

# The Not-So-Grand Review: Abraham Lincoln in the *Journal of American History*

Allen C. Guelzo

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Perhaps it is accidental that the premier journal of American history has had so little to say about the premier figure in American history, Abraham Lincoln. Or perhaps it was Lincoln's misfortune that the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (MVHA, the forerunner of the Organization of American Historians, or OAH) was not formed until 1907 and that the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (MVHR, the forerunner of the *Journal of American History*, or JAH) did not begin quarterly publication until 1914, when the sun of Lincoln's historical reputation had already reached its apogee and had nowhere to go but downward. For five decades after his assassination, Lincoln's position as the second greatest American (after George Washington) had arched upward, until by 1909, the centennial of his birth, Lincoln had eclipsed even Washington as the central icon of American democracy. In just one decade, 1910–1919, seventeen new Lincoln statues were dedicated, one more than all the Lincoln statues installed in the half century after the attack in Ford's Theatre. And in that heyday of Progressivism, the most important Lincoln biography, Ida M. Tarbell's *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1900), was not only the product of one of Progressive journalism's most famous voices, but unveiled a Lincoln whom Progressives could embrace as their own. Which they did: "The Progressive platform of to-day is but an amplification . . . of Lincoln's," announced Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>1</sup>

But from the 1920s onward, the outsize historical image of Lincoln began to wane, almost in tandem with the waning of Progressivism. In 1914, although Lincoln's sole surviving child, Robert Todd Lincoln, was still alive and active and Henry Bacon had only sketched out his first plans for what became the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, the historical glow of Lincoln was already dimming among American historians. By 1936 James G. Randall was moved to ask, almost plaintively, "Has the Lincoln theme been exhausted?" Enthusiasm for the theme was also passing in popular culture. The last two movie biographies of Lincoln—Henry Fonda's *Young Mr. Lincoln* and Raymond Massey's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*—appeared in 1939 and 1940, respectively. (Among Lincoln's recent on-camera appearances have been roles in a short-lived UPN television sitcom, in the 1989 movie *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, and in a TV ad, in the company of a beaver.) After the first volumes of Carl Sandburg's folkish *Abraham Lincoln* in 1926 and

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Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era at Gettysburg College. Readers may contact Guelzo at [aguelzo@gettysburg.edu](mailto:aguelzo@gettysburg.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Christopher A. Thomas, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (Princeton, 2002), 63; James A. Percoco, *Summers with Lincoln: Looking for the Man in the Monuments* (New York, 2008), 199–200; Ida M. Tarbell, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln, Drawn from Original Sources and Containing Many Speeches, Letters, and Telegrams Hitherto Unpublished* (2 vols., New York, 1900); Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago, 2000), 126–27.

Albert J. Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858* in 1928, the only memorable Lincoln biographies to appear over the next sixty years were Randall's neo-Progressive *Lincoln the President* in 1945–1955, Benjamin P. Thomas's *Abraham Lincoln* in 1952, and Stephen B. Oates's *With Malice toward None* in 1977.<sup>2</sup>

So, by the time the *MVHR* was beginning to make its mark as a serious historical quarterly, the “Lincoln theme” was passing into a long scholarly shadow as the study of Lincoln became the province of dedicated nonacademics (such as Thomas) or academics who preferred a popular audience (such as Oates, whose *With Malice toward None* was also plagued by charges of plagiarism), rather than a field deemed appropriate to historical professionalism. It did not help that the veterans of Progressivism, who had done so much to support the apotheosis of Lincoln at the beginning of the century, turned in the bitterness of their own eclipse on the image of the man they had thought their friend. Albert J. Beveridge, a Progressive and a U.S. senator from Indiana, found less and less to admire in Lincoln the longer he wrote about him, and when Beveridge died, leaving his biography of Lincoln unfinished, he had become almost dismissive of Lincoln as a conventional big-business Republican. “Solely on their merits,” sniffed Beveridge in his account of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, “the debates themselves deserve little notice.” They served merely “to advertise Lincoln to the country and thus made possible his nomination for the Presidency.” And with the dominant icons of the historical profession—Charles A. Beard, Carl Becker, Arthur M. Schlesinger—in the years between the world wars either veterans of the Progressive struggle or New Dealers, there was little interest in building a scholarly reputation by studying the man whom Richard Hofstadter, in the final act of Progressive parricide, denounced as a capitalist tool. Beard might describe Lincoln as the man whose “services . . . to the cause of union defy description.” But Beard also pointed out that Lincoln's Republicans had made the fortunes of the robber barons. During Lincoln's administration “the Republican leaders at Washington were planning such expenditures from the treasury in the form of public land grants to railways as would have dazed the authors of the national road bill half a century earlier.” By 1948 Hofstadter was less restrained. Lincoln's great achievement was to take policy on slavery “out of the realm of moral and legal dispute” and turn it into a question of “free labor's self-interest,” so that proposals to halt the spread of slavery became nothing but a plan “for the material benefit of all Northern white men.”<sup>3</sup>

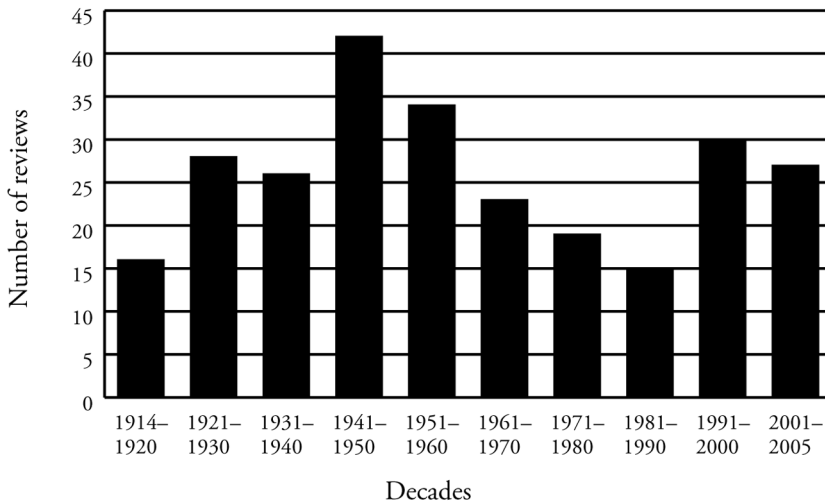
All of which helps explain why the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History* have generally displayed a combination of indifference to Lincoln,

<sup>2</sup> Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 294–98; James G. Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?,” *American Historical Review*, 41 (Jan. 1936), 270–94; Mark S. Reinhart, *Abraham Lincoln on Screen: A Filmography of Dramas and Documentaries Including Television, 1903–1998* (Jefferson, N.C., 1999), 13; *Young Mr. Lincoln*, dir. John Ford (Twentieth Century Fox, 1939); *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, dir. John Cromwell (RKO, 1940); *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, dir. Stephen Herek (De Laurentiis Entertainment Group, 1989); Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (2 vols., New York, 1926); Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858* (4 vols., Boston, 1928); James Harvey Young, “Randall's Lincoln: An Academic Scholar's Biography,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 19 (Summer 1998), 4; James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President* (4 vols., New York, 1945–1955); Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 1952); Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, II, 635; Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *History of the United States: A Study in American Civilization* (New York, 1921), 363, 369; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (1948; New York, 1973), 113.

