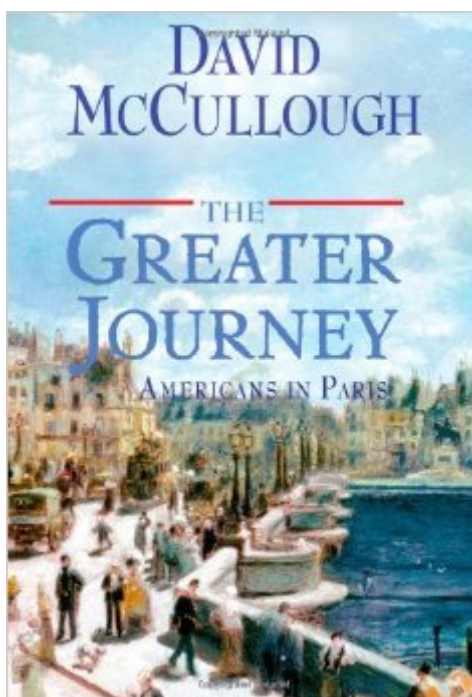


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The Greater Journey: Americans In Paris



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's phrase, longed to soar into the blue. • The Greater Journey is itself a masterpiece.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

Ever since I picked up "John Adams", I have been an avid fan of David McCullough. His biography of Harry Truman is perhaps the best one I've ever read. McCullough has a knack for taking people or things that perhaps have escaped the popular limelight (such as the Panama Canal or the Brooklyn Bridge) and writes a completely captivating history of them. You do not simply read a McCullough book, you experience it. When I first heard that McCullough was penning a new work focusing on the impact that Parisian life had on Americans of the 19th century, I was quite excited to say the least. And when I was offered the chance to do a pre-release review of "The Greater Journey," I was thrilled and jumped at the opportunity. McCullough did not disappoint. "The Greater Journey" varies in focus from his other works. While the majority of his previous books have focused on political and engineering aspects of American history, "The Greater Journey" instead highlights many of the artistic influences of American history (Adams, Jefferson and Franklin get barely a mention). Although working with a large cast of characters such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Cassatt, Louis Moreau Gottschalk and Harriet Beecher Stowe, McCullough spotlights a few in more detail. Although Samuel F. B. Morse is more widely known for inventing the telegraph, McCullough spends more time discussing Morse's artistic work in the Louvre. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sculptor of such memorials as the Farragut, Sherman and Robert Gould Shaw Memorials, was greatly influenced by his time in Paris. Of particular interest to me was the account of Elihu Washburne's efforts during the Franco-Prussian War to protect French, American and German citizens.

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