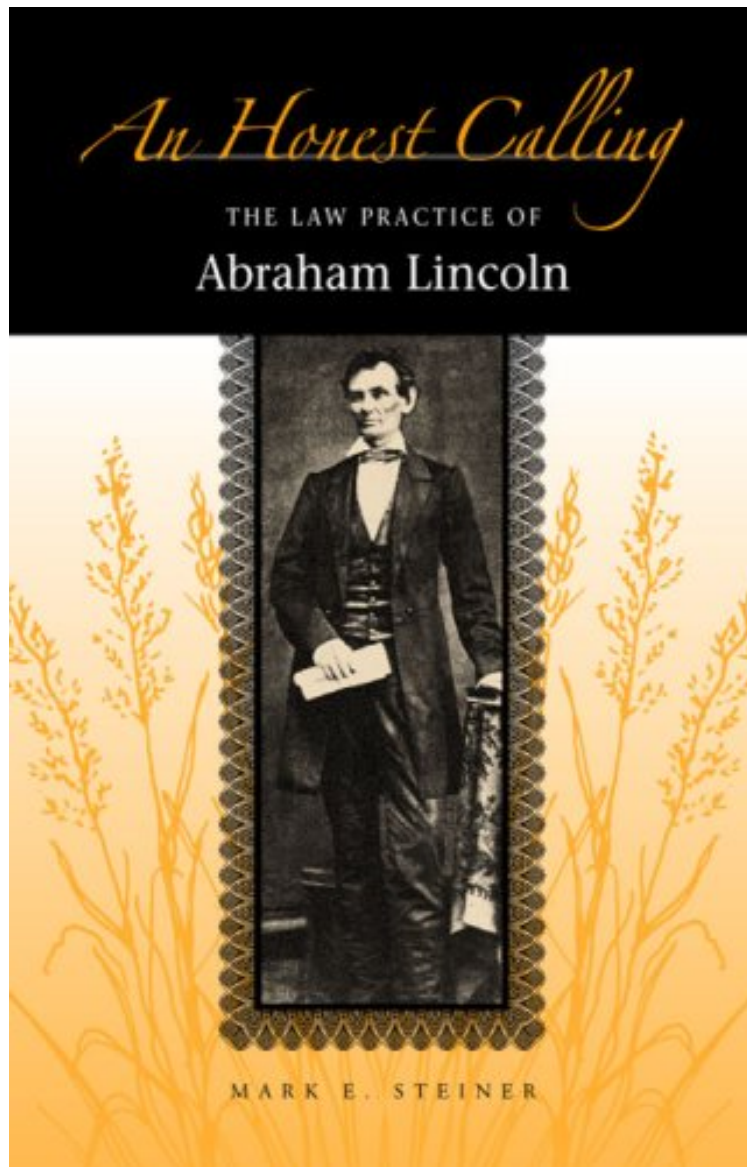


(Mobile ebook) An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln

An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln

Mark E. Steiner

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Mark E. Steiner : An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Law on the Antebellum Prairie - RecommendedBy Jim Schmidt4.49 stars - I've read at least 3 books about the lawyer-life of Lincoln in the past 6 months and they have all been different -

