

It is possible that the Indian played little or no part in the development of the character traits of Americans, but if he did, *America's Frontier Heritage* sheds little light on his role.

Overall, *America's Frontier Heritage* is an excellent work that should be in most libraries and of great interest to all students and general readers who desire to know more about the origins and peculiarities of the American character.

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Abraham Lincoln: A History. By John G. Nicolay and John Hay. Abridged and edited by Paul M. Angle. [*Classic American Historians.* Edited by Paul M. Angle.] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. Pp. xix, 394. Notes, illustrations, bibliographical note, index. Paperbound, \$3.45; clothbound, \$8.50.)

Shortly after Lincoln's tragic assassination a torrent of biographical writing began that has not yet run its course. As of 1939 Jay Monaghan's standard *Lincoln Bibliography* listed some four thousand separate titles concerning Lincoln, not including articles. By now five thousand or more such works exist. Although the earliest of the Lincoln biographers were generally the weakest, in 1890 his two former secretaries, John G. Nicolay and John Hay, published their notable ten-volume *Abraham Lincoln, A History*. It was the result of more than twenty years of personal knowledge and careful note-taking by alert and intimate observers of Lincoln's role as president. Furthermore, Lincoln had cooperated with his secretaries in gathering relevant manuscript materials. Although Nicolay and Hay had every possible opportunity to present a biography of the "inner Lincoln," particularly in times of great national stress, they fashioned instead a conventional history of the United States from Lincoln's birth until the end of the Civil War, serialized first for *Century Magazine*. In its pages he emerged as the central figure of a "life-and-times" approach. The original volumes encompassed the major facets of Lincoln's career but did so in a conventional way, reprinting documents and letters to which Nicolay and Hay alone had access—until these manuscripts were much later made available to scholars.

Immersed as the authors were in the political atmosphere of post-Civil War Republicanism, a conservative and highly proper Lincoln, quite different from William Herndon's damaging caricature, emerged. The Nicolay and Hay work, authorized by Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, possessed both the merits and defects of an official biography. Though exhaustive, its argument was marred by party bias and was lacking in fundamental interpretive skill. Nevertheless, Nicolay and Hay's detailed volumes remain indispensable to the serious Lincoln scholar. His two secretaries were dedicated and loyal men whose exhaustive writings mirrored their close personal association with and adulation of their chief.

Abridged and edited now by Paul M. Angle, the original ten volumes are made available to modern readers in manageable form. An introduc-

tion precedes the digested text. How successful this condensation into a single volume is remains a matter of individual opinion. In this reviewer's judgment, the results are commendable. Yet it is doubtful that Nicolay and Hay should now be labeled "classic" or "great" historians and thereby included in the company of Prescott and Parkman. They were hardly skilled practitioners of historiography, although they performed a valuable service for posterity.

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History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850. By James Ford Rhodes. Abridged and edited by Allan Nevins. [*Classic American Historians*. Edited by Paul M. Angle.] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966. Pp. xxvi, 576. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical note, index. Paperbound, \$3.95; clothbound, \$10.00.)

James Ford Rhodes' massive *History of the United States From the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule in the South in 1877*, published in seven volumes between 1892 and 1906, is one of the great works of American historical writing. Rhodes, a Cleveland businessman turned historian, was an honest researcher and a good judge of character who brought much hard common sense—as well as the prejudices of his age—to his account of the politics, diplomacy, and fighting of the Civil War era. He, more than anyone else, gave historical substance to the view which thoughtful Northerners generally and Republicans in particular held of the causes, course, and consequences of the war. His picture of these heroic years, altered in so many particulars by subsequent study, is now being replaced in its entirety by an even more massive and sweeping narrative, more gracefully written, more thoroughly researched, and better balanced, by the greatest living American historian, Allan Nevins. Thus Rhodes' work, superseded by a great historical synthesis and lacking in the literary power of some of our other classical American historians, seems doomed to the ever deepening oblivion of being respected but not read.

This is unfortunate. The first five volumes of Rhodes' history (taking the story to 1865) offer one of the more pleasant surprises in store for readers of American history. One is continually amazed at how good Rhodes was: how reasonable his explanations, how sharp his character portraits, how much he knew about the era, how much closer his conclusions come to recent scholarship than do those of many writers who came after him. And the prose, if not brilliant, remains solid and serviceable. Rather than a musty period piece, one discovers, as Nevins writes in introducing his abridgement of the first five volumes, "a magnificent piece of narrative history that offers a larger combination of enjoyment and profit than any but a few historians provide" (p. xxvi).

The volume under review provides historians with an excellent introduction to Rhodes' history—which is not to say a sufficient ac-