



# **The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery**

*Don E. Fehrenbacher*

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William Lloyd Garrison argued--and many leading historians have since agreed--that the Constitution of the United States was a proslavery document. Garrison called it "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell." But in *The Slaveholding Republic*, one of America's most eminent historians, Don E. Fehrenbacher, argues against this claim, in a wide-ranging, landmark history that stretches from the Continental Congress to the Presidency of Abraham Lincoln.

Fehrenbacher ranges from sharp-eyed analyses of the deal-making behind the "proslavery clauses" of the constitution, to colorful accounts of partisan debates in Congress and heated confrontations with Great Britain (for instance, over slaves taken off American ships and freed in British ports). He shows us that the Constitution itself was more or less neutral on the issue of slavery and that, in the antebellum period, the idea that the Constitution protected slavery was hotly debated (many Northerners would concede only that slavery was protected by state law, not by federal law). Nevertheless, he also reveals that US policy--whether in foreign courts, on the high seas, in federal territories, or even in the District of Columbia--was consistently proslavery. The book concludes with a brilliant portrait of Lincoln. Fehrenbacher makes clear why Lincoln's election was such a shock to the South and shows how Lincoln's approach to emancipation, which seems exceedingly cautious by modern standards, quickly evolved into a "Republican revolution" that ended the anomaly of the United States as a "slaveholding republic."

The last and perhaps most important book by a Pulitzer-Prize winning historian, *The Slaveholding Republic* illuminates one of the most enduring issues in our nation's history.

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