

Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's. By Don E. Fehrenbacher.
(Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962. Pp. ix, 205.
Bibliographical note, notes, index. \$4.75.)

Significant political episodes which occurred during the 1850's in which Abraham Lincoln was a conspicuous participant are re-examined in this volume, making more understandable his spectacular advancement to the presidency. The seven separate essays borrow heavily from monographs by the author already published in leading historical magazines.

Mr. Fehrenbacher's critical review of other writers with whom he has found himself in disagreement has prompted him to divide Lincoln biographers into two schools: the "panegyrists" represented by Josiah G. Holland and Isaac N. Arnold; and the "revisionists" of whom he names Donald W. Riddle and several other prominent historians, among them noted Indiana authors (p. 21).

Discussing the Kansas-Nebraska question, Riddle states that Lincoln was not "fighting for a cause" but "to advance his own political standing" (p. 22). Fehrenbacher prefers the middle view between "hero worship and cynicism," recognizing Lincoln's "moral convictions" as well as his practical politics (p. 22).

Another "revisionist," James G. Randall, was born in Indianapolis, graduated from Butler, and became a member of its faculty. His reaction to the debates, from the author's viewpoint, discovers no "vital principles" at stake but finds instead an "exciting show" by partisans (p. 109). The widely accepted assertion by another Hoosier, Albert J. Beveridge, that Lincoln's House Divided speech was his paramount move "in the game for the Presidency," is strongly refuted by Fehrenbacher, who can discover no contemporary record confirming it (p. 73). He draws the conclusion that "Beveridge like James G. Randall found his true hero for the 1850's in Stephen A. Douglas" (p. 161).

The most uncomplimentary criticisms are reserved for *Herndon's Lincoln*, written by Jesse W. Weik in a room over a grocery store at Greencastle, Indiana, the town where Weik was born. The sources Herndon supplied for Weik are described as having been "distilled from memory and imagination . . . a kind of retrospective ghost writing" (p. 72). This description is especially applicable to statements about the House Divided speech. Herndon's statements on the "Second Freeport Question" are recorded as "second hand, based on a dubious source" (p. 124).

The author's criticisms are also directed to a recent contributor, Reinhard H. Luthin. The supposed aloofness of Lincoln towards the founding members of the Republican group, which Luthin supports, is pointed out as another instance of Herndon leading "scholarship astray" (p. 45). Luthin declares that up to 1860, Lincoln "had left no record of achievement, except the quest for office" (p. 161).

A brief essay in the biographical note states that the "revisionists'" theory about the causes of the Civil War led them to become "to a

certain extent, anti-Lincoln." They discredited and questioned the soundness of his "anti-slavery stand," qualified his "sympathy for the Negro," placed his "political opportunism" above his "idealism," minimized his reputed "stature" during the 1850's and limited his "greatness" to the presidential terms (pp. 169, 170). The author has been successful in showing that there were some great moments for Abraham Lincoln, even in the groundwork of the decade preceding his elevation to the nation's highest office.

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