Brewster Ladies' Library

BLL Book Reviews –August 2011

Brewster Ladies Library
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Perfect Soldiers
by Terry McDermott
reviewed by Jim Mills

Perfect Soldiers, written in 2005, tells the story of the 9/11 hijackers, their background and how they became involved in the attack on America. The title is derived from a Dashiell Hammett quote from *The Dain Curse*: "He was the perfect soldier: he went where you sent him, stayed where you put him and had no idea of his own to keep him from doing exactly what you told him."

Perfect Soldiers concentrates on the major Al Qaeda figures including Osama Bin Laden, the planner of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and on the leader of the hijackers, Mohamed Atta as well as the other three hijack pilots. As the author points out, the really scary part of the plot is that the major players were so ordinary. Several, including Atta, had advanced degrees in technical fields, in Atta's case Architecture. The hijackers originated primarily from Saudi Arabia with a few from Egypt and Yemen. None came from Iraq. One center for recruitment was in Hamburg, Germany. Friends and family of the hijackers noted a definite sharp transition from ambitious career driven individuals to ones with a more fanatical religious personality readily willing to forgo a career. The influence of radical clerics as well as study/prayer groups with fellow students seemed to initiate and reinforce this isolating tendency.

The 9/11 attacks differed from previous Al Qaeda projects, not only in scale, but in the thoroughness of the preparation and execution. Much of this was due to the single minded orientation of the attack leader, Atta. Atta was characterized as a humorless individual almost an ascetic, who had an intense hatred of western liberality and moral values. All of the hijackers were strongly motivated by the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and the US support of the Israeli side. They were also upset about other areas of the world where Muslims were suppressed such as Chechnya, Kosovo and Bosnia. However, they seemed to give no credit to the US for its efforts to end the Kosovo, Bosnian conflicts and to stopping the Serbian led genocides.

Perfect Soldiers is a very interesting and important book with its insight into a different world and the dangers posed to the US and the Western World. Intelligence and interdiction efforts since 9/11 seem to have been effective in limiting terrorist attacks. The ones that have been attempted have been small in scale and characterized by incompetence and poor preparation. It seems to this reviewer that good intelligence coupled with smart police work and close international co-operation can be effective in limiting terrorist activities. It will probably take basic improvements in the economic and educational opportunities in Islamic countries to eventually end the threat that we have been facing these past few decades.

The Greater Journey
by David McCullough
reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

David McCullough is no mystery to any serious student of American history. He's already won two Pulitzers (*John Adams* and *Truman),* two National Book Awards, and the nation's highest civilian award the Medal of Freedom. However, his latest book, *The Greater Journey, Americans in Paris* will surprise even the most unflappable.

The 456 pages of text and another 81 of sources and notes, all rendered in McCullough's beautiful writing style, and supported by 39 pages of exquisite, full color reproductions and facsimiles of the subjects covered in this wonderful patch work quilt of fragments of American history will make this book one of the most unique on anyone's American history shelf.

Mr. McCullough has long worried about Americans' historical illiteracy and, particularly, about the errors, omissions, and political correctness that pass today as authentic American history in so many of our public school classrooms. *The Greater Journey, Americans In Paris* is a delightful effort to address one of the more important and least understood parts of this problem: the overseas adventures of some of our most interesting young men and women, who decided to finish their professional educations in Paris France, between the years of 1830 and 1900, and to bring home the best of what they had learned to shape the foundations of science, art and literature in the United States.

Opening with a graphic account of what an Atlantic crossing was like, between the United States and France, under sail and largely on commercial freighters, these young Americans put their lives on the line, endured terrible storms and bouts of seasickness, and constant misery on most trips. Once there, many were quite disappointed with their first glimpse of Paris, but the majority for a variety of reasons quickly fell under its spell. Only then in "the city of lights", for those McCullough chooses to tell us about, did "The Greater Journey Begin".