**Figure 1**

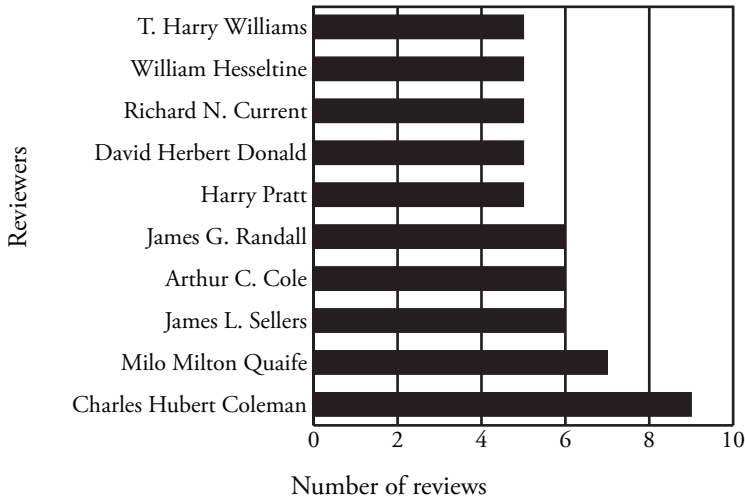
Reviews of books about Abraham Lincoln published in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, 1914–2005, by decade



in the pattern of their reviews of Lincoln-related books, and a resigned concession of Lincoln to the categories of pragmatism and conservatism, in their published articles. Between 1914 and 2005 the *Review* and the *Journal* published 260 reviews of books about Abraham Lincoln. It will not be difficult to argue over what constitutes a “book about Abraham Lincoln”—this count includes reviews of works by talented amateurs, such as Clarence E. Macartney’s *Lincoln and the Bible* in 1949; an occasional bit of serious historical fiction, such as Gore Vidal’s *Lincoln* in 1984; and a few oddities, such as Frank McGlynn’s *Sidelights on Lincoln* in 1947 (McGlynn had portrayed Lincoln in eleven feature films between 1915 and 1940). But it excludes reviews of books whose subject is only tangentially connected to Lincoln (John Niven’s *Gideon Welles: Lincoln’s Secretary of the Navy* in 1974 or Edward A. Miller Jr.’s *Lincoln’s Abolitionist General: The Biography of David Hunter* in 1997). What will be difficult is to realize that the tally equals fewer than 3 Lincoln book reviews a year in the *Review* and the *Journal*. What is still more striking is how lopsided the timing of the reviews has been, if we break them out by decade. The raw numbers need to be seen in proportion to the numbers of historical nonfiction books marketed from decade to decade. Between 1914 and 1970, the number of new books published each year jumped from 10,175 to 24,288; by 1997, that number had jumped again to 65,796. Between 1950 and 1970 the number of new history titles alone appearing every year in the United States leaped from 456 to 1,010. The numbers also need to be seen in relation to the 30 book reviews that the first issue of the *Review* in 1914 carried. But making all allowances, the picture is disheartening. Allowing for the short cycle of 1914–1920, when the *Review* was just starting, and the smaller size of the book trade’s output in those years than in 2005, the number of Lincoln books reviewed in the *MVHR* stood proportionately at its highest in the first two decades of the *Review*’s life, started to decline in the 1930s, spiked up in the 1940s, and then resumed its decline, until in

**Figure 2**

Reviews of books about Abraham Lincoln published in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, 1914–2005, by reviewer



NOTE: All authors of at least 5 reviews are listed.

the 1980s the number of reviews of Lincoln books in what by then was the *Journal of American History* had shrunk to only 15.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the reviewing tasks were not taken up by the best and the brightest among Lincoln scholars. Between 1914 and 2005, the most prolific reviewer of books on Lincoln was Charles Hubert Coleman, who taught history and political science at Eastern Illinois State Normal School (now Eastern Illinois University) in Charleston, Illinois, one of the Lincoln-Douglas debate sites, and authored a small book on the Lincoln family in Coles County, Illinois. In number of reviews, he was followed by Milo Milton Quaife, a University of Chicago Ph.D., superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, secretary of the Detroit Public Library's Burton Historical Collection and editor of its publications, editor of the *Review* (1924–1930), and president of the MVHA (1919–1920). Third place went to James L. Sellers, a professor of history at the University of Nebraska with no record of publishing on Lincoln.<sup>5</sup> Only after those three are the reviewers familiar names in the Lincoln community: James G. Randall, Richard N. Current, William Hesselstine, Harry Pratt, and David Herbert Donald.

Nor do the reviews demonstrate much appreciation for Lincoln's injunction to show "malice toward none." Few of them argue about any large interpretative issues, but they

<sup>4</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Lincoln and the Bible* (New York, 1949); Gore Vidal, *Lincoln: A Novel* (New York, 1984); Frank McGlynn, *Sidelights on Lincoln* (Los Angeles, 1947); John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York, 1973); Edward A. Miller Jr., *Lincoln's Abolitionist General: The Biography of David Hunter* (Columbia, S.C., 1997); "New Books and New Editions Published, by Subject: 1880 to 1970," in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, 1975), II, 808; Dave Bogart, ed., *The Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac* (New Providence, N.J., 1999), 530.

<sup>5</sup> *Directory of American Scholars*, 5th ed., I, s.v. "Coleman, Prof. Charles H(ubert)"; Ian R. Tyrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago, 2005), 221, 231, 144.



Albert J. Beveridge, a former U.S. senator from Indiana and a Progressive, wrote *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858* (1928), the first major Lincoln biography to be reviewed in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. Beveridge, once a huge supporter of Lincoln, came to admire him less the longer he wrote about him. *Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-B2-1053-16[P & P]*.

abound in meanness, pedantry, and parades of the reviewers' own unappreciated virtues. When Arthur C. Cole reviewed Randall's *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln* in 1928, he could not resist a Pecksniffian objection to "the author's recourse" to "the first personal pronoun," which "does not serve the desirable end of lightening the academic style of the text." Otherwise, Cole confined his commentary on *Constitutional Problems* to the terse observations that "this study is rigidly and analytically logical," with all the necessary dimensions of Lincoln's behavior toward habeas corpus, military tribunals, and confiscation "systematically considered in their various aspects." Only obliquely did Cole insert his real objection to the book, that Randall had been too forward in his identification of Lincoln's wartime policies with Woodrow Wilson's.<sup>6</sup>

