

# Image Makers of the Nation

**"The Genius of America," by Saul K. Padover** (McGraw-Hill. 369 pp. \$6.50), ranges from Washington to Franklin D. Roosevelt in articulating the political ideas that have been the building blocks of the nation. Robert H. Salisbury is an editor and co-author of "Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century."

By Robert H. Salisbury

ONE OF the standard allegations European observers have made about the United States is that Americans have lacked facility for intellectual speculation generally and philosophical system-building in particular. With respect to political ideas, the argument is that institutions and programs of American politics have developed on a foundation of thought borrowed eclectically from various European thinkers—Locke, Montesquieu, and others—and adapted pragmatically to the needs of the American experience. Without trying to refute this argument, Dr. Padover has presented a series of essays articulating the intellectual apparatus of some nineteen important American figures whose ideas both reflected and helped create the American experience.

His choices are not unusual. They range in time from Washington to FDR, in ideology from Hamilton to Thoreau. Padover wisely includes men who contributed to the American political tradition, as Washington did, by providing a living example of character and devotion; men who, like Emerson and Whitman, expressed portions of the American dream in evocative imagery; men, like Calhoun and Dewey, who wrote carefully reasoned arguments in behalf of one strand or another of the heterogeneous fabric of American political thought. Practical politicians and philosophers, poets and reformers are here, and the impression one finally gathers is that if Americans have been less philosophical than other peoples, they have not lacked understanding of how to construct and maintain a viable political system which has served their values well.

The difficulty (and Padover's useful discussion makes less of this than it might have) is that in our national

rhetoric, at least, we have learned too little from a fundamental shift in the ways of looking at political questions to which American thought has made important contributions. Padover occasionally points out that some of the men he treats simply did not bother to provide data to test their theories. Indeed, the writings of most of these men are shot through with statements of alleged fact which in the real world are not fact at all. Accordingly, many of the arguments (and political philosophers of greater renown often suffer from the same fault) are based upon either false premises or mere personal preferences.

The distinction is important, and it provides a basis for separating those ideas that are still relevant from those that are not. While some of the early writers, notably Madison, grounded their theses in empirically valid observations, the main break occurred in the late nineteenth century, when philosophers like James and Dewey, jurists like Holmes and Brandeis, and finally politicians like Franklin Roosevelt employed in one way or another what Dewey called instrumentalism, whereby the usefulness of an idea was to be determined by the consequences of acting upon it, rather than by its *a priori* plausibility. All the instrumentalists had strong value preferences, and instrumentalism was an intellectual method by which to achieve these goals more reliably.

THE method could be employed by them in behalf of any values they might choose, and on this ground it has been blamed for undercutting the sense of clear purpose and dedication to traditional verities which is supposed to have cast our society, rudderless, upon the contemporary scene. This seems to me nonsense. If verities cannot survive the admonition to hold them tentatively and test them constantly against experience, they must not have been very true in the first place.

In any case, Padover's essays provide a basis for discerning this shift in intellectual method, and a useful purpose is served thereby. There are, of course, matters of emphasis and interpretation with which one could quarrel, but the book is generally one to stimulate that inner reflection and debate which a good book should.

This reviewer found his thoughts frequently moving from Padover's readable prose to the currently popular game of searching for America's lost sense of national purpose. And, as regularly as the question arose, the answer appeared: that we have as little doubt now as in the past as to what ultimate objectives we seek—individual freedom, a productive and harmonious society, and the fullest possible development of our personal and group potentialities. The problem comes in achieving these goals.

An emphasis on sober, dispassionate examination of the consequences of alternative courses of action seems far more likely to serve here than the lamentations over lost ideals.

## BETWIXT THE OLD AND THE NEW:

In "Becoming More Civilized" (Yale University Press, \$6) Leonard W. Doob offers us what he modestly calls "a psychological exploration" into what happens to people when they become more civilized.

By "more civilized" Doob, who teaches psychology at Yale, is here content to accept a limited definition meaning "more urban, more industrialized, more like the modern Western nations." He attempts no moral or metaphysical definition of what it really means (if anything) to be a truly "civilized human being."

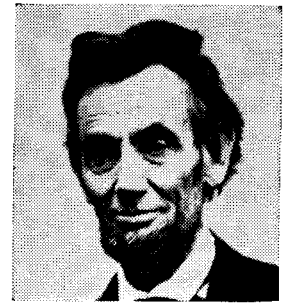
As a result his book is a mildly interesting study in social psychology and cultural anthropology, but it fails to touch us in our central concerns. Doob investigates African societies turning from their ancient tribal and ethnic patterns to modern Western institutions and systems, and formulates a series of twenty-seven hypotheses about "social contact" between the Old and the New cultures.

Most of these hypotheses are trite or tentative or so open to qualification that they mean little. Their general level of shallowness is typified by Hypothesis 15: "After people change centrally from old to new ways, they are a little less likely to be dogmatic concerning the validity of their own beliefs and the goodness of their own values."

It is, of course, to Doob's credit as a conscientious social scientist that he hedges his study with so many qualifications, demurrers, apologies, and almost embarrassing modesties. Restraint and inconclusiveness are scientific virtues; but their prevalence in this book means a loss of psychological dynamism, of feeling for persons, of any existential understanding of the ferment in African society. A monograph, after all, need not be offered to the public as a rite of academic piety.

—SYDNEY J. HARRIS.