McCullough opens by introducing the reader to Samuel B. Morse and his magnificent painting, "Gallery of the Louvre". We imagine him once more, crouching on high scaffolding copying the paintings in the Louvre's collection with his dear friend James Fennimore Cooper, who came each afternoon to cheer him on, sitting on a chair beneath. Morse returned to his native land not at all convinced of his gifts as an artist or that his chief work of art would later be called a masterpiece, but with the germ of an idea that would eventually develop into the trans-Alantic cable, the Morse code, and the telegraph.

France was the center of modern medicine in the 19th century and Paris was where the best of the science was taking place. The greatest surgeons in the world daily lectured there, with clinical demonstrations before hundreds of would be physicians, in a day before anesthesia and antibiotics, amidst the screams of those undergoing the surgery. But Elizabeth Blackwell who earned the first M.D. ever granted a woman in France, came home and opened the field of medicine to tens of thousands of other American woman. Oliver Wendell Holmes was one of a legion of young men who likewise came to Paris to finish their professional educations and then to come home and shape modern medicine in the United States.

Many of the 19th century's greatest American writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Henry James, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, joined James Fenimore Cooper in spending extended periods of time in Paris, polished their skills and brought home the best of their findings in novels, works of philosophy and social justice that became American classics.

Painters and sculptors, most of the very best of America's 19th century artists, either had their beginnings or perfected their genius under the direction of the European masters, both those still alive and those memorialized in the great galleries and parks of Paris. Scores of them are remembered in *The Greater Journey*, *Americans In Paris* usually with fascinating details of their experiences in "the city of lights".

Then there was Charles Sumner who came to Paris as a young man and, for the first time ever, saw Africans studying alongside Caucasians at the Sorbonne, which convinced him that the segregationist belief of racial superiority had no basis in fact. He went home to the USA a radical abolitionist. Twenty years later on May 22, 1851, Senator Sumner was at his desk in an almost empty Senate chamber when an incensed Congressman from South Carolina named Preston S. Brooks slipped up behind him and almost beat him to death with a heavy wooden cane. Sumner recovered and became an instant hero in the North and in Europe and one of the strongest voices for the abolitionist movement that, nine years later, brought on the American Civil War.

Finally there is Elhu Washburne, the courageous U.S. Ambassador to France who remained at his post, at considerable risk of his life, through the terrible siege of Paris during the Franco- Prussian War and the even more frightful nightmare of the Commune. Washburne's diary, certainly one of the most important ever written by an American, was the basis of McCullough's discussion of these events, which had such a lasting impression on French and to a lesser extent American history.

To this reviewer these events were the most unforgettable in David McCullough's *The Greater Journey, Americans In Paris.* However they are far from the only reason for reading this book. If you would have a better understanding, not simply of American history, but also of the deep currents of the often invisible culture that shaped it, here is one of the better places to begin your search.

Magic and Mayhem
by Derek Leebaert
reviewed by Don Boink

The author has taught foreign policy at Georgetown University since 1996. He has also written a number of books on foreign policy. His analysis is in an historical context that goes back several decades. Therein he attempts to identify patterns and characteristic behavior on the part of what he terms ”emergency men” and how “magical thinking” takes the place of sound principles. Part of the problem the U.S. has in formulating foreign policy is the legacy of our frontier days and rugged individualism. We relish our exceptionalism and feel obligated to bring our enlightenment to the rest of the world -- whether they like it or not.

What is considered “in our best interest” is usually determined by criteria that do not match our professed idealism. In my early school days my impression was that the U.S. stood for honesty and support for the downtrodden. How we wound up being buddy-buddy with tyrants and dictators always puzzled me. Now I realize that the definition of “best interest” is what is most profitable for the large corporate interests. On national security, Leebaert states, “the major works --- are high profile meditations---- rather than rigorous analysis wrestling with awkward facts”.