A year later the *MVHR*'s first review of a major Lincoln biography, Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln*, appeared as a thirteen-page essay by William E. Barton, a Congregational minister who had taken up writing about Lincoln in retirement and by his *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* and a two-volume Lincoln biography carved out a substantial reputation that still abides. Barton opened by praising Beveridge's uncompleted opus as "a magnificent piece of work"—and thereafter questioned just what would have made it magnificent. Beveridge had conducted no firsthand research in "the Lincoln country," he had uncovered no "new and convincing information on Lincoln's youth," and the image of Lincoln that emerged from his pages had more resemblance to Albert J. Beveridge than to "Lincoln himself." This categorical dismissal did no justice to Beveridge's careful use of the unpublished pa-

<sup>6</sup> James G. Randall, *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln* (New York, 1926); Arthur C. Cole, review of *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln* by James G. Randall, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 14 (March 1928), 553–54.



pers and interviews accumulated after Lincoln's death by his erratic law partner, William Henry Herndon, as preparation for a Lincoln biography, which it took Herndon more than twenty years to write. Beveridge had been allowed access to Herndon's manuscripts by Jesse W. Weik, Herndon's assistant and eventually the coauthor of *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life* in 1889. This made Beveridge one of the few Lincoln biographers to make serious scholarly use of the Herndon-Weik papers before the 1990s. No matter to Barton; he himself had "secured photostats of about a hundred pages of these manuscripts" and declared that "there was not as much as Beveridge thought there was" in them. But Barton's sharpest knives were reserved for Beveridge's "reliance" on "the Ann Rutledge story," which Barton scorned as "detestable." And well he might, since in 1928 Barton had been burned on the fingers by his involvement in the Wilma Minor forgeries. Wilma Francis Minor is notorious to this day in Lincoln studies for fobbing off a purported series of letters between Lincoln and Ann Rutledge on the *Atlantic Monthly*, which published them at the end of 1928. Ellery Sedgwick, the editor of the *Atlantic*, invited Ida Tarbell, Carl Sandburg, and Barton to evaluate the Minor letters, and so skillfully had Minor confected her deception that all three initially endorsed publication of the letters. Barton withdrew his endorsement at the last moment, after interviewing Wilma Minor, but the Minor affair embarrassed all three biographers. That Beveridge had given even the slightest credence to the material in Herndon's papers concerning Ann Rutledge was an offense from which Barton was eager to distance himself.<sup>7</sup>

Many other reviews seem purely and perplexingly wrongheaded in their evaluations of books that have over time become acknowledged as salient pieces of the Lincoln literature. Benjamin Thomas's *Abraham Lincoln* has never been out of print since its first appearance in 1952, and it is pretty broadly reckoned the best one-volume biography of Lincoln on offer. Thomas earned a Ph.D. in history from Johns Hopkins University in 1929 with a dissertation on nineteenth-century Russian-American diplomacy. He taught briefly at a small college in Alabama but quickly grew weary of the endless round of teaching assignments. In 1932 he was only too happy to apply for the post of executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association (ALA), which had been created in 1908 in Springfield, Illinois, to oversee celebrations of the Lincoln birth centennial and developed into a permanent historical association with its own publications series, an annual meeting, and a quarterly magazine dedicated to Lincoln studies. He was a major contributor to the ALA's *Lincoln Day by Day* (a key, three-volume reference serial begun in 1933 that tracked every recorded movement of Lincoln's from 1809 to 1865), wrote a short account of Lincoln's years in New Salem, and published a collection of biographical sketches of major Lincoln biographers from Herndon to Sandburg. Thomas also had the inestimable advantage of being the first scholar to benefit from access to the Robert Todd Lincoln Papers—the vast collection of his father's White House papers that Robert Todd Lincoln had secreted in trunks in his New England mansion and donated to the Library of Congress only on the condition that they be closed to researchers until twenty-one years after his death.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> William E. Barton, "A Noble Fragment: Beveridge's Life of Lincoln," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (March 1929), 497–510, esp. 498, 499, 500; Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1994), 297; John Evangelist Walsh, *The Shadows Rise: Abraham Lincoln and the Ann Rutledge Legend* (Chicago, 1993), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 1952); John Hoffman, "Benjamin P. Thomas," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 19 (Summer 1998), 41; United States Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, *Lincoln Day by Day: A Chronology, 1809–1865* (3 vols., Washington, 1960); Benjamin P. Thomas, *Lincoln's New Salem* (Springfield, 1934); Benjamin P. Thomas, *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and His Biographers* (New Brunswick, 1947).



Benjamin Thomas, executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association from 1932 to 1936, was the author of *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography*, which has remained in print since it was first published in 1952. Photo Herbert Georg Studio. Courtesy the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Nevertheless, when Donald W. Riddle drew the ticket to review Thomas's *Abraham Lincoln* for the December 1952 issue of the *Review*, he was both condescending and unsparing. Riddle was an Illinoisan with a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Chicago, and his early publications had been studies of early Christianity. But as an associate professor of history at the University of Illinois, he turned his hand to Lincoln studies with the publication of *Lincoln Runs for Congress* (on the convoluted election campaign that won Lincoln his only term in the House of Representatives) in 1948 and *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* in 1957. His review of Thomas's biography is short and dismissive of "certain features of the book." Overall, Thomas's was little more than "an excellent chronicle of Lincoln's life" that nevertheless left Lincoln "still an enigma." What may have troubled Riddle most, however, was Thomas's perpetuation of "the myth that Lincoln after his congressional term retired from politics, to emerge when the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise." That story trenched on Riddle's scholarly territory as the historian of Lincoln the congressman, but Riddle's objection was so largely a matter of parsing what Thomas meant by "retired" that Thomas wrote to the managing editor of the *Review*, Wendell Stephenson, to complain. That letter generated a riposte from Riddle. Finally, Thomas asked Stephenson to drop any thought of printing the exchange in the *Review*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. Riddle, *Lincoln Runs for Congress: A Publication of the Abraham Lincoln Assn., Springfield, Ill.* (New Brunswick, 1948). The biographical material on Donald W. Riddle is drawn from the dust jacket of this book. Donald W. Riddle, *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1957); Donald W. Riddle, review of *Abraham Lincoln* by Benjamin P. Thomas, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 39 (Dec. 1952), 564–65; Hoffman, "Benjamin P. Thomas," 41–42.