## Four Score and Seventeen Years Ago



*Less than a decade ago President Eisenhower's party preference was sufficiently in doubt as to inspire hope in some Democrats that he might carry the 1952 banner for them, while today there are those who maintain that Senator Kennedy is at heart a conservative. However, these statesmen are not the first Chief Executives whose political position has been subject to dispute. As at least one of the titles considered below by the Civil War scholar Earl Schenck Miers will attest, Lincoln himself could not wholly be identified with the Republican standard under which he marched to the White House.*

**I**N MANY respects there never was a more reluctant Republican than Abraham Lincoln, who embraced the party that made him President for the simple reason that, politically, he had nowhere else to turn. A splendid biography—"Lincoln's Manager, David Davis," by Willard L. King (Harvard University Press, \$6.75)—focuses sharply on the dilemma that haunted old Illinois Whigs like Lincoln and Judge Davis when the revolutionary forces of their age swept away the political underpinnings upon which they stood.

All manner of dissenters, seeking to turn unrest, fanaticism, and bigotry into political capital, found a marriage of convenience in Republicanism. The two groups that Lincoln and Davis most distrusted were the rip-the-hell-out-of-slavery abolitionists and the anti-foreigner, anti-Catholic disciples of Know Nothingism. As a love nest of abolitionists, Free Soilers, and Know Nothings, the Republican Party carried the Massachusetts gubernatorial election of 1854, and Lincoln bluntly confessed his misgivings at such loose political morality. "I do not perceive," he said, "how anyone professing to be sensitive to the wrongs of the Negroes can join in a league to degrade a class of white men."

Nor could Judge David Davis. A boyhood spent in Maryland explained only in part his distrust for the excesses of abolitionism. Like Lincoln, Davis was a lawyer who rode the circuit. He was devoted to reason and the solution of disputes by law, and he foresaw clearly that unbridled, irresponsible agitation could in time substitute an inquisition for these orderly processes. Certainly it was no fault of Davis's that the conflict ultimately became "irrepressible"; and he came to love Lincoln, and to work for him with mind and heart, because no other person he knew was fairer in spirit, more balanced in judgment, or more committed to moderation.

Willard King, who is a distinguished lawyer in Chicago, brings to his study of Judge Davis both the subjective emo-

tion of the man who treats law as a way of life and the objective method of the historian who has sought diligently for new materials. His portraits of life on the circuit, the prairie courtroom, and the rough-and-tumble of politics in a nation falling apart have freshness and strength.

To Davis, Lincoln was no ready-made friend; first Davis derided, then grew to respect, later to trust, and finally to embrace with thoughtful conscience the Lincoln who gave the upstart Republicans their best hope of finding a middle ground. Long before the judge went to the 1860 convention to direct the behind-the-scenes high jinks that resulted in Lincoln's nomination, Lincoln was the man Davis trusted to handle his court on those occasions when necessity forced him to be absent.

**A**ND high jinks aplenty went on at Chicago and elsewhere in the political conventions that pitted Lincoln against Douglas, Breckinridge, and Bell in the election of a century ago. "Three Against Lincoln" (Louisiana State University Press, \$6) is a new edition of Murat Halstead's gem of political journalism, "Caucuses of 1860," edited with an intelligent introduction by William B. Hesseltine, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin. Halstead, who represented the *Cincinnati Commercial* at all four conventions that year, was a reporter "in depth" with a *New Yorkerish* touch. He could catch in a word how the politicians were talking themselves into an intensified cold war, so that no Republican in Chicago could express an idea that was not "solemn" and no Democrat in Charleston could open his mouth without expounding upon "the crisis."

The clichés captured the delegates and in time, in Halstead's opinion, nominated the wrong candidates, for Douglas came off with only half a party behind him and Lincoln won over the eminently qualified William H. Seward. What such shenanigans demonstrated to

Halstead was the fact that "there is no honesty in caucuses," but for all his prejudice Halstead managed to capture as well as anyone ever has the drama of intense passion, high humor, and astonishing compromise that constitutes the American phenomenon of a nominating convention.

The point of course is that, in the judgment of history, despite the gin cocktails at breakfast that made Halstead's hair stand on end, the caucuses discovered and America elected a President who still lives in the heart of the nation. Each year continues to bring a new ton of books about Halstead's "wrong" candidate, among them this season "The Real Abraham Lincoln," by Reinhard H. Luthin (Prentice-Hall, \$10), a lengthy "one-volume history of his life and times."

Professor Luthin, who teaches at Columbia, retells the story of Lincoln from birth to the ultimate sealing of his coffin nineteen years after his death, which seems a pretty fair biographical span. No one can quarrel with Dr. Luthin's scholarship; he knows the events and legends in the Lincoln story, and with plodding intensity he places them in a straight line for the less informed to follow. There is, however, no poetic insight into the interplay of environment upon the man that one finds in Carl Sandburg (and which emerges also in Willard King's biography of Judge Davis); and there is precious little of the felicity of prose or the richness of detail making for lifelike character that gave to the one-volume biography of Lincoln by Benjamin P. Thomas the aura of a literary event.

**A**T least it is complete, and it has the prime virtue of keeping events in reasonable perspective. A world awakening to freedom surely must need the story of Lincoln, and, to borrow a phrase from Senator Kennedy, there may well be a new frontier for the Lincoln craftsman; in that event, Professor Luthin