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Ninety-nine glimpses of Princess Margaret, Craig Brown (book review)

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social sciences

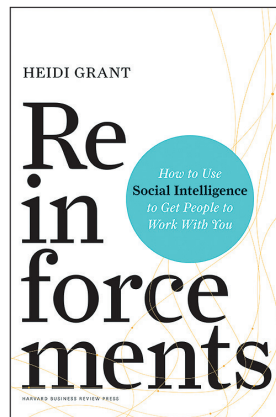
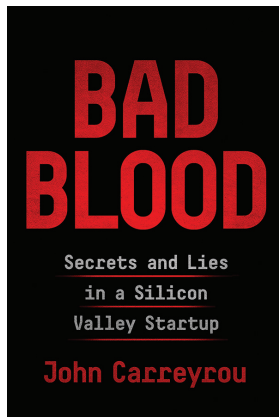
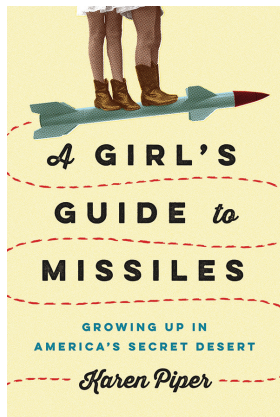
BIOGRAPHY

Abrams, Brian. *Obama: An Oral History*. Little A: Amazon. Jul. 2018. 503p. bibliog. ISBN 9781503951662. \$24.95; pap. ISBN 9781503951655. B106

Journalist and author Abrams (*Die Hard: An Oral History*) enjoyed unprecedented access to more than 100 of President Barack Obama's former campaign aides, White House staffers and officials, and Republican opponents. Through wide-ranging interviews, we get a full view of his historic presidency, internal deliberations and all. One gets the sense that Obama's White House was highly energized and quite demanding. He required a high level of commitment and preparedness from staffers. What shines through more than any tensions or disagreements is the deep respect and admiration the majority of those interviewed felt for the president. However,

(1930–2002), only sister to the reigning Queen Elizabeth II, and the entire royal industry and its hangers-on, yet a small balm of sympathy for Margaret is added to the mix. Relegated by chance of birth to a secondary position—always a princess, never a queen—Margaret meandered through life performing official royal duties and acts of personal self-indulgence, which Brown bounds through in 99 chapters of diaries, essays, minutiae, and a few imaginings of his own. The expected portrait emerges of Margaret as snobbish and exacting, an inveterate rank-puller and a dreadful dinner guest—and also a woman who turned to alcohol and affairs to fill up the empty tedium between charity visits and ribbon cuttings. **VERDICT** Readers wanting a straightforward biography should look elsewhere, but those interested in a sometimes hilarious, sometimes

cant political and social upheaval. Taking a roughly chronological approach, the author depicts the nomadic life of a refugee family escaping Japanese invasion as well as her development as a student during wartime. Poignant recollections of poetry and correspondence with relatives and friends serving on the front lines underscore Chi's reflections about her changing beliefs and impulses. Her experiences of loss, hardship, and educational advancement are contextualized within the broader social and political changes brought about by World War II, the Chinese Communist Revolution, and its aftermath. The second half traces Chi's life in Taiwan, her work as a teacher, her teaching fellowships in America, her marriage and family life, and the dramatic changes happening in Taiwan during the second half of the 20th century. **VERDICT** An engaging read for those interested in memoir, 20th-century Chinese and Taiwanese history, and Chinese culture.—**Rebecca Brody, Westfield State Univ., MA**



Piper's childhood among secret weapons; business greed and fraud; the benefits of asking for help

the voices of some key players, such as Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, and John Kerry, as well as a recounting of events surrounding the Benghazi, Libya attack are missing, leaving the work with an incomplete feel. **VERDICT** An excellent starting point to gaining an inside perspective on the Obama presidency.—**Chad E. Statler, Westlake Porter P.L., Westlake, OH**

Brown, Craig. *Ninety-Nine Glimpses of Princess Margaret*. Farrar. Aug. 2018. 432p. illus. notes. bibliog. ISBN 9780374906047. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9780374719685. B106

In this biography from noted satirist Brown, one expects and gets an effective skewering of both its subject, England's Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon

gloomy view of Princess Margaret through a variety of lenses, or a look at how popular representation shapes our view of a public figure should snap up this book.—**Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans**

Chi Pang-yuan. *The Great Flowing River: A Memoir of China, from Manchuria to Taiwan*. Columbia Univ. Jul. 2018. 480p. tr. from Chinese by John Balcom. illus. maps. index. ISBN 9780231188401. \$35; ebk. ISBN 9780231547819. B106

Chi (emeritus, English & comparative literature, National Taiwan Univ.) offers a sweeping memoir of her life in China and Taiwan in this extraordinarily detailed look at the experience of a Chinese national during the war with Japan, a time of signifi-

Maura, Soledad Fox. *Exile, Writer, Soldier, Spy: Jorge Semprún*. Arcade: Skyhorse. Jul. 2018. 328p. photos. notes. bibliog. ISBN 9781628729177. \$25.99. B106

Jorge Semprún (1923–2011) was a Spaniard, guerilla, secret agent, politician, and award-winning writer. When he was a child, his family fled to France to escape the Spanish Civil War. As a teenager, he joined the French Resistance and survived a Nazi concentration camp. After World War II, he spent ten years as a communist secret agent, infiltrating universities to rally opposition to Spain's right-wing regime. Ousted from the Spanish Communist Party in 1964 for voicing dissent, this ex-spy became a writer renowned for his Oscar-nominated screenplays (*Z; The War Is Over*) and Holocaust testimonials (*The Long Voyage; Literature or Life*), though his fictionalization of his concentration camp experiences garnered controversy. After Spain transitioned to democracy, Semprún became culture minister, leaving the position in 1991 to become a star European public intellectual. Maura (Spanish & comparative literature, Williams Coll.) calls him a “chameleonic genius,” but even though he reinvented himself time and again, Semprún never faltered as a patriot. He went to his grave draped in the flag of the Old Spanish Republic, for which he had fought so long. **VERDICT**

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