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Editor's Shelf

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Editor's Shelf

Looking back over one's shoulder is how the average person searches for history in everyday life. It is, however, a more revealing and poignant look back when conducted by an award-winning journalist and author. Bob Greene's *Fraternity: A Journey in Search of Five Presidents* provides readers with reflections and profiles on the lives-after-office of five former US Presidents: Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and Bush. The book is based on Greene's quest to meet and interview all five (at the time) living former Presidents. The book is as much about Greene and his journey, however, as it is about each of the men profiled. More a story of American culture and those who influenced it, the tale spun by Greene is one of how even Presidents go on to live fairly normal lives.



Continuing on the theme of historical reflections on the lives of five Presidents is James M. Perry's *Touched with Fire: Five Presidents and the Civil War Battles that Made Them*. This insightfully written and masterfully researched book is a story of war and politics during the Civil War period and of five men who "waved the bloody shirt" for all to see. The author presents the wartime experiences of Rutherford B. Hayes, James Garfield, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, and Ulysses S. Grant (the only professional soldier of the group) and artfully details how each man leveraged his combat record into votes for the White House. Perry reveals how the wartime experiences of each of his subjects helped to mold the soldier into the politician who would later lead the nation. The author presents a lively, revealing story that any student of the Civil War or American political history would appreciate.

With the passing of most great Americans there is an accompanying "rush to print." Such was the case with the passing of our 40th President, Ronald Reagan. Jack F. Matlock, Jr., examines Reagan's role as "the man who defeated communism" in *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*. What makes Matlock's examination distinctive is that he knows what he's talking about. This follow-on to his earlier work, *Autopsy of an Empire*, is a much more detailed and personality-specific view of the last days of the Soviet Union. No one is better suited, based on his tenure on Reagan's National Security Council, his four tours of duty in the US Embassy in Moscow, and his personal relationships with many of the principals who dominated diplomacy between the United States and the Soviet Union during the period 1983-1989, to present such an introspective analysis. *Reagan and Gorbachev* is a chronological recounting of events during this pivotal period, drawing on both Matlock's personal insights and newly released primary source materials. Matlock gives credit where due for ending the Cold War, but he emphatically recognizes Mikhail Gorbachev as the man primarily responsible for the demise of the Soviet Union. A practitioner of diplomacy at

For details on publishers and prices of books mentioned, see "Off the Press" in this issue or call *Parameters* at 717-245-4943 (e-mail: Parameters@carlisle.army.mil).

the highest levels, Matlock provides readers with a compelling story of the inner workings and personalities dominating the Reagan and Gorbachev era.

Whether or not Senator Everett Dirksen ever uttered the profound words, “A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you are talking real money,” the phrase captures the essence of Winslow T. Wheeler’s latest book, *The Wastrels of Defense: How Congress Sabotages U.S. Security*. Wheeler draws on more than 30 years of staff service in both the House and Senate, along with a nine-year stint with the General Accounting Office, to present a damning indictment of fraud, waste, and abuse by those sworn to protect against such excesses, members of the US Congress. The author points out that in the FY 2005 Department of Defense budget, members of Congress inserted some \$8.5 to \$10 billion in “pork” for their own vested interests. Well known for his previous insider attacks on this massive misappropriation of defense dollars, Wheeler details for the reader how such abuse shortchanges our troops and the programs essential for their survival. Not one to avoid controversy, he names those lawmakers who are the greatest purveyors of pork. The author also examines the critical balance of power supposedly maintained between the Executive Branch and the Congress, with a special look at when the President can go to war and what supporting authorizations are required. Wheeler concludes with 12 specific recommendations on how to stop the highway robbery of taxpayer’s money. This is a book that should be on the desk of every member of Congress and anyone associated with the preparation of the defense budget.

Renowned British journalist and historian Godfrey Hodgson provides a fitting sequel to his 1995 book, *America in Our Time*, with his new work, *More Equal than Others: America from Nixon to the New Century*. The author presents a critical analysis of the influence of free-market capitalism on American society over the past quarter century, crediting “the conservative ascendancy” as the movement having the greatest influence on America’s growing inequality. He blames a combination of conservative ideology, corporate power, and the dominance of the mass media for America abandoning its traditional system of wealth creation and replacing it with a system akin to the class-stratified societies of the early 20th century. Hodgson determines that it is the corporate power of the American ruling class that has turned the United States into the most unequal of all the developed nations. The author presents chapters on a broad range of issues—politics, the economy, technology, women, race, and financial policy—to support his assertion that free-market absolutism has destroyed America’s traditionally tolerant, egalitarian culture, supplanting it with a system where the measure of a person or an institution is based only on the “almighty dollar.” Although not really providing the knowledgeable reader with new facts, the author does cause one to understand that there are any number of ways in which the United States could be so much better.

A rather different contribution to the genre of land warfare is Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell’s edited work, *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War*. The editors have brought together several experts in military and environmental history to explore and analyze the dynamics linking warfare and the environment. Some of the essays argue for an understanding of war as a force in environmental change. Others examine the impact of the environment in shaping an army’s ability to go to war. This volume will appeal to students of environmental and military history, as well as any scholar concerned with nature’s role in land warfare. — RHT □