Using the lead up to the Iraq war he lists the several missteps in the process. Several “emergency men” exerted influence disproportionate to their actual knowledge or understanding of the situation. References to previous circumstances accepted as congruent to the current one are relied upon to reach desired conclusions. This is termed “magical thinking”. Ideological misconceptions ie: the “ dominoes theory” or the “monolithic“ nature of the Communist Conspiracy drew policy makers into postures inappropriate for our real “best interest” and culminate in adventures that prove to be disastrous : ie Korea and Vietnam as well as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Tragically the same patterns recur time and again with the same disastrous results. Is there such a thing as “learning from one’s mistakes”? Today, playing all too dynamically into Al Qaeda’s hand by setting out to remake Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East while appearing to be equating Muslim resistance or independence movements with Terrorism. Already a sober half of Americans conclude that the U.S. should “mind its own business”. This is a level headed response to a lifetime of emergencies and to realize that those responsible, no matter how exalted, are mostly winging it.

From the blurb: Afghanistan and Iraq are the latest in a string of blunders that include Vietnam and an unintended war with China from 1950-’53, these four fiascos being just the most recent in nearly a lifetime of false urgencies, intelligence failures, and stereotyping of enemies and allies alike.

The demise of the Soviet Union was surrounded by myths such as the conviction that we can easily shape the destinies of other people. Misjudgments of this scale arise from a pattern of self-deception best described as “magical thinking”. therein we conjure up beliefs that everyone want to be like us. Mantras like “democracy” or “stability” got substituted for more reasoned reflection. Leebaert portrays many leaders who succumbed to those magical notions; George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, Robert McNamara, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and Presidents Kennedy, Carter, and George W. Bush.

Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

Sir Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965)

Lost in Shangri-La
by Mitchell Zuckoff
reviewed by Jim Mills

World War Two has engendered many harrowing stories but few as unusual as the story told in Mitchell Zuckoff's *Lost in Shangri-La*. The time is May 1945 and the place is New Guinea by then a backwater in the Pacific War. An American military support base was located in Hollandia on New Guinea's north coast. Within the previous year an American flyer operating out of the base had inadvertently discovered a large inaccessible inland valley populated by natives who were completely isolated from the rest of humanity by a ring of 10,000 ft. high mountains. These natives had established a complex agricultural economy that had developed independent of the outside world. However, the natives were rumored to be headhunters and cannibals.

Periodically troops at the base would participate in recreational flights with military transports flying over the valley to observe the natives and their villages from the air. The natives were frequently observed fleeing into the woods or their dwellings in terror at the strange airborne sight. Lost in Shangri-La relates the story of a particular C-47 transport that left the Hollandia base on May 13th carrying two dozen officers, enlisted men and WACs to view the remote valley 250 miles away. Flying low over the terrain, the aircraft approached a narrow pass leading to the hidden valley. Either due to pilot error or a sharp downdraft the airplane crashed into the pass and was quickly engulfed in flames. Only five of those on board were able to escape from the plane with only three, an officer, an enlisted-man and a WAC surviving the first day. Two of the three survivors had significant burns making the process of proceeding from the steep, rugged, and densely forested crash site to a nearby clearing a painful and time consuming procedure. Several days after the crash, the trio made it to the clearing and was able to attract the attention of search aircraft.

Over the following week numerous supply air drops were made including walkie-talkies, putting the survivors into radio contact with the outside world. . Airborne troops including medics stationed at the base were parachuted several miles from the three soldiers. The survivors had their first tense contacts with the natives prior to the arrival of their rescuers. Once contact was made the remaining problem was how to extract the survivors and rescuers, a total of 15 troops from an extremely remote region. No airstrips were available and height of the surrounding mountains eliminated the possibility of helicopter use. The distance to the coast was so great that a ground exit through the surrounding jungle was not a practical option. The technique used to safely extract the group, a month after the crash, was definitely a unique approach.

