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Industrial revolutionaries: the making of the modern world, 1776-1981, by Gavin Weightman (book review)

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Thomas Sneum. Skyhorse, dist. by Norton.

Apr. 2009. c.368p. maps. index. ISBN 978-1-60239-710-1. \$24.95. HIST

In 1940, Thomas Sneum, a 22-year-old pilot in the Danish Air Arm, refused to stand by while the Germans took over his homeland. He gathered data about Nazi radar installations, using a camera and German contacts. Then he and a fellow pilot pieced back together a disassembled Hornet Moth biplane they had found and flew it to England to share their information. The Hornet lacked the range to make it all the way, requiring Sneum to climb out of the plane onto the wing in midair to refuel. Sneum was eventually recruited by the British and provided valuable information during the war despite the many obstacles in his way, including being jailed as a suspected double agent. Using original documents and hundreds of hours of interviews with Sneum (who died in 2007), Ryan's book is the first to chronicle the journey of the audacious Dane whose real-life exploits include all the key elements of any good spy story: sex, danger, and intrigue. In fact, Ken Follet's *The Hornet's Sting* was based on this World War II episode, but the real account is more exciting than fiction: readers will find the book hard to put down. Highly recommended.—**Patti C. McCall, Albany Molecular Research, Inc., NY**

Schama, Simon. The American Future: A History. Ecco: HarperCollins. Jun. 2009.

c.400p. index. ISBN 978-0-06-053923-8. \$29.99. HIST

In this companion to a BBC documentary about the 2008 presidential campaign, British transplant Schama (University Professor of Art History & History, Columbia Univ.; *Rough Crossings*)—a foremost revivalist of the grand narrative historiographic tradition—trains his interpretive virtuosity on the United States. Schama, who views Obama's triumphant ascendancy as the realization of the grandest American values, ties campaign themes to the larger historical traditions, tensions, and contests that gave rise to them. He cuts back and forth between vignettes of his visits to Nevada, Texas, and Georgia, among other locales, and startlingly original takes on America's practices of democratic warring, deep but diverse religiosity, ethnic and racial identity, and grabs for land, water, and energy. Some readers will be put off by the author's affectionate but condescending assumption of dialect-inflected depictions of Iowan voters, Mexican American veterans, and Mississippian Civil Rights heroines, but these passages are comparatively brief. In the end, while Schama makes a real contribution to an understanding of how America is special (and imperiled), this work is not based on archival research and does not re-

veal new stories that illuminate a complex past. Appropriate for all readers but perhaps best for the general public. [See Prepub Alert, *LJ* 2/15/09.]—**Scott H. Silverman, Bryn Mawr Coll. Lib., PA**

Taylor, Jay. The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-shek and the Struggle for Modern China.

Belknap: Harvard Univ. Apr. 2009. c.610p. photogs. maps. index. ISBN 978-0-674-03338-2. \$35. HIST

Taylor (research assoc., Fairbank Ctr. for Chinese Studies, Harvard), best known for his biography of President Chiang Kai-shek's son, Ching-kuo, follows up with an equally engaging biography of Chiang Kai-shek himself, founder of the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan. Indeed, this book is arguably less a biography than a modern history of China. Drawing heavily on Chiang's personal diaries, the text reveals a soldier who was curiously self-contradictory in both actions and personality. Although an ill-tempered and ruthless politician, Chiang was a courageous intellectual who loved and sacrificed for his country. Taylor reveals the complex relationship among Republican China on Taiwan, Communist China, and the United States and shows that while Chiang was an archrival of Mao, he nonetheless secretly consulted with his mainland counterparts on most policy developments. Although he ran a tightly regulated police state with brutal suppression of dissidents, Chiang's rule ultimately raised personal income, health, and education levels on the island, setting the stage for Taiwan's evolution of a Chinese model of democratic modernization. An excellent addition to the field of modern Chinese history; recommended for academic audiences.—**Allan Cho, Univ. of British Columbia Lib., Vancouver**

Weightman, Gavin. The Industrial Revolutionaries: The Making of the Modern World, 1776–1914. Grove. Apr. 2009.

c.432p. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-8021-1899-8. \$27.50. HIST

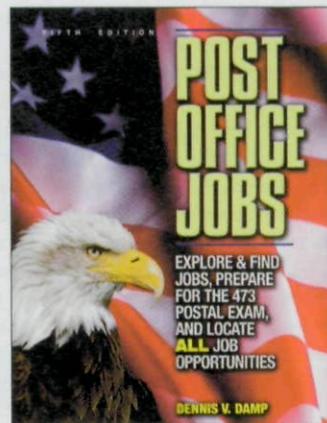
In the period covered by this book—just a little over a century—the world shifted from reliance on human labor to the use of machines as an essential aspect of daily life and work. Weightman's (*The Frozen Water Trade: A True Story*) well-researched study examines the lives of familiar figures who made such advancement possible and brings to light equally important names now absent from general knowledge. Yet it would be a mistake to regard this simply as a collective biography of inventors and their creations, for an equal amount of attention is given to the movement of technological innovation worldwide. Britain may have begun as the center of modern industry, but it was the spread of

its achievements and subsequent refinements by other countries that helped drive industrialization to a rapid pace. While giving proper credit to the minds and efforts of the people involved, Weightman provides a thoughtful exploration of the paths through which their inventions and knowledge were transmitted and how particular circumstances, such as natural resources, socioeconomic needs, and political climates influenced and shaped a county's industrial development. Highly recommended.—**Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia**

Weller, George. Weller's War: A Legendary Foreign Correspondent's Saga of World War II on Five Continents. Crown. Apr. 2009. c.656p. ed. by Anthony Weller. illus. index. ISBN 978-0-307-40655-2. \$29.95. HIST

George Weller wrote for the *Chicago Daily News* for 35 years, achieving fame for his widely ranging dispatches from the many fronts of World War II. He was captured by the Gestapo in Greece, escaped from Java on a boat strafed by Japanese fighters, marched with Belgian colonial troops fighting Italian colonial troops in Ethiopia, and slogged through swamps with Americans and Australians locked in grim struggles in New

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