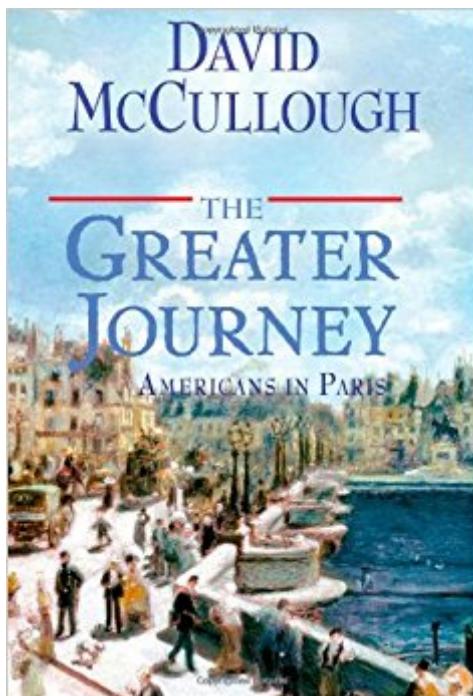


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The Greater Journey: Americans In Paris



Synopsis

The Greater Journey is the enthralling, inspiring—and until now, untold—story of the adventurous American artists, writers, doctors, politicians, architects, and others of high aspiration who set off for Paris in the years between 1830 and 1900, ambitious to excel in their work. After risking the hazardous journey across the Atlantic, these Americans embarked on a greater journey in the City of Light. Most had never left home, never experienced a different culture. None had any guarantee of success. That they achieved so much for themselves and their country profoundly altered American history. As David McCullough writes, “Not all pioneers went west.” Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female doctor in America, was one of this intrepid band. Another was Charles Sumner, who enrolled at the Sorbonne because of a burning desire to know more about everything. There he saw black students with the same ambition he had, and when he returned home, he would become the most powerful, unyielding voice for abolition in the U.S. Senate, almost at the cost of his life. Two staunch friends, James Fenimore Cooper and Samuel F. B. Morse, worked unrelentingly every day in Paris, Cooper writing and Morse painting what would be his masterpiece. From something he saw in France, Morse would also bring home his momentous idea for the telegraph. Pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk from New Orleans launched his spectacular career performing in Paris at age 15. George P. A. Healy, who had almost no money and little education, took the gamble of a lifetime and with no prospects whatsoever in Paris became one of the most celebrated portrait painters of the day. His subjects included Abraham Lincoln. Medical student Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote home of his toil and the exhilaration in “being at the center of things” in what was then the medical capital of the world. From all they learned in Paris, Holmes and his fellow “medicals” were to exert lasting influence on the profession of medicine in the United States. Writers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, and Henry James were all “discovering” Paris, marveling at the treasures in the Louvre, or out with the Sunday throngs strolling the city’s boulevards and gardens. “At last I have come into a dreamland,” wrote Harriet Beecher Stowe, seeking escape from the notoriety Uncle Tom’s Cabin had brought her. Almost forgotten today, the heroic American ambassador Elihu Washburne bravely remained at his post through the Franco-Prussian War, the long Siege of Paris and even more atrocious nightmare of the Commune. His vivid account in his diary of the starvation and suffering endured by the people of Paris (drawn on here for the first time) is one readers will never forget. The genius of sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the son of an immigrant shoemaker, and of painters Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent, three of the greatest American artists ever, would flourish in Paris, inspired by the

examples of brilliant French masters, and by Paris itself. Nearly all of these Americans, whatever their troubles learning French, their spells of homesickness, and their suffering in the raw cold winters by the Seine, spent many of the happiest days and nights of their lives in Paris. McCullough tells this sweeping, fascinating story with power and intimacy, bringing us into the lives of remarkable men and women who, in Saint-Gaudens' phrase, longed "to soar into the blue." The Greater Journey is itself a masterpiece.

Book Information

Hardcover: 558 pages

Publisher: Simon & Schuster; 1st edition (May 24, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9781416571766

ISBN-13: 978-1416571766

ASIN: 1416571760

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 1.7 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 840 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #125,410 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > France #80 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Immigrants #195 in Books > History > Europe > France

Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, June 2011: At first glance, The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris might seem to be foreign territory for David McCullough, whose other books have mostly remained in the Western Hemisphere. But The Greater Journey is still a quintessentially American history. Between 1830 and 1900, hundreds of Americans--many of them future household names like Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, Samuel Morse, and Harriet Beecher Stowe--migrated to Paris. McCullough shows first how the City of Light affected each of them in turn, and how they helped shape American art, medicine, writing, science, and politics in profound ways when they came back to the United States. McCullough's histories have always managed to combine meticulous research with sheer enthusiasm for his subjects, and it's hard not to come away with a sense that you've learned something new and important about whatever he's tackled. The Greater Journey is, like each of McCullough's previous histories, a dazzling and kaleidoscopic foray into American history by one of its greatest living chroniclers. --Darryl Campbell