Lost in Shangri-La tells a fascinating story that had been buried in the larger chronicle of WW 2. The author provides an interesting background on the native culture showing how they interpreted the sudden airborne arrival of outsiders whose existence was previously unknown. The native groups had maintained a continual state of warfare with each other as long as anyone could remember. Since the intruders were not viewed as part of this combat culture, they were spared a very hostile reception. Upon their return to civilization, Zuckoff follows the future lives of each of the major figures in the story, showing the impact of this 1945 experience on each. The author succeeds in maintaining interest and suspense throughout the telling of this most unusual wartime story.

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Extraordinary Ordinary People
by Condoleezza Rice
reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

For most of the eight years that George W. Bush was President of the United States Condoleezza Rice was seldom off of the front pages of this nation's newspapers. She served George W. Bush, during his first term as National Security Advisor, and as Secretary of State during his second term. Condoleezza had been recommended to George W. Bush by his father whom she had previously served as special advisor on Soviet and East European affairs, during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany.

However even more monumental tasks faced Condoleezza in the 8 years she spent laboring on national security and foreign policy affairs during the Presidential years of George W. Bush. As U.S. Secretary of State, she designed and pioneered a new approach to Middle Eastern foreign policy for the United States called Transformational Diplomacy, based upon supporting democratically elected governments. Nation Building soon became the often unexpressed goal of America's military efforts as well as its foreign policy in the Middle East. Transformational Democracy's great success story, at least to date, has been Iraq, but Afghanistan remains a serious and possibly insoluble problem, while Libya and Egypt may very well end up as disasters. Meanwhile the strain on this nation's armed forces, the mounting casualties, and the failure of its NATO partners to live up to their military commitments have brought the whole Transformational Diplomacy initiative into question.

Condoleezza Rice came to Washington from Stanford University, where she rose rapidly through the ranks from student to professor, to tenured professor, to Provost. She followed Madeline Albright, as only the second woman ever to become this nation's Secretary of State, and no small factor in her opportunity came from the fact that Madeline Albright's father was the University specialist in Russian and Near Eastern affairs, who first captured Condoleezza's commitment to foreign policy and Russian affairs, and then mentored her through her PhD and much of the brilliant political career that followed.

Nevertheless, having said all this about Condoleezza's political career, *Extraordinary Ordinary People* is really about her family. The families of John and Theresa Rice, Condoleezza's parents, one a football coach and counselor and the other an English and music teacher, were and had been for at least three generations part of a very successful African American middle class. Today at least 40% of the African American population, with more joining every year, belong to this African American middle class. However ever since the 1960s, a radical politicized minority, led by the likes of Stokely Carmichael, Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and the Black Panthers took over the front pages of America's newspapers. The real African American middle class has been eclipsed. The NAACP led by Roy Wilkins, the black churches, and the Sleeping Car Porters Union long the heart and soul of the African American middle class began to lose the power and political leverage it had enjoyed through the previous decade when the Supreme Court of the United States declared in the Brown decision that segregation in the public schools was illegal and the earliest of our national Civil Rights legislation was passed.

After the assassinations of Martin Luther King and President John F. Kennedy, race riots began to break out in numerous American cities. The Ku Klux Klan enjoyed a considerable revival. Bull Connors and his police dogs and Governor Orville Faubus and his futile last stand in the schoolhouse doorway ushered in a new age of racial hostility, and a further crushing of the African American middle class.

However through it all, John and Theresa Rice, raised their gifted child in Bull Connor's Birmingham Alabama. The rest is history. Once this amazing woman decided against a career as a concert pianist in favor of Russian and Middle Eastern scholarship and a career in national politics nothing stopped her. *Extraordinary, Ordinary People* is a marvelous book, not just because Condoleeza Rice brought so much good to everything she touched, but even more because her family memoir brings into the light of day the real African American middle class to whom all Americans owe so very much. Make sure you read it. It's a wonderful read and you'll be awfully glad you did.

