

Michigan Law Review

Volume 47 | Issue 4

1949

Schlesinger: PATHS TO THE PRESENT

Michigan Law Review

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Recommended Citation

Michigan Law Review, *Schlesinger: PATHS TO THE PRESENT*, 47 MICH. L. REV. 602 ().

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PATHS TO THE PRESENT. By *Arthur M. Schlesinger*. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1949. Pp. vii, 317. \$4.

This collection of essays by Professor Schlesinger of Harvard University presents the American individual and state as products of the past. Eschewing the approach of more formal historical analyses, however, Professor Schlesinger looks for significant influences in the "simple annals of life" rather than the "great affairs of state." Thus the long working hours required on the frontier are found to have produced a worship of useful work, which in turn was instrumental in developing an indifference to the fine arts. The same frontier, as a source of natural wealth, contributed to wasteful living and governmental corruption. With the individual characterized, the effect of his qualities on the state is examined. The spiral of political attitude from conservative to liberal and back again is not a product of the business cycle or war or other external feature, the author concludes, but of something basic in the "new man." Using the opinions of fifty-five historians as to the relative qualities of the American presidents, interesting consequences of the influence of these presidents are considered. Superficially heterogeneous, the six greatest presidents have exhibited traits of notable similarity. American history might have been different had the four more inferior presidents who occupied the White House during the twelve years preceding the Civil War possessed some of these traits. Particular political problems which have persisted, including the function of the electoral college and the proper order of presidential succession, are examined by the author. He analyzes the effects on American history of such influences as the martial spirit, the city, and a continuing abundance of food. America and its citizens are then pictured as a part of the international community in connection with a critical re-examination of such dogmas as "no entangling alliances." The book closes with an extensive bibliography.