An even more egregious misreading of a major Lincoln book occurred in the March 1960 issue of the *Review*, when Maurice G. Baxter wrote a short joint review of Harry V. Jaffa's *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* and the edition of Lincoln's and Douglas's campaign speeches in Ohio in 1859 that Jaffa edited with Robert W. Johannsen, the noted biographer of Douglas. Jaffa's *Crisis of the House Divided* has since achieved something akin to cult status in the Lincoln literature, partly because it took the content of the Lincoln-Douglas debates seriously for the first time since Beveridge had dismissed them as inconsequential in 1928 and partly because Jaffa was a political scientist rather than a historian and a pupil of the political philosopher Leo Strauss. Jaffa brought to the debates a typically Straussian close textual scrutiny and Strauss's characteristic concern that modern liberal democracy had surrendered its Lockean basis in natural law and thus had nothing transcendent with which to resist the blandishments of forms of Nietzschean despotism that ran amok through the twentieth century. In Jaffa's hands, Douglas became a symbol—and a gifted symbol, since Jaffa refused to indulge good-Lincoln–bad-Douglas stereotyping—of a democracy with no other core value than the *vox populi*, as though “all political right is positive right” and democracy exists for no other purpose than to fatten a contented but mindless bourgeoisie. “The whole struggle with Douglas revolved precisely around the question of the moral demands which must be obeyed by a people if the people themselves are to possess the title deeds to respect and obedience,” Jaffa insisted. The significance of Lincoln lay primarily in his conviction that the rights of the people in a popular government could be legitimately asserted only when those “were rights which they must first respect themselves” as expressions of natural law that were universally binding no matter what the majority willed.<sup>10</sup>

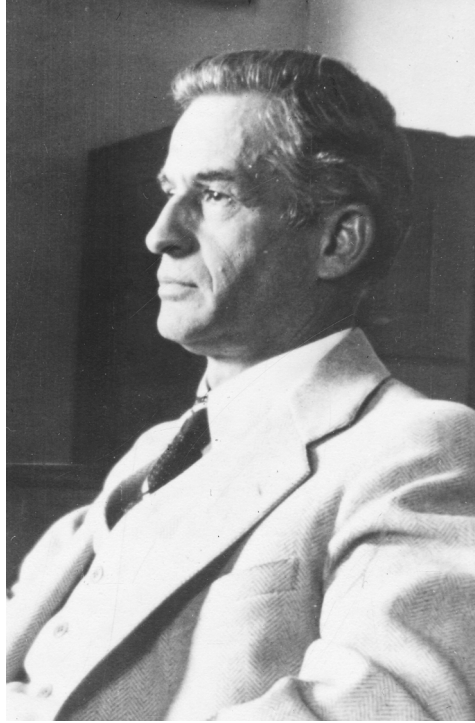
That was an extraordinary assertion when *Crisis of the House Divided* was published in 1959. Since the 1940s James G. Randall's disenchanted interpretation of the Civil War as the product of “a blundering generation” of irrational and incompetent politicians and generals had dominated Civil War historiography, and Carl Sandburg had shaped the popular image of Lincoln as a folklore everyman, not a political philosopher. Even more, Jaffa had recruited Lincoln as an intellectual player on the field of the Cold War, responding to the criticisms of the European Left that nothing was left of liberalism but a bankrupt capitalist kleptocracy who had been saved from fascism only by the selfless sacrifices of the Soviet Union. According to Jaffa Lincoln had achieved a “synthesis” of secular Jeffersonian liberalism with “Hebraic and Christian” religious ethics that could provide the liberal democracies “objects of faith as well as cognition.”<sup>11</sup>

None of this figured largely in Baxter's review. Before 1960 Baxter's one substantial foray into Lincoln studies had been a 1957 biography of Orville Hickman Browning, Lincoln's lifelong but critical friend, a study in large part inspired by the boyhood Baxter spent in Browning's hometown of Quincy, Illinois. Baxter wrote his dissertation (which became the Browning biography) at the University of Illinois under Randall, and he spent his entire academic career, from 1948 till 1991, at Indiana University. Perhaps it was the

<sup>10</sup> Harry V. Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided: An Interpretation of the Issues in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Garden City, 1959), 191, 224, 352; Harry V. Jaffa and Robert W. Johannsen, eds., *In the Name of the People: Speeches and Writings of Lincoln and Douglas in the Ohio Campaign of 1859* (Columbus, 1959); Maurice G. Baxter, joint review of *Crisis of the House Divided* by Harry V. Jaffa, and *In the Name of the People* ed. by Harry V. Jaffa and Robert W. Johannsen, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (March 1960), 716–18.

<sup>11</sup> J. G. Randall, “The Blundering Generation,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 27 (June 1940), 3–28, esp. 4; Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided*, 229.





James G. Randall influenced Lincoln scholars for decades by his argument, presented in a 1940 *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* article, that a “blundering generation” of politicians had brought on the Civil War. Courtesy the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Randall influence that disinclined Baxter to see the depths in Lincoln and Douglas that Jaffa saw, since Baxter savaged *Crisis of the House Divided* for concentrating too much on the text of the debates and not enough on “broad historical research,” with the result that Jaffa had produced “an abstruse treatment” of Douglas’s evolving position on the Missouri Compromise. Jaffa’s account of how “the philosophy of the Declaration of Independence” entered into the debates of the 1850s, including those between the two Illinoisans, was “very stimulating, but probably too abstract for Lincoln and Douglas if they could have read it.” Baxter was also incensed that Jaffa would credit the “real possibility of a Douglas-Republican coalition, warded off only by Lincoln’s firm stand.” In fact, it was the rumors circulating in the winter of 1857–1858 that Douglas and the East Coast Republican leadership had struck an alliance, which would have given Douglas a free pass to reelection to the Senate in 1858 and a Republican presidential nomination in 1860, that gave Lincoln his most agitated moments in the run-up to the 1858 senatorial contest. Both *Crisis of the House Divided* and the edited volume of the Ohio speeches would “provide interesting reading,” Baxter concluded, but he added that “it is likely that the printing of the Ohio speeches . . . will be more useful than the interpretation of the issues of 1858.” He could not have been more wrong. *Crisis of the House Divided* is, according to Michael M. Uhlmann’s reevaluation of Jaffa’s work in 2000, “the best commentary on American politics written in this century—indeed, since the death of Lincoln himself,” and it occupies a seat on Michael Burkholder’s 2003 checklist, *100 Essential Lincoln Books*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Stevens, “In Memoriam: Maurice G. Baxter,” Nov. 2003, *OAH Newsletter*, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/>