"An epic of ideas, as well as an exhilarating book of spells . . . This is history to be savored." (Stacy Schiff The New York Times Book Review) "An ambitious, wide-ranging study of how being in Paris helped spark generations of American genius. . . . A gorgeously rich, sparkling patchwork, eliciting stories from diaries and memoirs to create the human drama McCullough depicts so well." • Kirkus Reviews (starred review) "A lively and entertaining panorama. . . . By the time he shows us the triumphant Exposition Universelle in 1889, witnessed through the eyes of such characters as painters John Singer Sargent and Robert Henri, we share McCullough's enthusiasm for the city and his affection for the many Americans who improved their lives, their talent and their nation by drinking at the fountain that was Paris." • Michael Sims, The Washington Post "From a dazzling beginning that captures the thrill of arriving in Paris in 1830 to the dawn of the 20th century, McCullough chronicles the generations that came, saw and were conquered by Paris. . . . The Greater Journey will satisfy McCullough's legion of loyal fans . . . it will entice a whole new generation of Francophiles, armchair travelers and those Americans lucky enough to go to Paris before they die." • Bruce Watson, The San Francisco Chronicle "McCullough's skill as a storyteller is on full display. . . . The idea of telling the story of the French cultural contribution to America through the eyes of a generation of aspiring artists, writers and doctors is inspired. . . . a compelling and largely untold story in American history." • Kevin J. Hamilton, The Seattle Times "There is not an uninteresting page here as one fascinating character after another is explored at a crucial stage of his development. . . . Wonderful, engaging writing full of delighting detail." • John Barron, Chicago Sun-Times "McCullough's research is staggering to perceive, and the interpretation he lends to his material is impressive to behold. . . . Expect his latest book to ascend the best-seller lists and be given a place on the year-end best lists." • Booklist (starred review) "A highly readable and entertaining travelogue of a special sort, an interdisciplinary treat from a tremendously popular Pulitzer Prize-winning historian. . . . Highly recommended." • Library Journal (starred review) "For more than 40 years, David McCullough has brought the past to life in books distinguished by vigorous storytelling and vivid characterizations. . . . McCullough again finds a slighted subject in The Greater Journey, which chronicles the adventures of Americans in Paris. . . . Wonderfully atmospheric." • Wendy Smith, Los Angeles Times "McCullough has hit the historical jackpot. . . . A colorful parade of educated, Victorian-era American travelers and their life-changing experiences in Paris." • Publishers Weekly (starred review) "A rich and enjoyable literary experience. There are reminders on almost every page

why Mr. McCullough is one of the nation's great popular historians." •Claude R. Marx, The Washington Times "McCullough wants us to know more than just the dry facts of our country's history; he wants us to share the vivid emotional experience of those who inhabited it. . . . [he] reminds us of that with each shimmering, resonant page he writes. . . . The Greater Journey is the exhilarating story of what Americans learned [in Paris]." •Julia Keller, Chicago Tribune

Every time David McCullough puts his fingers to the typewriter that he uses to write with, he seems to transform our understanding of the topic he is studying. Whether it was President Harry Truman or for me Mornings on Horseback, I have walked away from his books with an enlightened feel for the topic that I have only been able to achieve with very few authors. James Michener is one who comes to mind immediately. With this book, The Greater Journey, the author has now thoroughly engaged the reader with a topic seldom written about but very deserving of study. It is only natural that we as Americans feel we live in a self centered world; after all we have 2 vast oceans that have protected our shores from invasion for several centuries, and probably will for several more. It simply does not occur to us that since our beginnings, many Americans have chosen to spend considerable time abroad, and in some cases decades of their lives. During the 1800's and specifically from 1830 until 1900, there was a wave of intellectual migration that headed not west to America, but east to Paris, France from America. Keep in mind that we now sit in a country that is preeminent in the world, financially, intellectually, and probably culturally as well. Back then, we were just forming as a nation. The Indian wars were still in process, and the Civil War would also take place, which became the second re-creation of the United States. McCullough is totally aware of this comparison and makes wise use of it throughout this 456 page book composed of 14 distinct chapters separated into 3 parts, followed by a wonderful epilogue, and a very useful bibliography. The author understands history, and is always mindful of the relative positions of different nations. During this period we were not yet the top dog that we were to become after World War I. Europe still controlled the world's greatest universities and they were already centuries old. If you are going to read this book in a physical format as opposed to the Kindle digital version, you are in for a treat because the paper chosen is exquisite, and the font selection is superb. If you are an older reader as I am, you will appreciate the time that was taken to design the book appropriately for readers that still relish a physically well made book, and that's what we have here. This is the story of a 70 year period in the history of Paris, and the scores of Americans who occupied it, lived there, and helped participate in the transformation of what is called the city of light. It is also the story of scores of for want of a better word can be called expatriate Americans, although many of them did return to their

