

war, including state-federal politics, diplomacy, Indian-white relations, and army operations. The author succeeds remarkably well in integrating these important themes into a coherent story. Rather than emphasizing the ineptness with which the Americans conducted the war, a popular approach to the War of 1812 among historians from the time of Henry Adams, Stagg focuses on "a detailed study of what the Madison administration intended to happen in the War of 1812, of how it translated this intention into specific policies, and only then to consider what happened to those policies as they were carried out" (p. x).

While the study is well balanced, there are some problems. Some readers will be dismayed with the harsh treatment of William Henry Harrison. Stagg portrays Harrison as an indecisive, incompetent leader through the use of several quotations from his enemies, but a more balanced appraisal of Harrison would have to include statements from his friends and discuss his accomplishments. It could not have been simply blind luck that made Harrison the most successful commanding general in the Northwest during the War of 1812.

There are other weaknesses in *Mr. Madison's War*, although they are not wholly the fault of the author. A select bibliography, a more detailed index, and maps would have made the work more useful. The hefty price for the hardcover edition is a part of a disturbing trend in the publishing world that might result in many worthy academic works not being published at all or only being available to more affluent individuals and institutions.

Despite these drawbacks, *Mr. Madison's War* is an important work that deserves to be read and reread. Stagg has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of the early American republic.

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Speaking of Abraham Lincoln: The Man and His Meaning for Our Times. By Richard Nelson Current. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983. Pp. 196. Notes, index. \$17.50.)

This volume contains eleven speeches which deal with the life and influence of Abraham Lincoln, delivered between 1955 and 1982 by the noted scholar, Richard Nelson Current. Eight of these addresses were published previously. They discuss Daniel Webster as a political exemplar for the younger Whig, President Lincoln as a model and inspiration for his successors (Democratic and Republican), and "recent Lincoln scholarship" (p. 39). The last mentioned of these essays was written in 1960 and, unfor-

tunately, was not revised prior to republication. Chapters which better stand the test of time deal with Lincoln's maturing racial and ethnic views, his political ideals and sense of America's mission, and a comparison of his effect on history with that of Mahatma Gandhi. Current further argues that President Lincoln acted with due restraint during the secession crisis and absolves him of blame for the outbreak of civil war. (To support this assertion the author cites, among other sources, the *Indianapolis Daily Journal*.) Once hostilities commenced, however, the president realized that more than a union of states was at stake—and the Civil War was fought to demonstrate that political ideals such as democracy and representative government could survive the challenge.

The three essays here published for the first time deal with Thaddeus Stevens, George Bancroft, and the conception of Lincoln as a southerner. In a lecture delivered in 1972, Current attempts to restore Lincoln's tarnished image as the Great Emancipator. While Stevens was an aggressive, steadfast advocate of slave emancipation and the enrollment of black troops in the Union Army, Lincoln lagged behind. But Current correctly emphasizes that their responsibilities were incomparable. The president had to hold the nation together and enlist the aid of conservatives and Radicals, War Democrats as well as moderate Republicans. He had to move cautiously, and his personal feelings regarding racial issues encouraged him to do so. Current does not portray Lincoln as an omniscient statesman because "it is naive to look for perfection in our political leaders, either past or present" (p. 92).

George Bancroft certainly understood this. The foremost historian of his time and a staunch Democrat, Bancroft came to appreciate the contributions made by President Lincoln, but he never truly grasped "the complexities of Lincoln's personality" (p. 185). The chapter written in 1982 relating to Bancroft's discourse at the public observance of Lincoln's birthday in 1866 is most revealing.

The essay Indianans will especially appreciate was also written in 1982. In "Lincoln the Southerner," Current disabuses the reader of the notion that Lincoln (born in Kentucky of Virginian ancestry) developed a southern character and sentiments. Instead, Lincoln was well aware that his ancestors lived in Pennsylvania before emigrating to Virginia, and he "developed an ambivalence toward his native state" (p. 155). Although Lincoln obviously had a stronger emotional attachment to Illinois than to the Hoosier state, he "retained much more fond and vivid memories of Indiana than of Kentucky" (p. 156). Current notes that while campaigning for Henry Clay in 1844, Lincoln "revisited the

Indiana scenes of his boyhood, and they inspired him to [pen] several stanzas of sentimental verse. Kentucky never had any such effect on him" (p. 156). Lincoln viewed himself as a westerner, not a southerner—although as a politician he transcended sectionalism.

The format of this volume precludes a unifying theme beyond the fact that all the essays pertain to Abraham Lincoln. If the reader is seeking an elucidation of Lincoln the man, he would be better served with a recent biography (or, indeed, with Current's *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* [1958]). But this volume serves its purpose. It is a worthy contribution to Lincoln scholarship—an expanding corpus which Current long ago correctly characterized as "unexhausted and inexhaustible" (p. 39).

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The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies By William Hanchett. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983. Pp. 303. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$18.50.)

As William Hanchett points out in the introduction to this fine book, most Americans have at least a hazy notion of what transpired at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865, but very few understand the complex background of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Misconceptions and myths abound. Anyone who has ever taught American history has listened to breathless students unfolding tales of various incredible conspiracies that explain this event. Even scholarly accounts of the assassination have often contained factual errors and questionable hypotheses.

Part of the problem has been the lack of scholarly interest in the assassination. Hanchett shows how amateurs and popularizers have dominated the historiography. The author argues that the assassination was a political act that cannot be explained either by Booth's supposed "madness" or by some deep-laid plot of government officials. Rather Booth and his band of conspirators believed they had reason to hate the "tyrant" Lincoln and acted to defend a long tradition of republican liberty. In this way, Booth's famous cry to the audience at Ford's Theater, "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*," concisely defined the motivation behind the act.

Hanchett's treatment of the charge that Lincoln's death was part of a Confederate conspiracy contains little new information. He gives only brief attention to the attempts by Radical Republicans to implicate Andrew Johnson in the assassination and does not even mention the visits of Benjamin F. Butler and James M.