It would be hard to find a reviewer of a landmark Lincoln book in either the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* or the *Journal of American History* who, after a few concessions at the outset to the importance or originality of the work, did not proceed to savage it. Godfrey Rathbone Benson, first Baron Charnwood's great *Abraham Lincoln* merited a glowing review in the *American Historical Review* the year after its publication but no notice in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. The ubiquitous Milo Quaife reviewed the first volume of Sandburg's multivolume Lincoln biography, *Abraham Lincoln*, when it was released in 1926 and announced himself "not much impressed." Sandburg might be in his element, said Quaife, as "an author of fairy tales and a recitalist of American folk songs," but he was "free from any conceptions or training engendered by the professional school of historians." Sandburg's *Lincoln* was less "a work of history" and more "a literary grab-bag" or a "hodge-podge," full of "driveling sentimentality." Quaife's five-page rant ends with a fusillade of complaint about "the literary school" whose reviews in "the daily and weekly press" had "hailed" Sandburg "with rapturous acclaim." The unenlightened amateurs might swoon over Sandburg's *Lincoln* all they liked, "but it is not history as the reviewer understands the term."<sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein, Avery Craven, who shared Randall's suspicion that the Civil War was the result of a "blundering generation," reviewed T. Harry Williams's pathfinding study of Lincoln as a military commander-in-chief, *Lincoln and His Generals*, and waved it away as "only a logical step in the development of the Lincoln myth." Craven was reluctant to see any member of a blundering generation elevated to the status of "an Olympian figure," and he scored Williams for doing exactly that by praising Lincoln's "genius" in managing military affairs, setting out the objectives of a long-term strategy, and recruiting the generals who could capture those objectives. Eric Foner, reviewing G. S. Boritt's *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* for *Reviews in American History* in 1979 found Boritt's book "comprehensive and enlightening"—but not Peter F. Walker, writing for the *Journal of American History*. Walker, a longtime member of the history department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who had published a book on abolitionism the previous year, damned Boritt's *Lincoln* with faint praise as "often delicate and subtle, sometimes tedious, at places cryptic, and doggedly tendentious." Despite being the first significant study of Lincoln as a Whig with a Whig's comprehensive ideology for national economic transformation, Boritt's book struck Walker as incredible. The argument that Lincoln had been guided by anything so abstract as the "dream" of "a society of self-making men in which a person gets what he deserves in a material way and in which opportunity for upward mobility toward material affluence is unimpeded" was more than our knowledge of "the sources of individual human behavior" could sustain. Finally, when David Herbert Donald's long-awaited magnum opus, *Lincoln*, appeared in 1995, William Hanchett unhesitatingly stigmatized it as "a disappointment" for present-

nl/2003nov/memorial.html; Maurice G. Baxter, *Orville H. Browning, Lincoln's Friend and Critic* (Bloomington, 1957); Baxter, review of *Crisis of the House Divided* by Jaffa, and *In the Name of the People* ed. by Jaffa and Johannsen, 717–18; Richard Allen Heckman, "Out-of-State Influences and the Lincoln-Douglas Campaign of 1858," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 59 (Spring 1966), 34–35, 39; Michael M. Uhlmann, "Harry V. Jaffa *Crisis of the House Divided* (1959)," *First Things* (March 2000), 58; Michael Burkhimer, *100 Essential Lincoln Books* (Nashville, 2003), 144–46. The previous standard checklist of Lincoln books had been Paul M. Angle, *A Shelf of Lincoln Books: A Critical, Selective Bibliography of Lincolniana* (Springfield, 1947).

<sup>13</sup> Godfrey Rathbone Benson Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1916); Carl Russell Fish, review of *Abraham Lincoln* by Lord Charnwood, *American Historical Review*, 22 (Jan. 1917), 413–15; M. M. Quaife, review of *Abraham Lincoln* by Carl Sandburg, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13 (Sept. 1926), 287–91.

ing, “not his views of Lincoln, but Lincoln’s views of himself.” The criticism is surprising since Donald’s *Lincoln* is notable for opening with Donald’s view of “the essential passivity of [Lincoln’s] nature.” But the reward for satisfying Hanchett’s first demand was to be attacked for not satisfying it in the way Hanchett desired. “Far from being passive, the young Lincoln was so ambitious . . . that years passed before he could trust himself.”<sup>14</sup>

It would be quite a discovery if one could show that the *MVHR* and *JAH* reviews conform to a conscious scheme to debase and intimidate Lincoln scholarship. Their tone may represent something much more humdrum: the likelihood that authors of salient Lincoln books had neither time nor inclination to write reviews, which require substantial investments of time at the service of minimal arenas of explanation. But it may not be entirely a matter of reviewing by backbenchers. The chilly atmosphere the *MVHR* created around Lincoln books may also have emanated from the ideological culture of the early Mississippi Valley Historical Association, which embraced midwestern Progressivism more zealously than the professionally broader American Historical Association did. “We shall not wish to be of that class that would add to ‘the colossal weight of national selfishness,’” declared James Albert Woodburn in his presidential address to the 1926 annual meeting of the MVHA. Every “advance of democracy has been the result of radical opinion, radical action and radical leadership,” Woodburn insisted—and Lincoln was not a good example of any of them. Lincoln “may be said to have been clinging to and conserving old ideas and policies.” Woodburn, an Indiana native with a Ph.D. from John Hopkins in 1890 (the same year as Frederick Jackson Turner) who spent his career (1890–1924) teaching history at Indiana University, was typical of the Progressives who turned a colder eye on Lincoln once the prospects of Progressive politics had faded.<sup>15</sup> (And it is worth noting how often the starchiest of the reviewers had their roots in midwestern Progressivism). But that accounts only for the first three decades of the MVHA, decades when reviews of Lincoln books were a larger fraction of all reviews than subsequently. What also figured in the tetchiness of reviewers in the *MVHR* and the *JAH* in later years were a stiffness that equated severity with insight and allowed reviewers to parade complaints as badges of learning (Quaife’s review of Sandburg is a particularly bad example); a professional resentment at the success enjoyed by nonacademic Lincoln writers as well as at the enhanced profile of those academics who concentrated on writing about Lincoln (one thinks of Riddle’s review of Benjamin Thomas); and the related sense that the “Lincoln theme” smacked too much of the “whig interpretation” and the “great man” theory of history to attract those who desired to be considered serious historians (the reviews of Jaffa and Boritt are the prime exhibits).

There were also the external influences exerted by changing intellectual environments after the climacteric of Lincoln scholarship was passed in the 1920s. The suspicions that larger economic motivations and causalities operated behind the facade of politics, that

<sup>14</sup> T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York, 1952); Avery Craven, review of *Lincoln and His Generals* by T. Harry Williams, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 39 (Sept. 1952), 337–39, esp. 338; Eric Foner, “A New Abraham Lincoln?,” *Reviews in American History*, 7 (Sept. 1979), 375–79, esp. 378; G. S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis, 1978); Peter F. Walker, review of *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* by G. S. Boritt, *Journal of American History*, 66 (Sept. 1979), 408–9, esp. 409; David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, 1995); William Hanchett, review of *Lincoln* by David Herbert Donald, *Journal of American History*, 83 (June 1996), 216–18, esp. 217.

<sup>15</sup> “Lilly Library Manuscript Collection: Woodburn mss.,” *The Lilly Library*, <http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/lilly/mss/html/woodburn.html>; James Albert Woodburn, “Western Radicalism in American Politics,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13 (Sept. 1926), 143–68, esp. 145, 146, 168.

ideology was a product of class consciousness, and that the Civil War had probably been as useless and unreasoning as the Great War, along with the decay of political history in the face of an emerging new social history—all tilted the instincts of American historians away from the celebration of a great emancipator. That tilt formed the terrain in which these reviews were written. Ironically, in 1978, when James A. Rawley of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln reviewed Stephen B. Oates's *With Malice toward None*, he too praised and then panned the book, closing with the lament that "Lincoln's life awaits the artist who can combine the talents of Lord Charnwood, Beveridge, Randall, Thomas, and Carl Sandburg." Time does indeed pardon with strange excuse.<sup>16</sup>

It is even more of a curiosity that, as routinely hypercritical as reviewers of Lincoln books in the *MVHR* and *JAH* were, the small sprinkling of full-scale articles on Lincoln published in the *Review* and the *Journal* are routinely neutral or admiring of their subject. But the sprinkling *is* small. Between 1914 and 2000, only nine articles directly addressing Abraham Lincoln appeared in the pages of the *Review* and the *Journal*, and only one of those was published after 1960. Once again the palm goes to the decade of the 1940s, when in the five-year period 1944–1949 four articles about Lincoln appeared.