I would compare this one with Brian Dirck's "Lincoln the Lawyer." I gave Dirck's book 5 stars for its great readability, scholarship, broad scope, and contribution to Lincoln biography...I wanted to give this book 5 stars as well for its very deep dive into legal analysis, but as described below, just a few criticisms prevent that. First the good - an exceptional first chapter in which the author systematically runs through the merits and faults of the existing literature on Lincoln's legal career; two chapters on Lincoln's legal training and life in the courtroom are also very good. His characterization of Lincoln's Whig philosophy as it pertains to the law was persuasive and interesting. The coverage of the Jane Bryant/Matson slave case was especially comprehensive and interesting and while it strayed a bit from Lincoln by focusing on professional ethics and the moral quandary over representing a client's interests, even if you disagree with them, was terrific. A few criticisms - the author gives multiple examples when only two or three would do: the slander cases, while colorful, went on and on; the debt cases - fully half of Lincoln's practice - merited a couple of pages. While he argues that previous biographies emphasized a handful of Lincoln's most famous cases (Duff Armstrong, Effie Afton, Manny Reaper) - here, the author swings the pendulum a little to far the other way - where I'd love to see his perspective, he offers none. There's some repetition as well, concepts and situations mentioned in an early chapter are reproduced in a later chapters - indeed, some of the chapters are based on articles that the author wrote for legal journals - they may have been adapted for this book without a closer eye to cohesion or editing, and it affected the book's readability. In short, this is a serious book, with good arguments, and exceptional research - perhaps a bit dry when compared to other books on Lincoln's legal career, but still very much recommended. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Meticulous Mining for Gold Nuggets By Miz Ellen Were I completely objective about this book, I'd probably grant it only 3 stars. It is a rather dry read, but because I bought it in a bookstore just around the corner from Lincoln's law office in Springfield, IL it represents a souvenir of a great day learning about the life of our 16th President and I love it. Its greatest virtue is also its greatest vice. The author has made a phenomenal survey of the digital repository of Lincoln legal documents published in 2000 by the University of Illinois. His notes, bibliography and case index comprise about a third of the book's bulk. I've no doubt that these alone make this book a useful tool to the Lincoln scholar. The seven chapters of text that precede the index are probably 100 percent interesting to people in the legal profession. The first three chapters are a bit plodding. They talk about 1) Lincoln's popularity vs the current standing of the legal profession, 2) the typical education of a lawyer in Lincoln's time with observations on how Lincoln was different and 3) political and economic considerations in the practice of law prior to the Civil War. The author tends to get bogged down in his minutiae, citations and quotes to the point where he fails to interpret his data. This book is limited to descriptive history. The author does not have a case to make or a question to pose. This lack of historical argument can make for dry reading, however a patient reader can find nuggets of gold that the author has dug up. I particularly refer to the fourth chapter: Law on the Prairie. Here is a fascinating compilation of the cases that lawyer Lincoln was involved with and they paint a remarkable picture of the society that he was a part of: cases for assault, slander and libel, property disputes, trespass, seduction, theft...it's mind boggling and somehow brings us closer to Lincoln and his time, particularly in the dollar amounts of the damages. Here the author's attention to detail works in favor of the material. This is information drawn directly from primary sources and assembled in a fresh way. Likewise, the fifth chapter treats in detail what seems to be an anomaly: in 1847 Lincoln was a secondary lawyer acting on behalf of a Kentucky slaveholder who was seeking to retain a black woman and her three children as his slaves even though he had transported them to the free state Illinois and left them there for two years. Here, because the author is so focused on gathering his evidence, I feel his treatment of this issue and conclusion is objective and exhaustive. Chapter six is again a meticulous review of Lincoln's case work both for and against the railroads. This is an important chapter, since Lincoln made most of his money from railroad work and was able to add a second story to his house from this aspect of his practice. I'd recommend this book to serious Lincoln buffs and also to historians interested in law in the pre-Civil War period. The author's meticulous attention to detail has created a gold mine of perspectives that will enrich further studies of Lincoln and his time. 15 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Lincoln's "day job" By Richard Lawrence Miller, Lincoln author In An Honest Calling attorney Mark E. Steiner makes good use of his professional training and years spent in helping to compile Lincoln's legal papers. Study of Lincoln's law career has long been hampered by the scattered nature of Lincoln's court documents throughout Illinois and the Midwest. Now they are gathered together, and Steiner has made a fine presentation of what they reveal about Lincoln's "day job," which may have consumed as much of his time as politics did. Steiner deals with Lincoln's law practice in general and with some individual cases revealing Lincoln's handling of particular issues (including slavery and railroad corporations). Civil and criminal practices are covered. This is an excellent introduction to Lincoln's law practice, and will also interest persons seeking information about the influence of attorneys on the Western frontier.

Steiner describes Lincoln's legal education, the economics of the law office, and the changes in the practice of law that Lincoln himself experienced as the nation became an industrial, capitalist society. Abraham Lincoln embraced a professional ideal which cast the lawyer as a guardian of order and, adopting a service mentality, represented clients to the best of his ability regardless of his own beliefs about the justice or morality of their claims.

"Insightful, convincingly argued, solidly researched ... illuminates the story of Lincoln at the bar." -- Michael Burlingame, Sadowski Professor of History Emeritus, Connecticut College
"Like turning on lights in ... a dim and unsorted storehouse.... no better word to describe this book than simply Aha!" -- Allen C. Guelzo, Director of Civil War Era Studies, Gettysburg College
"Well-written a major step forward in our understanding of Lincoln's law practice." -- Peter Karsten, University of Pittsburgh
About the Author
Mark E. Steiner is Associate Professor of Law at South Texas College of Law. He received both his J.D. and his Ph.D. in History from the University of Houston.