Condoleeza Rice

The Storm of War
by Andrew Roberts
reviewed by Jim Mills

In *The Storm of War*, Andrew Roberts covers all of the major combat theaters of the Second World War. The progress of the War is viewed from the perspective of the major decision makers with an in depth look at the possible alternatives to those decisions. The author compares the collaborative resolution of problems exercised by the American and British democracies to the autocratic rule exercised by the Soviet and German regimes.

As Roberts points out, as the war progressed Stalin was increasingly able to accept the advice of his generals with an improvement in performance against the Germans. However as the war turned against Germany, Hitler would not accept his general's professional opinions particularly if any retreats were involved. In the author's opinion Hitler's interference in the tactics of the German forces shortened the war considerably. Had the generals been able to do what they wanted, the war would have been extended with increased casualties on both sides but in Roberts' view Germany would still have lost the war. Once the tide of war had changed at Stalingrad and El Alamein, the outcome was inevitable. The combination of the American industrial might and the Russian manpower availability insured that outcome. By the end of the war the Soviet Union had suffered, by far, the brunt of the allied casualties with an estimated 27 million dead.

Japan, also with an autocratic regime, had decisions made by a small group of leaders who were not accountable to the Japanese people. All of the autocratic regimes waged war with little or no concern for casualties, either those of the enemy or their own. The United States with the advantage of not having been invaded and with the time to choose when and where to become involved, suffered far fewer battle losses than Japan, China, Germany or Russia. The author provides a comprehensive discussion of the war in the European, African and Pacific areas as well as the war at sea and in the air. His take on the major critical junctions of the war such as the German invasion of Russia and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Hitler's resulting decision to declare war on the US are of particular interest considering the massive ramifications of these events.

Roberts writes very well and despite the books 600 page length, this reviewer found *The Storm of War* to be a fairly quick read. Books written recently have an advantage over earlier World War Two texts with much more information on the war's decision making being released as much is declassified particularly from the former Soviet Union. Today we can get a much more complete view of the real situation that each government faced and how they responded.

Andrew Roberts

It is well that war is so terrible - otherwise we would grow too fond of it.
Robert E. Lee (1807 - 1870), *Statement at the Battle of Fredericksburg (13th December 1862)*

Ruffians
by Tim Green
reviewed by Don Boink

Tim Green is well qualified to write about the NFL and what goes on there. He was a key defensive player for the Atlanta Falcons for a number of years. In *Ruffians* he kind of reprises his own career with the exception that he didn't play for a radical team or a sadistic coach. In order to make a dramatic story he puts the hero through the wringer. His own background (I know this because he grew up in our hometown and was in school with our children and his adoptive mother, Judy Green, served on the Liverpool Library board the same time that I did) was the typical American boy high school football star, Rhodes Scholar, Syracuse University football stand-out, then entered professional football with the Atlanta Falcons. Later he went through Harvard Law School and enjoys the hobby of writing. Actually Amazon lists several of his books.

Ruffians depicts a small minded but avaricious millionaire's attempt to satisfy his ego through owning a mediocre football team that he envisions achieving a meteoric rise to the championship. To accomplish this he seeks out a strength enhancing drug containing an ingredient that masks its steroidal compound making it undetectable. Then he seeks out the most ambitious coach who enjoys breaking the rules as well as demanding complete obedience to his grueling work schedule and acceptance of the drug

Our hero, Clay, is idealistic and secure in his considerable ability as an outstanding linebacker. His stats place him as a first round draft pick. Of course he is grabbed by the outlaw team. When he runs afoul the tyrannical coach his life is made miserable. He refuses to use the drug and he is worked to the point of exhaustion and also cut from the first team. Signing a multimillion dollar contract and then being demoted makes him the butt of his teammates cruel hazing. His friend and grizzled veteran of the pro circuit tries to get him to go along with the program. The friend however eventually over does his work-out routine of strength building and has a seizure and dies. Although Clay briefly gives in to the drug he deplores its use and again refuses. Things go from bad to worse but all is resolved in the end.
There is a lot of cussing and drinking, as well as casual sex. This book is one of Green's earliest and perhaps his worst. (His editors told him he had to put sex and colorful language in to make it sell) Later ones, such as The Fourth Perimeter are more enjoyable.