The first of the nine articles, Arthur C. Cole's "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans," was published in March 1918. Cole, who chided Randall for using the "first personal pronoun," taught at Case Western Reserve University and Brooklyn College, succeeded Milo Quaife as editor of the *Review* in 1930, and rounded out his service to the OAH as its president in 1941–1942. Cole had already established himself by 1918 with a history of the Whig party in the South and a flurry of articles on a broad array of Civil War subjects. He wrote *The Era of the Civil War, 1848–1870* for the Illinois state centennial history series in 1919 and a widely used and much-reprinted survey of the Civil War era, *The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850–1865*, in 1934. From the research Cole was conducting for his Illinois centennial history volume, he spun off "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans." In it Cole argued, to his evident satisfaction, that Lincoln had been "inclining more and more to the position recommended by the radicals" all through the Civil War. It was not a perfect harmony, however, and the Radicals' plans for Reconstruction "required of Lincoln serious changes in his own views, changes he was not as yet ready to make." His assassination, "which placed a martyr's crown upon his troubled brow," relieved him of "possible estrangement" from the Radicals, but the "estrangement" was only "possible," and it would be hard to deduce from Cole's tone that he thought Lincoln had been weighed in the balance and found wanting.<sup>17</sup>

Cole's essay was not followed by any article-length Lincoln work in the *Review* until 1935, when Winfred A. Harbison edited and published a series of letters from the Zachariah Chandler Papers in the Library of Congress, detailing the backstage political activity Michigan's Radical Republican senator undertook in the fall of 1864 to persuade other

<sup>16</sup> James A. Rawley, review of *With Malice toward None* by Stephen B. Oates, *Journal of American History*, 64 (March 1978), 1117. Here I reference W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," in *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York, 1945), 50.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur C. Cole, "President Lincoln and the Illinois Radical Republicans," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 4 (March 1918), 417–36, esp. 425, 435–36; *Dictionary of American Scholars*, 5th ed., I, s.v. "Cole, Prof. Arthur C(harles)"; Arthur C. Cole, *The Era of the Civil War, 1848–1870* (Springfield, 1919); Arthur C. Cole, *The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850–1865* (New York, 1934).

Radicals to rally around Lincoln as the least of political evils in the presidential election of 1864. It was succeeded the next year by a briefer editorial submission by Paul I. Miller from the Thomas Ewing Papers (also in the Library of Congress) on Lincoln's telegram, and then letter, declining appointment as governor of the Oregon territory in 1849. (The last example of that genre of Lincolniana—an edited collection of correspondence between J. Franklin Jameson and Albert Beveridge concerning the composition of Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln*—appeared in 1949.)<sup>18</sup>

It was June 1944 before James Harvey Young's essay on Anna Elizabeth Dickinson—"an oratorical prodigy"—and Lincoln appeared in the *Review*. Young, a graduate of Knox College (where the fifth Lincoln-Douglas debate was held in 1858), an administrative historian, and another protégé of Randall, was a new hire at Emory University (where he would spend his entire career) in 1941, and the Dickinson article was lifted from his dissertation for Randall at the University of Illinois. Although Lincoln himself made only one direct appearance in the article, Young described Dickinson's abolitionist speechmaking as a Radical commentary on Lincoln's policies, and he intended no compliment to either Dickinson or the Radicals. Dickinson's "speeches consisted primarily of vicious, biased attacks," delivered "sarcastically," and Young concluded that her principal significance was as "a tool of the Radicals" who "could benefit by the votes and opinion that she could capture with the novelty of her sex and youth and the spellbinding of her fiery words." In 1948 the *Review* published "Lincoln and the Territorial Patronage: The Ascendancy of the Radicals in the West" by Rev. Vincent Tegeder, a Catholic priest who chaired the history department at St. John's University in Minnesota. The geography of Tegeder's article follows much the same pattern seen in Young's—Lincoln himself makes no direct appearance, and the attention is focused on Lincoln's patronage appointments in the West, which installed an almost-uniform line of Radicals in federal offices. Not all the appointees Tegeder identified as "radicals" seem very good samples of the breed—one was a cousin of Mary Todd Lincoln and another the brother-in-law of the Illinois Radical Republican senator Lyman Trumbull. Miguel Otero, Lincoln's nominee as territorial secretary for New Mexico, was rejected by the Senate. But Tegeder was satisfied that "the disposition of the territorial patronage by the Lincoln administration resulted in placing numerous staunch supporters of the radical program in important positions," and that was enough to suggest that Lincoln was on the side of the angels.<sup>19</sup>

The final burst in the sequence of Lincoln articles from the 1940s came in the December 1949 issue of the *Review*, from LeRoy H. Fischer, who later became the Oppenheim Regents Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma and a prominent writer on Oklahoma state political history and the Civil War in the trans-Mississippi West. Fischer's article, his only serious foray into the Lincoln literature, focused on Count Adam G. De Gurowski, the irascible Polish revolutionary exile and sometime State Department trans-

<sup>18</sup> Winfred A. Harbison, ed., "Zachariah Chandler's Part in the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 22 (Sept. 1935), 267–76; Paul I. Miller, ed., "Lincoln and the Governorship of Oregon," *ibid.*, 23 (Dec. 1936), 391–94; Elizabeth Donnan and Leo F. Stock, eds., "Senator Beveridge, J. Franklin Jameson, and Abraham Lincoln," *ibid.* (March 1949), 639–73.

