

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