



Lincoln and Darwin: Shared Visions of Race, Science, and Religion

James Lander

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Born on the same day in 1809, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin were true contemporaries. Though shaped by vastly different environments, they had remarkably similar values, purposes, and approaches. In this exciting new study, James Lander places these two iconic men side by side and reveals the parallel views they shared of man and God.

While Lincoln is renowned for his oratorical prowess and for the Emancipation Proclamation, as well as many other accomplishments, his scientific and technological interests are not widely recognized; for example, many Americans do not know that Lincoln is the only U.S. president to obtain a patent. Darwin, on the other hand, is celebrated for his scientific achievements but not for his passionate commitment to the abolition of slavery, which in part drove his research in evolution. Both men took great pains to avoid causing unnecessary offense despite having abandoned traditional Christianity. Each had one main adversary who endorsed scientific racism: Lincoln had Stephen A. Douglas, and Darwin had Louis Agassiz.

With graceful and sophisticated writing, Lander expands on these commonalities and uncovers more shared connections to people, politics, and events. He traces how these two intellectual giants came to hold remarkably similar perspectives on the evils of racism, the value of science, and the uncertainties of conventional religion.

Separated by an ocean but joined in their ideas, Lincoln and Darwin acted as trailblazers, leading their societies toward greater freedom of thought and a greater acceptance of human equality. This fascinating biographical examination brings the mid-nineteenth-century discourse about race, science, and humanitarian sensibility to the forefront using the mutual interests and pursuits of these two historic figures.

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