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BOOK NEWS

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150 Years of *Loathing Lincoln*

LSU Press to publish the first panoramic study of Lincoln's critics in April 2014

Baton Rouge—While most Americans count Abraham Lincoln among the most beloved and admired former presidents, a dedicated minority has long viewed him as not only the worst president in the country's history, but also as a criminal who defied the Constitution and advanced federal power and the idea of racial equality. From historian **John McKee Barr** comes the first panoramic study of Lincoln's critics. *Loathing Lincoln* is an eminently readable history that ranges from Lincoln's entry on the national stage all the way to the present day.

Barr's work offers both an analysis of Lincoln in historical memory and an examination of how his critics—on both the right and left—have frequently reflected the anxiety and discontent Americans felt about their lives. From northern abolitionists upset about the slow pace of emancipation, to Confederates who condemned him as a “black Republican” and despot, to Americans who blamed him for the civil rights movement, to, more recently, libertarians who accuse him of trampling the Constitution and creating the modern welfare state, Lincoln's detractors have always been a vocal minority, but not one without influence.

By meticulously exploring the most significant arguments against Lincoln, Barr traces the rise of the president's most strident critics and links most of them to a distinct right-wing or neo-Confederate political agenda. According to Barr, their hostility to a more egalitarian America and opposition to any use of federal power to bring about such goals led them to portray Lincoln as an imperialistic president who grossly overstepped the bounds of his office. In contrast, liberals criticized him for not doing enough to bring about emancipation or ensure lasting racial equality. Lincoln's conservative and libertarian foes, however, constituted the vast majority of his detractors. In examining the full range of these individuals and groups, Barr's study provides a deeper understanding of American political life and the nation itself.

John McKee Barr is professor of history at Lone Star College–Kingwood.

April 2014 / 480 pages, 6 x 9
978-0-8071-5383-3/ Cloth \$35.95, ebook available
Civil War Studies / Political Science
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