native United States at different times. McCullough is one of the few authors who truly captures the essence of an environment and then proceeds to envelop it with a reality that absorbs and perhaps even demands our attention as readers. His description of the relationship between James Fennimore Cooper and Samuel F.B. Morse and their joy in living in this magnificent city and the effects it had on their work will remain in the reader's soul for many years after the book is put back on the shelf. When Morse painted his masterpiece, it was done in Paris, and perhaps after reading this book, one realizes it could only have been done in Paris. The city of lights already had vast boulevards, and extraordinary parks decades before the United States designed them. Indeed, New York City's Central Park which would be created later in the century would take much from Paris, and other European cities. The Americans who would go to Paris and spend years there would recall later after returning to the United States the joy of the parks, the energy of the city itself and the sheer unequalled cultural delights that embodied Paris. Visually we can still see much of this in the work of the Impressionist School of painting. I found the author's handling of Mary Cassatt, who was a Philadelphia born daughter of American socialites who went on to be an illustrious painter as a principal part of the Impressionist school, to be particularly well done. Her relationship to Edgar Degas the renowned painter of the ballet and horses, as well as landscaping is thoroughly chronicled in the book. McCullough's ability to weave life into life, with Paris as the focal point constantly holding the book together in such a way that the reader feels compelled to continue to read, not pausing to eat is what in the end keeps the author at the pinnacle of his profession today. It is obvious that this book was a labor of love for the author. It comes shining through with the admiration that McCullough holds for both Oliver Wendell Homes the American medical student in Paris, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, a name we all recognize. He even takes the time to take us through the time that Mark Twain spent in this wonderful city. Not only was Paris transformed by the Americans that occupied it during this century, but Paris itself went through extraordinary changes and development. Kings re-invented the city several times during this century. Vast numbers of poor were displaced and sent to the country. It was invaded during this period as well. Later vast tree lined streets and boulevards would be created that became the envy of Europe. The Louvre would be increased in size enormously in an attempt to make it the most important museum on the entire continent, and France would succeed in this effort. McCullough intertwines the story of Paris, its growth, its impact on the Americans and what the Americans brought back to America as a result, into a book in such an imaginative way that the reader will find himself revisiting this book from time to time. In the end the book is riveting, and this is a phrase I find myself continuing to use every time I pick up a book written by this author. Many lives are captured in this masterpiece. They include

George Healy the portrait painter, Nathaniel Hawthorne whose writings still continue to occupy many a college freshman's late nights, and future American Senator Charles Sumner who would have his views on slavery refined while living in Paris. Indeed he became an abolitionist as a result of his Parisian experience.

CONCLUSION: Prior to reading *The Greater Journey*, I believed I had a good understanding of 19th century Paris. Having studied the art of that period, going to the Louvre, and sitting in on lectures dealing with Paris in the 1800's, I looked forward to seeing what this author could add to the story. I did not expect what I got, which was to have him blow away my understanding and replace it with something that came alive and stood on many different legs of understanding, but isn't that what great writing can do. It can simply make things come alive again. You feel as though you are there, and McCullough puts us right there in the thick of the action. Although it is not the whole story, if you have any interest at all in understanding the transformative art period that was the Impressionist movement it is vividly captured here in the lives of Augustus Saint-Gaudens with John Singer Sargent, and Mary Cassatt. David McCullough is already an acclaimed author with two Pulitzers and two national Book Awards, and it looks like with this book, he's got another Pulitzer coming down the pike. Thank you for reading this review. Richard C. Stoyeck

If you read only one sentence of this review, please know that I think *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* is downright excellent and I'd highly recommend it! As much as I enjoyed the books *John Adams* and *1776*, there is something refreshing in seeing living treasure David McCullough depart from the 1700s, an era he knows vividly, and take a tromp through fresh ground. *The Greater Journey* was so good, so flowing and fast-paced I read through it a little too quickly, in one day to be exact, and emerged with the feeling that I cheated myself of what more properly should have been a lingering experience. Therefore, I plan to read it again in smaller bits in the near future! That aside, this was among the more interesting history books I've opened in a long while. McCullough's style has never seemed sharper, more conversational, more authoritative or more learned. Where else is the City of Lights examined in such minute detail and from quite this angle? The museums, the streets, the gardens, the parties and salons, and most of all the people, natives and American alike are examined under the microscopic gaze of this finest of living historians. What emerges is an explanation of why Paris was so alluring then as today, and how their time spent there, often brief visits, shaped some of America's leading personages into the figures they went on to be in life. So many famous names leap out from these pages that it proves a who's who of a time and place. The life stories here are as good as biographies anywhere, and there's something to be

learned on just about every page as McCullough makes time for many asides and anecdotes about those who passed through the French capital before and during la Belle Èpoque. To read this book is to feel a part of Paris 150 years ago, and that is the highest praise I think it is possible to give any historian! Well done, David McCullough, well done!

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