

realm of intellectual and psychosocial history, where he seems uncomfortable. Bartlett's biography is clearly the best one-volume life of Webster. It is stimulating, well-written, and carefully researched. That it raises more questions than it answers is in part a measure of the book's success.

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Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream. By G. S. Boritt. (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1978. Pp. xxiv, 420. Historiographical essay, notes, bibliography, index. \$15.00.)

This is a book with one over-riding thesis. Economics, G. S. Boritt insists, was central to the beliefs and faith of Abraham Lincoln, or, put another way, "the *right to rise* [which Boritt views solely in economic terms] . . . was Lincoln's central ideal" (p. 281). Lincoln's central ideal was also that of America. The right to rise, the right to get ahead in life—in short, the American Dream—was the central ideal of the Republic, and it was Lincoln who made it so. No one, Boritt suggests, "placed the Dream so clearly on the highest pedestal as the *central idea* of the Republic" (p. 160); more than anyone else Lincoln "helped institutionalize the American Dream—made it perhaps the most *central idea* of the nation" (p. 161). It was Lincoln "who uplifted America's coarse materialism and gave it a spiritual dimension" (p. 160). It was Lincoln who extended the Jeffersonian meaning of equality to encompass equality of opportunity, which Boritt feels may be "one of the most important metamorphoses of an idea in American history" (p. 158). In fact, Lincoln himself was not fully aware of his "creative approach" to Jefferson's dictum. To support these contentions Boritt has painstakingly combed the Lincoln literature, amassing evidence from Lincoln's own words and from the words of those who knew him and remembered him. The result is a truly formidable array of documentation, demonstrating the central importance of economics to Lincoln's outlook from his early career as an Illinois legislator to the end of his presidential years.

While the course of Boritt's reasoning is not always clear, it is apparent that he has both his subject and his sources well in hand. There are pitfalls, however, in Boritt's approach, and he does not always avoid them. To prove his case he frequently employs a type of selective quotation, piling up citations without regard for their contexts. His zeal at times leads him into

hyperbole. There are instances when his efforts to tie Lincoln's thought to economic roots seem contrived and artificial (as when Boritt finds the "right to rise" in the president's military policies, a discovery which Boritt himself found startling). Boritt tends to view Lincoln's development in isolation from the intellectual and cultural currents of early nineteenth-century America, a lack of perspective that easily tempts him to exaggerate Lincoln's uniqueness. Still, this is a valuable study if only because it fills out a dimension of Lincoln's thought that has received little emphasis before now. Lincoln's early support of Whig economics is given careful analysis; the economics that directed his stance on slavery, his concept of the Union, and his view of the nature of the Civil War are revealed. Appended to Boritt's study is an extended essay in which the author seeks the "historiographical ancestry" of his book. Why, he asks, had not Lincoln scholars before him discovered the essential importance of economics to Lincoln's thought and action? The answer, he suggests, is found in the persistent and overpowering duality of the Lincoln image, Lincoln as man and Lincoln as god. His book, Boritt feels, not only explodes the "myth of the noneconomic Lincoln" but also provides "the sturdiest support for the bridge between man and god" (p. 304). That Boritt has made a contribution to Lincoln studies is unquestioned; that he has succeeded in his aim "to find a more real, more believable, Lincoln" is less certain.

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R. E. Olds: Auto Industry Pioneer. By George S. May. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977. Pp. viii, 458. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, notes, index. \$13.95.)

Ransom E. Olds has long remained an enigmatic figure in the history of American automobiles. George S. May's richly detailed biography indicates that Olds shared much with Henry Ford: age and Michigan residency, an aversion to farm life, mechanical training, and early experience with automobiles. Olds built his first car a decade before Ford and was even better equipped to dominate the new industry. From the 1880s he had superintended the manufacture of nationally known steam and gasoline engines in his father's firm. His experience and reputation helped him found the Olds Motor Vehicle Company and capture one third of annual industry sales before Ford was firmly established.