The Elephant to Hollywood
by Michael Caine
reviewed by Jim Mills

The Elephant to Hollywood is British actor, Michael Caine's second autobiography. The first, *What's it All About?*, was written in 1991. Maurice Mickelwhite was born in 1933 in the Elephant and Castle section of London, hence the book's title. Like thousands of other children, Caine, was evacuated from London during the 1940 Blitz. Following a year serving with the British Army in the Korean War, Caine began an acting career in the 1950s. Pondering a stage name, Mickelwhite walked past a theater playing a current film hit, *The Caine Mutiny*, and the rest, as they say, was history. After a succession of minor roles and minor films, the actor became a film star with his lead role in the two films, *The Ipcress File* and *Alfie,* released in the early 1960s.

Despite the earlier biography, Caine covers his entire life up to the 2010 publication date. Since this reviewer admires Michael Caine as an actor, I was much interested in reading his biography. Like many celebrity autobiographies, *The Elephant to Hollywood*, is replete with the names of many other celebrities. Caine's long career has allowed him to meet and get to know many other performers from the likes of Bob Hope and Cary Grant to the latest performers on the Silver Screen. Arriving in Hollywood after the release of Alfie, Caine never ceased to marvel at his entrée into the lives of those who had been his film idols. Unlike many other film stars, Caine is still married to his wife, Shakira, of nearly forty years. One story that Caine tells concerns a walk that he was taking one day in Hollywood with Cary Grant. A tourist rushed up to Caine, asked for his autograph, exclaiming that one never saw a star on the streets, in the process completely ignoring Caine's walking companion.

This autobiography should be of special interest to fans of Michael Caine since it gives such an insight to his personality and views. Also of particular interest, is his opinion on many of the other celebrities who he has known including his very close friend Sean Connery. The Elephant to Hollywood is fairly standard celebrity fare but is seasoned by the insights provided. Not having read his earlier *What's it All About?*, this reviewer cannot say how much new information is provided for the period that is covered by the two books.

Don't Know Much About The Civil War
by Kenneth C. Davis
reviewed by James N. McCutcheon

Originally published in 1996 by Avon Books, *Don't Know Much About The Civil War,* was subsequently reissued by Perennial Books in 2001 and 2004, and most recently reissued again in 2011, as a Harper Collins paper back. Not just for people who "don't know much about the Civil War", any American who takes on this 502 page classic will emerge a much wiser and more grateful citizen for the experience.

In August of 1619, a Dutch ship landed 20 West Africans at Jamestown Virginia to be sold as indentured servants, but those 20 poor souls were actually sold as slaves. One might have hoped that these would have been the last. However that was not to be the case. In a few short years the African slave trade would become just too valuable, and involve all of the American colonies with ports on the Atlantic seaboard. Over the following century most of the major countries of Europe enacted formal arrangements for the marketing of African slaves in their South American, Caribbean, and North American colonies. And when the slave trade became illegal, the business continued to flourish outside of the law. In 1725 the African slave population in the North American colonies was about 75,000.

However from the very beginning, the slave trade was not without its opponents, many of whom warned of the danger of continuing a practice so clearly at odds with the Christian faith and later the Declaration of Independence. Rhode Island actually outlawed slavery in1652. The first serious slave insurrection in America occurred in Stono South Carolina in 1739. Thirty whites were killed and 44 blacks were put to death in retaliation.

Racial superiority was now firmly fixed in the land. George Washington did not allow African Americans to enlist in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, until after the British permitted black American slaves to become British citizens by enlisting in their forces. Yet still when the Constitution of the United States was written, the only way the 13 states would all sign on was if black African slaves, solely for voting purposes, were counted not as citizens and only as "3/5 of a man".

