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American Speeches: Political Oratory from the Revolution to the Civil War and Political Oratory from Abraham Lincoln to Bill Clinton

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CHOICE

Ted Widmer (director, John Carter Brown Library; speechwriter, Clinton administration) has selected significant familiar examples of political oratory for this two-volume set. The first volume covers the Revolution to the Civil War, and includes selections from the expected Founding Fathers as well as leaders in the antislavery, women's rights, and labor movements. Volume 2 begins with Lincoln on Reconstruction and offers a broad selection of speakers urging social change on many fronts, including J. Robert Oppenheimer, Mario Savio, and Jesse Jackson among the presidents, senators, and generals. The reading experience is uninterrupted by notes on the page, although line-by-line annotations are available at the end of each volume to gloss the names, events, literary allusions, and historical context that stirred each speech's initial auditors. Brief biographical notes and bibliographic citations round out the critical apparatus. Providing evidence of both "a measure of just how far political discourse has fallen in this country," as Marc Weingarten observed in the *Los Angeles Times*, and what William F. Buckley identified as "powerful ignition points for hot flashes of indignation, contempt, rage, veneration and yearning" in *The New York Times Book Review*, these speeches are indispensable reference points from America's oratorical heritage. **Summing Up:** Essential. Lower-level undergraduates, professionals, and general readers.

-- P. Finley, *University of Nevada, Las Vegas*