<sup>19</sup> James Harvey Young, "Anna Elizabeth Dickinson and the Civil War: For and against Lincoln," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 31 (June 1944), 59–80, esp. 59, 69, 72, 76, 77, 80; "In Memoriam: James Harvey Young," *Perspectives on History*, 45 (Jan. 2007), 38. James Harvey Young contributed a retrospective on James G. Randall to the 1996 Abraham Lincoln Association symposium "Lincoln's Biographers," subsequently published as Young, "Randall's Lincoln." Vincent G. Tegeder, "Lincoln and the Territorial Patronage: The Ascendancy of the Radicals in the West," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 35 (June 1948), 77–90, esp. 79–80, 83; Merrill E. Jarchow, *Private Liberal Arts Colleges in Minnesota: Their History and Contributions* (St. Paul, 1973), viii.



lator (he spoke eight languages) whose published diaries during the Civil War years coruscated with Radical criticism of Lincoln. Gurowski raised irritability to high art. Even his native Poland, for whose sake he had taken up arms against the Russian Empire and suffered lifelong exile, got short shrift: Poland was “a rather feeble branch of the great Slavic stem” that “through a total want of statesmanship” had let slip its chances to establish “supremacy” in eastern Europe. Poland’s brief career “as an independent state” was “suffered only by courtesy” as long as “her neighbors were not yet bold enough for her partition.” Gurowski’s chronic extremism, Fischer explained, made Lincoln and Gurowski temperamental opposites who would have disagreed about almost anything and under almost any circumstances, and it aligned the Pole with the Radical Republicans. “Gurowski’s opinions of the President were representative of the views the vindictive Radicals had of the chief executive.” Lincoln need never have noticed the opinions of a State Department employee, except that Gurowski sent letters of advice directly to Lincoln, sometimes shrewd (as on the standing of the federal blockade in international law) and sometimes arrogant. But Fischer had to admit that the evidence for Gurowski’s role as a Socratic “gadfly” was slight. Gurowski’s “contacts with [Lincoln] were seldom of a personal nature,” and the only direct recognition of Gurowski by Lincoln that Fischer could find was a bizarre statement in Dorothy Lamon Teillard’s 1911 edition of the *Recollections* of her father, Ward Hill Lamon—who was also among the least dependable memoirists from Lincoln’s inner circle in Washington to write in the postwar years. Still, what emerged clearly from Fischer’s article was the lineaments of a crank, an image that might by extension imply that Radical Republicanism “with all its antidemocratic implications” was cranky, while Lincoln was the suffering saint, “spiritless, exhausted, quenched, and careworn.”<sup>20</sup>

All the Lincoln articles in the *Review* from Cole to Fischer (spanning three decades) concentrated on Lincoln and the Radicals. Even though in each case Lincoln came off as the better and wiser politician, the articles still defined Lincoln by his relationship to Radical Republicanism, as though Lincoln had historical value only insofar as he could be attached to a recognizably Progressive cause. That assumption was about to change decisively. In the June 1953 issue T. Harry Williams of Louisiana State University (later president of the OAH) wrote a seventeen-page review essay on the new *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* by Roy P. Basler in which the *Review* for the first time not only got Lincoln exclusively in its sights, but relegated the Radicals to the sidelines rather than taking them as the base line. Basler, executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association and later chief of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, had taken only five years to assemble eight volumes’ worth of Lincoln’s writings (excluding his legal cases). But the Basler edition has stood for over a half century as the standard text of Lincoln’s writings and as a monument of documentary editing in American history. Nearly half of Williams’s review was taken up with an admiring commentary on Basler’s editorial methods; only then did Williams use the new edition as a platform “to evaluate more accurately than before the significance of Lincoln as a democratic leader and a spiritual force in America.” Disgusted by the attempts of “modern ideology” to “fit Lincoln into some neat niche of present-day thought,” Williams condemned the presentation of Lincoln “as a kind of early New Dealer”; if Lincoln had encountered the New Deal in person, Wil-

<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary of American Scholars*, 7th ed., I, s.v. “Fischer, LeRoy Henry”; Adam G. De Gurowski, *A Year of the War* (New York, 1855), 13–14; LeRoy H. Fischer, “Lincoln’s Gadfly—Adam Gurowski,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 36 (Dec. 1949), 415–34, esp. 430, 433, 434; Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847–1865*, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (1911; Lincoln, 1994), 274.

liams was certain, "he would have been amazed and amused." Lincoln functioned by no abstract political template, and "the position he took on specific political issues was always a pragmatic one." The only beliefs guiding Lincoln were confidence in "a Guiding Providence," the "higher nature" of humanity, and an economic system "in which most people would own property and in which all had equal opportunities to acquire it" and an "exaltation" of the United States as "the supreme demonstration of democracy." This was the most defiant statement of Lincoln's conservatism ever to appear in the *Review*, and Williams just as defiantly criticized "the assumptions of the academicians" that "modern industrial capitalism . . . has been exploitative, illiberal, and possibly anti-democratic."<sup>21</sup>

Williams not only pushed the *Review's* Lincoln articles further away from Progressive associations, but he also continued a less-noticed continuity among the article writers, their Illinois ties. Williams was for so long identified with Louisiana (he won a Pulitzer Prize in 1970 for a biography of Huey Long) that it comes as a minor jolt to realize that he was an Illinoisan who earned his undergraduate degree at a Wisconsin teachers' college and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. Williams was far from alone: James Harvey Young was born in Brooklyn but grew up in Illinois; Arthur C. Cole taught at the University of Illinois from 1912 to 1920. Joining them, and joining Williams in his distaste for an ideological Lincoln, was Don Edward Fehrenbacher, who was born in Mount Sterling, Illinois, took his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago (under Avery Craven), and published his first book on Long John Wentworth, the nineteenth-century mayor of Chicago and sometime rival of Lincoln's in Illinois politics. Fehrenbacher's contributions to the history of the Civil War era were wide-ranging and widely hailed (he won a Pulitzer for *The Dred Scott Case* in 1979 and earned a 1977 Pulitzer for the late David Potter by completing Potter's magisterial *The Impending Crisis*). Memories of Lincoln hung heavily on Fehrenbacher in his youth—"on the grounds of the grade school I attended for nine years there was a boulder designating the spot where Abraham Lincoln delivered a political speech in 1856," he recalled—and it was his essays on Lincoln's rise to national political prominence, published in 1962 as *Prelude to Greatness*, that made his reputation as a Lincolnite.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth of those essays, "The Origins and Purpose of Lincoln's 'House-Divided' Speech," originally appeared in the March 1960 issue of the *Review*. In it Fehrenbacher turned on the "house divided" speech a textual concentration of attention worthy of Harry Jaffa, as he asked why Lincoln had resorted to so radical-sounding a metaphor as the "house divided" at the outset of the Lincoln-Douglas campaign of 1858, a moment when Lincoln's purpose was to position himself as a moderate on slavery who could bring the old Whig swing counties of central Illinois over to the Republican column. He ruth-

<sup>21</sup> Henry F. Graff, *The Presidents: A Reference History* (New York, 2002), 222; Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (9 vols., New Brunswick, 1953–1955); "Roy P. Basler, Retired Aide at Library of Congress, Dies," *Washington Post*, Oct. 27, 1989, p. D12; T. Harry Williams, "Abraham Lincoln—Principle and Pragmatism in Politics: A Review Article," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 40 (June 1953), 89–106, esp. 95–96, 97, 100.