There were 4,000,000 African slaves owned by slave owners in the Confederate states when the Civil War began. The infamous "Triangle Trade" was in full swing, moving American manufactures and raw materials from such American ports as Richmond, New York, and Boston to the West Coast of Africa, where a shipload of African slaves was picked up, and, after navigating the dangerous Middle Passage, sold to plantation owners in the Caribbean. Meanwhile in the American South, plantation owners had discovered that they could breed slaves more cheaply than buy them from the slavers. So slave families were regularly broken up and only the strongest were allowed to propagate. That was the beginning of the breakdown of black families that remains such a social problem in our land today.

The Western expansion only heightened the tension. Decisions had to be made as to whether new territories would enter the union as free or slave states. The Missouri Compromise and a number of great American statesmen put off the inevitable for a generation but when the 1860 election for President of the United States sent Abraham Lincoln to the White House two and a half centuries of hypocrisy, growing alienation between the smaller, poorer, agrarian South and the larger, industrial, more industrial North exploded. No one thing brought on the American Civil War or made it the four years of bloody slaughter it turned out to be. Abraham Lincoln's original purpose was not to free the slaves but to save the Union. Only after two years of a terrible Civil War did it become clear to him and most other Americans that the Union "could not survive half slave and half free."

The Civil War itself only actually began four months after the first six Southern states had seceded from the Union, when on April 12, 1861 South Carolina troops bombarded Fort Sumter, located in Charleston Harbor into submission. President Lincoln then proclaimed the Confederacy to be in a state of insurrection and called for the raising of 75,000 Union troops.

Don't Know Much About The Civil War covers all of this in its first 178 pages. The rest of the book divides into what happened from the onset of hostilities in 1861 to the Gettysburg campaign in 1863; and from the major battles of 1864 to Lee's surrender at Appomattox in 1865. These much reported events will not be reviewed here although they occupy the last two thirds of this fine book. What Kenneth Davis has done is to make available a supremely readable account of the most important war in our nation's history, written out of the words of those who fought in it, the music they marched by, and the documents they left behind. Besides the author's rare gifts as a historian, *Don't Know Much About The Civil War* is remarkably free of any bias and is devoted, as the author says, to presenting an unvarnished account of all the important facts. This alone should earn it a place on any American's Civil War summer reading list.

Deadly Spin: An insurance company insider speaks out on how corporate PR is killing healthcare and deceiving America.

by Wendell Potter

reviewed by Don Boink

The healthcare bill that was finally passed and signed into law last year is a remarkable document indeed. It has taken several decades (since the time of Teddy Roosevelt) to get a healthcare bill through the Legislature. It has been attempted several times and dropped various times for various reasons. Despite the dire need to improve the health care system in the U.S. and the horror stories that abound, regarding the tragedy of unavailability of care, the effort for reform has met formidable opposition all along the way

What is there about doing good that causes intense opposition? In a word – money. Healthcare in its multiple forms is perhaps the largest industry in the United States. The captains of this vast complex reside in: the American Medical Association, the Hospital Association, the Coalition of Insurance Companies and also the Pharmaceutical companies, to name the principal players.

The book, *Deadly Spin*, is written by a former, very highly paid, public relations executive of a large insurance company named C I GN A. It is the account of his experience over several years employing the craft of "public relations or PR" for the good of the bottom line of his company. Any time an event or legislative proposal is deemed to potentially lessen the profit of any large business, or group of businesses, an army of PR people goes into action to thwart the proposal, or put a spin on the event that deflects a negative effect. The amount of money spent on PR activity is tremendous, but considered a good investment, relative to the profits protected.

PR is not all bad. There are many worthwhile projects and causes that helpfully inform consumers of their benefits. Bad PR is employed by the likes of the tobacco industry to promote proven health hazards – again for the profits derived from its sale. Politicians constantly apply "spin" to any news item that reflects on them negatively.

