

6-1-2010

The Sultan's shadow: one family's rule at the crossroads of East and West, by Christiane Bird (book review)

Kathleen McCallister

William & Mary, krmccallister@wm.edu

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



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCallister, Kathleen, The Sultan's shadow: one family's rule at the crossroads of East and West, by Christiane Bird (book review) (2010). *Library Journal*, 135(10), 92.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariespubs/64>

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.

against Goldman Sachs, McGee (contributing editor, *Barron's*) provides a timely analysis of why Wall Street came so close to destruction. McGee's premises are based on her discussions with over 200 workers on Wall Street's frontlines—some of whose names are changed to protect the innocent (and not so innocent). The three parts of the book build on McGee's view that Wall Street could head for another breakdown owing to the key drivers on the Street that still exist—fear and greed. Greed and envy drove companies to take on disproportionate risk in order to keep up with the returns generated year after year by Goldman Sachs. For Wall Street to thrive in the future, McGee suggests innovation, strategic thinking, and planning over driving profits through ever increasing risk. **VERDICT** Best for those who have some background in finance and can grasp the intricacies of the meltdown, but also a great look at a current event for the general reader.—**Elizabeth Nelson, UOP Lib., Des Plaines, IL**

HISTORY

Bird, Christiane. *The Sultan's Shadow: One Family's Rule at the Crossroads of East and West*. Random. Jun. 2010. c.416p. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-345-46940-3. \$28. HIST
Having previously written two Arabic-focused travelogs—*Neither East nor West* on Iran and *A Thousand Sighs, A Thousand Revolts* on Kurdistan—Bird now dons the historian's mantle and turns her gaze toward Oman, a small Arab country that at its height ruled over portions of East Africa and played a major role in the region's slave trade. Though centering the narrative on Oman's most powerful sultan, Sayyid Said bin Sultan Al-Busaid, who ruled from 1804 to 1856, and his daughter Salme, who scandalized her family by eloping to Europe with a German businessman, Bird does not confine herself to biographical details but expands her observations to the world of the Omani sultanate, its history and religion, its part in the development of Swahili culture, and how it was inevitably affected by European interests and exploration. Bird's engaging style and attention to a variety of subjects brings Oman's history to life; however, the wide focus prevents her from delving as deeply into some topics as one might wish. **VERDICT** This absorbing and well-researched presentation should appeal to both casual readers and history enthusiasts, though it might be too diffuse for those seeking a more academic treatment.—**Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia**

Borneman, Walter. *Rival Rails: The Race to Build America's Greatest Transcontinental Railroad*. Random. Sept. 2010. c.432p.

photogs. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-1-4000-6561-5. \$28. HIST

Borneman (*The French and Indian War*) goes beyond the driving of the golden spike at Promontory, UT, in 1869 to explore how during the subsequent two decades the western United States was crisscrossed with multiple rail lines. He explains how the railroad barons of storied lines like the Southern Pacific, the Denver & Rio Grande, and especially the Santa Fe battled over rights-of-way, passengers, and freight traffic. He also describes the advent of Fred Harvey's food service, how the railroads promoted settlement, and even several famous train robberies. Each chapter covers a particular development like the Santa Fe's entrance into California or the fight over the right-of-way through Colorado's Royal Gorge. **VERDICT** With modern railroads in a state of renewal, this well-written history of western railroad expansion will greatly interest rail fans and general readers alike. The book includes a 16-page photo section (not seen) and more than two dozen excellent maps essential to understanding the routes. Readers may also want to seek out Stephen Fried's *Appetite for America: How Visionary Businessman Fred Harvey Built a Railroad Hospitality Empire That Civilized the Wild West*.—**Lawrence Maxted, Gannon Univ. Lib., Erie, PA**

Bruce, Gary. *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi*. Oxford Univ. (Oral History).

Jul. 2010. c.272p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-19-539205-0. \$34.95. HIST

East Germany was perhaps the most stable satellite in the postwar Soviet bloc, and one of the main reasons was the scope and efficiency of its Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, the secret police known as the Stasi. Bruce (history, Univ. of Waterloo) examines its operations after first discussing in his introduction the complex way that the Stasi and East Germany have been remembered and interpreted by both Germans and outsiders since 1990. To understand the functioning of the Stasi, Bruce used good archival holdings for two unexceptional local districts north of Berlin. He also makes use of personal accounts from Stasi employees and general citizens, from whom one finds the real flavor and detail of everyday life in the socialist dictatorship. Bruce notes that a vast network of (mostly male) informers was the Stasi's primary means of control because citizens understood, tolerated, and participated in the surreptitious surveillance. This book can be supplemented with Edward Peterson's *The Limits of Secret Police Power* and Anna Funder's *Stasiland*. **VERDICT** For specialists and academic libraries, this well-researched book is as much a cultural and sociological study as a political and bureau-

cratic history. (Index and photos not seen; maps would have been helpful.)—**Daniel K. Blewett, Coll. of DuPage Lib., Glen Ellyn, IL**

Euchner, Charles. *Nobody Turn Me Around: A People's History of the 1963 March on Washington*. Beacon, dist. by Houghton Harcourt. Aug. 2010. c.256p. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-8070-0059-5. \$26.95. HIST

Euchner (English, Yale Univ.; *The Last Nine Innings*) tells the story of the August 1963 march on Washington as the compelling drama it was: organizing 100,000 people for civil rights required coordinating speakers with multiple alliances and agendas within one peaceful mass-action event. Enter lead organizer Bayard Taylor Rustin, portrayed as the hero who brought together the march through unprecedented planning and coordination. Rustin's challenge rested in keeping the alliances of numerous organizations together. He worked to temper the speech of John Lewis, a representative from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, whose message became more radical as it faced an unflinching deep southern segregationist challenge to its organizing efforts. Malcolm X was also on hand during the march. As a "people's history," the book's sources include Euchner's interviews with over 100 individuals, both known and unknown, who participated in the march. **VERDICT** This compelling history of the march on Washington is accessible to general readers, who will be moved at the emotional heights of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. Those who enjoy popular history will find much to like here, and students will appreciate the original research.—**Jim Hahn, Univ. of Illinois Lib., Urbana**

Fisher, Robin Gaby with Michael O'McCarthy & Robert W. Straley. *The Boys of the Dark: A Story of Betrayal and Redemption in the Deep South*. St. Martin's. Aug. 2010. c.254p. ISBN 978-0-312-59539-5. \$24.99. HIST

In 2006 Straley experienced a disturbing episode while shopping in which his fists were clenched and he was murmuring to himself in terror. A stranger reached out to him and broke the trance. He was remembering abuse. In 1963, at age 13, he had been sentenced to the Florida School for Boys, where he suffered physical and sexual abuse. Straley decided he was going to expose the school, and he contacted the one man he thought might help, journalist and filmmaker O'McCarthy, whose work had brought to light the 1923 Rosewood racial massacre in Florida. What Robert didn't know was that O'McCarthy had also been an inmate at the Florida School for Boys. Pulitzer Prize finalist Fisher (*Star-Ledger*),

Copyright of Library Journal is the property of Library Journals, LLC and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.