<sup>22</sup> T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York, 1969); "T. Harry Williams," in *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, ed. Glenn R. Conrad (2 vols., New Orleans, 1988), II, 851–52; Don Edward Fehrenbacher, *Chicago Giant: A Biography of "Long John" Wentworth* (Madison, 1957); Don Edward Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York, 1978); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976); Don Edward Fehrenbacher, "Becoming a Historian: Response on Being Awarded the Lincoln Prize for 1997," in *Accepting the Prize: Two Historians Speak*, by David Herbert Donald and Don Edward Fehrenbacher (Gettysburg, 1998), 20; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850s* (Stanford, 1962).

lessly debunked the notion, promoted since the 1860s, that Lincoln intended “to compromise his chances of becoming senator in order to improve his prospects of becoming president.” Lincoln’s radicalism was entirely unintentional, Fehrenbacher argued, and “much of the provocative quality inheres in the vigor of Lincoln’s rhetoric, rather than in the substance of his argument.” He had no policy to recommend in the balance of the speech apart from “the exclusion of slavery from the territories,” and if he intended to ruin Stephen A. Douglas’s presidential prospects, it was the prospect that the Republicans would adopt Douglas as a presidential candidate in 1860 that Lincoln aimed to quash. As a swipe at Craven and Randall’s “blundering generation” thesis, Fehrenbacher added that the “house divided” speech gave no support to the idea that the antislavery rhetoric of the 1850s was guilty of “the extravagance of partisanship.” As in T. Harry Williams’s judgment of the Lincoln corpus, so in Fehrenbacher’s: Lincoln was making a realistic assessment of a practical problem in which “he was confronted with no painful choice between expediency and principle.” Here was a Lincoln as much for the 1950s as for the 1850s.<sup>23</sup>

Like many *MVHR* reviews of books on Lincoln, the articles on Lincoln in the four decades between Cole’s and Fehrenbacher’s essays were not written by outstanding workers in the Lincoln field—not Benjamin Thomas, not Roy Basler, not David Herbert Donald, not William Hesselstine, not Louis Warren, not Paul Angle, not even James G. Randall. Those writers had not eschewed scholarly journals. Hesselstine, Donald, and Randall all left substantial trails of Lincoln essays in other journals; Frank L. Klement issued an entire volume of Lincoln-at-Gettysburg essays shortly before his death, not one of which had previously appeared in the *MVHR* or its successor.<sup>24</sup> Nor were the authors diverting their scholarly oeuvre into more specialized Lincoln-related venues—the publication of Basler’s edition of the *Collected Works* so nearly bankrupted the Abraham Lincoln Association that it was forced to suspend the publication of its *Journal* and did not restart a publications plan until the 1980s; and *Civil War History*, another likely venue, did not begin publication on its own until 1954.

Then, after Fehrenbacher, nothing. Between 1960 and 2005, the *Review* (and, as it became in 1964, the *Journal of American History*), published not a single article on Abraham Lincoln. Over the same decades, the *Journal* published articles on Frederick Douglass (1), on Sojourner Truth (1), on Salmon Chase (1), on Reconstruction (4), on abolitionism (2), on Radical Republicans (2), and even on Jefferson Davis (1). Nor can this dearth be blamed entirely on the heavy shift within the American historical profession to the writing of social and cultural history—to “history from the bottom up”—since articles on American presidents continued to pop up with resolute frequency. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson all came into the spotlight, while Woodrow Wilson garnered 8 articles in the *Journal*, just between 1967 and 1984. Even Herbert Hoover was the topic of 5 between 1967 and 1982. But the only article that even featured Lincoln in its title was Scott A. Sandage’s brilliant “A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939–1963” in June 1993, which was not really about Lincoln. In contrast, in the same years (1960–2005) the *Journal* published 19 articles on Progressivism (a series that finally exhausted itself in

<sup>23</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, “The Origins and Purpose of Lincoln’s ‘House-Divided’ Speech,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (March 1960), 615–43, esp. 620, 622, 626, 628.

<sup>24</sup> See William B. Hesselstine, *Sections and Politics: Selected Essays*, ed. Richard N. Current (Madison, 1968); and Frank L. Klement, *The Gettysburg Soldiers’ National Cemetery and Lincoln’s Address: Aspects and Angles* (Shippensburg, 1993).

1987 with David Glassberg's "History and the Public: Legacies of the Progressive Era") and 2 on Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.<sup>25</sup>

Does it need to be said that there is something majestically lopsided here? It is possible to entertain legitimate suspicions about writing American history merely as a succession of presidential administrations without insisting that history writing limit itself to analyzing heaving collective consciousnesses. And it appears peculiarly unrealistic to assess Lincoln almost entirely by his relationship, good or bad, with the Radical Republicans. To have paid so little attention to Lincoln in general—ignoring the three titanic accomplishments of national reunification, emancipation, and the installation of the Whig/Republican system as the dominant economic ideology for an entire political generation—seems to have required heroic determination. Still, the old order changeth. The place of Lincoln in the *Journal* since the mid-1990s has taken a tick upward; there have been a substantially larger number of book reviews containing less spite than in the old *MVHR* and much more mature evaluation. American historians in general are only now awakening to the realization that the last fifteen years have been a golden age of Lincoln scholarship, beginning with the publication of Michael Burlingame's *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* in 1994, David Donald's *Lincoln* in 1995, Don Fehrenbacher's last hurrah, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln*, coedited by Virginia Fehrenbacher, in 1996, and the release of the stupendous *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition* in 2000. In their wake have come a succession of meticulously edited editions of the Herndon-Weik papers (*Herndon's Informants*, by Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis) and of the papers of John Hay and John Nicolay and of Hay's diary (by Michael Burlingame); a plethora of studies of Lincoln's writings by Garry Wills, Ronald White, James Tackach, William Lee Miller, Harold Holzer, John Channing Briggs, and Gabor Boritt; and comparative studies of Lincoln and his contemporaries by James Oakes, Elizabeth D. Leonard, and Daniel Mark Epstein. Of course, it is possible that the *Journal* will see only a small virtue in this exfoliation of interest in Lincoln and that the long-term gloom of the Progressives will combine with the postmodern hermeneutics of suspicion to give the cold shoulder once more to a figure as whiggish and celebratory as Abraham Lincoln. Time, after all, has made stranger excuses.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939–1963," *Journal of American History*, 80 (June 1993), 135–67; David Glassberg, "History and the Public: Legacies of the Progressive Era," *ibid.*, 73 (March 1987), 957–80.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1994); Donald, *Lincoln*; Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Stanford, 1996); Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis, eds., *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition* (DVD, 3 discs, Champaign, 2000); Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1998); Michael Burlingame, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: The Observations of John G. Nicolay and John Hay* (Carbondale, 2007); John Hay, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay*, ed. Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger (Carbondale, 1997); Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York, 1992); Ronald White, *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln through His Words* (New York, 2005); James Tackach, *Lincoln's Moral Vision: The Second Inaugural Address* (Jackson, 2002); William Lee Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York, 2008); Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York, 2004); John Channing Briggs, *Lincoln's Speeches Reconsidered* (Baltimore, 2005); Gabor Boritt, *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows* (New York, 2006); James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York, 2007); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Lincoln's Avengers: Justice, Revenge, and Reunion after the Civil War* (New York, 2004); Daniel Mark Epstein, *Lincoln and Whitman: Parallel Lives in Civil War Washington* (New York, 2004).