Under the onslaught of ever new technology in the information field newspapers have been under siege for some time. Failures of papers and cutbacks in reporting staff have severely limited access to reliable news. This has left the different media forms wide open for dissemination of flagrant disinformation or grossly distorted versions of many topics in the "news". Potter divulges many of the schemes he participated in while with CIGNA and recounts schemes perpetrated by remarkably successful PR firms for the benefit of their clients, but to the detriment of the consumer.

He explains the "playbook" of PR and outlines its precepts. The tobacco industry is a case study in successful protection of a deadly product. Also cited is the effort to discredit the fact (not theory) of global warming. The BP oil spill is discussed.

- The use of "front groups" – those purporting to be consumer-oriented but actually promoting anti-consumer activity.
- Recruit third parties to list as members who lend their names to stealth campaigns.
- Cultivate close relationships with editors and publishers – to influence the tone and content of articles.
- Feed talking points to TV pundits and frequent contributors to op-ed pages.
- Also talk radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh or Bill O'Reilly or Glenn Beck to discredit your opponent.

These are fundamental tools of the spin business. Without a doubt the book is an eye-opener that will make one skeptical of all promotions.

What is the difference between unethical and ethical advertising? Unethical advertising uses falsehoods to deceive the public; ethical advertising uses truth to deceive the public.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson (1879 - 1962), *"Discovery", 1964*

Advertising is the modern substitute for argument; its function is to make the worse appear the better.

George Santayana (1863 - 1952)

Growing Up
by Russell Baker
reviewed by Don Boink

Russell Baker, best known as a columnist for the New York Times for several years, won a prestigious literary award and a Pulitzer Prize for writing a "distinguished biography". *Growing up* is amusing, poignant, and somewhat depressing tale of his life as he grew up during the Depression years. To me it was especially meaningful and interesting because we were born the same year, 1925. He in August and I in December. We were both raised by a single mother. I am an only child, he had two younger sisters. His mother had to give up the third child due to extreme poverty. My mother and I along with her married sister and husband as well as an unmarried brother, lived in the downstairs flat of a two-story house owned by my grandmother. Thus there were six people in three bedrooms. My grandmother slept on a sofa in the dining room. My mother was the only person of the family working.

Russell's father was from a large family so there were Bakers galore in a small town in Virginia. His father died when Russell was very young as did mine. He had Aunts and Uncles galore and that is a large part of his autobiography. Many of the uncles and aunts were interesting characters. Although all were poor there were close family ties.

Russell's mother was a very strong personality. Although his mother had limited education she taught school until they moved to a larger city. She was not qualified to teach there and had to try many menial jobs to get by. One of the uncles helped financially. His mother continually urged him to "make something of yourself". He was frustrated at being a "businessman". His mother literally: coerced him to sell Saturday Evening Post magazines. His lack of salesmanship doomed this venture. When he got great praise for a composition he wrote he found he liked writing. To him it was not "work" or getting up early for a paper route he had for a time. The entire family relied on "sayings" to suit the occasions. "A stitch in time saves nine", "the early bird gets the worm", etc. ad infinitum.

With his mother pushing him he got high marks in school and qualified for a scholarship to John Hopkins University. His fascination with flying caused him to enlist in the Navy for flight training in 1943. I enlisted in the Navy the same year. The several stages of flight training lasted till the end of the war frustrating his ambition to be a "hero". After finishing college he worked for the Baltimore Sun newspaper. Having the ability to type rapidly he soon became a rewrite man and excelled at the job. Later he worked for the New York Times and had his own column covering the White House and other great assignments.

I remember enjoying his columns and the humor he injected in the otherwise dry subject matter. His stint as the impresario of Masterpiece Theatre was of long-standing also. The internet has scads of sites containing Russell Baker's quotes and comments. His review of books related to the problems facing the newspaper field is an excellent overview of the corrupting influence of Wall Street and its mania for profits above all else. Russell did become an American hero and he didn't have to work- all he had to do was write.

An educated person is one who has learned that information almost always turns out to be at best incomplete and very often false, misleading, fictitious, mendacious - just dead wrong. .....**Russell Baker**

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