Benjamin Franklin in London: the British life of America’s Founding Father, George Goodwin (book review)

Kathleen McCallister

William & Mary, krmccallister@wm.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs/50

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the William & Mary Libraries at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in W&M Libraries Publications by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
Social Sciences

BIOGRAPHY


In 1983, civil rights activist Pauli Murray (1910–85) instructed Bell-Scott (emerita, women’s studies, Univ. of Georgia; Life Notes) to “know some of the veterans of the battle whose shoulders you now stand on.” When Murray died two years later, Bell-Scott began researching the activist’s life. After reviewing the correspondence between Murray and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Bell-Scott decided to focus on their decades-long friendship. Murray first wrote to both Eleanor and Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938 to express outrage that she was barred from the University of North Carolina’s graduate school because of her race. Over the next few years, Eleanor became mentor to Murray, urging her to be patient with the progress of civil rights, while Murray encouraged Eleanor to consider the plight of African Americans who were suffering from discrimination during the Great Depression and World War II. The quotes from their lengthy correspondence, up to Eleanor’s death in 1962, reveal their mutual respect and honesty. VERDICT Bell-Scott makes a convincing case that Murray influenced Eleanor’s views on civil and human rights and though not popularly known, she should be remembered as an important leader in both the civil rights and feminist movements. [See Prepub Alert, 8/31/15.—Barrie Olmstead, Sacramento P.L.]

Kate Stewart, American Folklife Ctr., Washington, DC


Quentin Roosevelt (1897–1918), Theodore Roosevelt’s youngest and reputedly favorite child, was fatally shot during World War I, just short of his 21st birthday, an event that precipitated his father’s death at age 60 less than a year later. That is usually the extent most accounts tell us about this young man whose story historian Burns (1920: The Year That Made the Decade Roar) expands with earlier anecdotes and interpretations. One of four brothers whom sister Ethel called “the Golden Lads,” Quentin possessed most of Theodore’s good qualities; popularity, daring, enthusiasm, humor, and academic ability. In this crisply written profile, Burns underlines Theodore’s contradictions: his love of family life, his favorable view of the masculine proving ground of war, and his tendency to ignore references to the unpleasant, such as public recognition of relatives’ deaths. Ironically, Theodore avoided military conflicts as president, instead choosing the negotiating table to the battlefield. As a former president he championed America’s entrance into the Great War and all of his sons enlisted. The Roosevelts’ enthusiastic letter writing helps Burns highlight Theodore’s fatalism and Quentin’s obsessive thoughts of death (and incongruous love of heights). A father-son focus reveals much about the multifaceted Theodore’s personality. VERDICT Books such as J. Lee Thompson’s Never Call Retreat detail Quentin’s activities and temperament; however, general readers seeking a naturally sympathetic, full-length portrait will appreciate this work.—Frederick J. Augustyn Jr., Lib. of Congress, Washington, DC


Egan’s biography of Irish revolutionary Thomas Francis Meagher (1823–67) illustrates a singularly Irish-American story. In outlining Meagher’s life, Egan, a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and author of the National Book Award winner The Worst Hard Time, seeks to demonstrate how Meagher’s experience was emblematic of Irish immigrants’ spirit and resolve. Meagher was born in a well-to-do family in Ireland but was deeply empathetic toward the plight of the Irish poor, having lived through the Great Famine in the 1840s. After a failed uprising against the English, Meagher was banished to a penal colony in Tasmania, Australia. He escaped to the United States and took up the cause of freedom, identifying with the new country’s anti-British attitudes. Leading the Irish Brigade in the Civil War, Meagher fought in some of the bloodiest battles, including Bull Run in 1861. He survived the war and was appointed governor of Montana territory where he hoped to create a “New Ireland.” His death by drowning in 1867 remains a mystery. VERDICT This important account is an excellent choice for all readers, especially those interested in the contributions of the Irish to U.S. history. [See Prepub Alert, 10/5/15.—Barrie Olmstead, Sacramento P.L.]


Between 1757 and 1775, Benjamin Franklin (1706–90) made a temporary home for himself in London as a representative and agent for the 13 colonies. Goodwin (Fatal Colours; Fatal Rivalry) lays the groundwork of his subject’s life quickly, zipping through Franklin’s early days as an up-and-coming printer, his first trip to London as a young man, and his experiments with electricity before settling in on the nearly two decades that his subject spent in England. Franklin’s activities on behalf of his American home

Veteran public radio personality and interviewer Rehm (Finding My Voice) presents the next installment in her story in this candid account of the last years of marriage to her husband of over 50 years, John. Rehm writes of John's life, his struggle with declining abilities owing to Parkinson's disease, and her reactions to those life-altering circumstances. Her distinctive radio persona may be detected in each episode she recounts, including those dealing with her own ambivalence about John's move to a care facility and her desire to keep working throughout the years of his decline. More pointedly, however, Rehm takes aim at the unsettled state of U.S. right-to-die legislation and policies, a situation that forced a heartbreaking and brutal decision by John. Anecdotes about other popular news figures who have been widowed, and Rehm's ruminations on her retirement plans as well as her own mortality are presented in the same conversational tone familiar to listeners of her long-running show. VERDICT Rehm doesn't gloss over the emotional complexities and difficulties of a long-term marriage, nor does she shy away from making her opinions about the inconsistencies in right-to-die legislation known (despite the apparent objections of her employers). Her views on the controversial topic, delivered with her hard-earned observations about its ramifications, distinguish this account from other memoirs of widowhood.—Thérèse Purcell Nielsen, Huntington P.L., NY

VERDICT


Shortly before becoming heavyweight champion of the world in 1964, Cassius Clay Jr. (b. 1942) became involved with the black supremacist sect, the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X (1925–65), a fiery though thoughtful minister within the sect, formed a symbiotic relationship with Clay. Malcolm helped Clay develop as a worldwide figure, and having Clay as a protégé served the ambitious Malcolm. Over time, Clay, who changed his name to Muhammad Ali, sided with factions of the Nation of Islam. Coauthors Roberts (history, Purdue Univ.) and Smith (history, Georgia Tech Univ.) argue that in losing Ali, Malcolm lost the centerpiece of his ascendance and then his protective cover; within months Malcolm was assassinated by his former cohorts. VERDICT This book offers a significant contribution to serious studies of Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, and the Nation of Islam.—Jim Burns, formerly with Jacksonville P.L.

ECONOMICS


VERDICT


Based on a study of over 100 start-ups, this book charts the path of successful companies and provides a list of best practices to help new companies manage their first few years. Martin, cofounder of sales-research firm Vertical IQ, compares the growth patterns of dozens of start-ups to the desired “hockey stick growth” chart, in which a company’s linear maturation turns exponential in a moment. Through his research, the author has found that most profitable start-ups follow a similar pattern, starting in a tinker phase that can last for years before the founders become focused on launching a product or service. After launch, they work through the “blade” years, when the founders manage expenses and search for investments, before hitting the “growth inflection point” when the product or service begins to grow rapidly, after which comes a period of surging growth. In Martin’s explanations of each of the four stages, he provides relatable anecdotes and 92 core principles that illustrate how to manage successfully. A glossary of business terms is also included. VERDICT Martin summarizes several core business practices in an accessible outline that entrepreneurs will find helpful.—John Rodzvilla, Emerson Coll., Boston