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The Bootblack Stand		by George Washington Plunkitt
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Dr. George Washington Plunkitt, our prize-winning political analyst, is celebrating the publication of his new book, which is now available at avant-garde bookstores throughout New Jersey. Dr. Plunkitt's book is about the importance of altruism in politics and it is titled *What's in It for Me?* Although Dr. Plunkitt expects to earn ten million dollars from sales of his new book, he has agreed to continue to advise public figures through this column. Address all correspondence to The Bootblack Stand, c/o The Establishment, R.R. 11, Box 360, Bloomington, Indiana 47401, Continental U.S.A.

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

My husband, Leonard, and I have been at the vanguard of the people's struggle, throughout this wretched period of war, strife, and conspicuous consumption. We hate America's crass materialism and we will go to any length to fix America's attention on the plight of the proletariat and the oppressed. What are needed are courageous, selfless, and audacious gestures forwarding the just goals of the oppressed and of criminals in general.

So it is that Lenny and I have committed ourselves to undertake such a gesture. Regardless of our fate, we intend to make bold to invite the Symbionese Liberation Army to a cocktail party. It is the only way my husband and I have left to speak out on their behalf. We shall invite all the right people and we shall take a collection for the furtherance of whatever it is that the SLA wants. Unfortunately I am not yet acquainted with any actual members of the SLA and I do not know what it is the SLA is in favor of. Can you help me get one or two good-looking specimens of the SLA to my party, and do you know what noble cause they are furthering? Does it have

anything to do with the Potawatomi women? Also is the SLA a tax-exempt army?

Cordially,  
Felicia Bernstein

Dear Mrs. Bernstein:

Though it may be an indication of an incipient disengagement from serious American politics, I must admit that I have yet to meet any members of the Symbionese Liberation Army. I do know several members of the Knights of Malta, and after the war I knew a retired member of the Foreign Legion who ran a beauty parlor in New York's famed Artichoke Area. But I cannot say that I know any of the SLA worthies. Nor does it seem that I will be meeting any, for I fear once these folks surface they will be locked in the slammer. I suggest you hold a symbolic cocktail party at a local insane asylum and invite Bella Abzug to represent the SLA.

—GWP

Dear Dr. Plunkitt:

As you are probably aware the government has hounded and persecuted me for my political beliefs. I have been jailed and

exposed to such unfortunate publicity that even my artistic integrity is being called into question. As things stand today I probably could not even get published in the *New York Review of Books*, even with a hyphenated name. But I can live with my sadness, after all, think of the hardships endured by artists like Oscar Wilde and Lenny Bruce.

What really troubles me is the moral climate of our country. Many Americans are not only losing their faith in government, but they are losing their faith in general. What will happen to America if the majority of Americans lose faith?

Sincerely yours,  
Clifford Irving

Dear Mr. Irving:

I am honored to have received a communiqué from such an illustrious name in the world of letters. During all that pother over the Howard Hughes book I was quite taken by your grace and high purpose, and though I cannot say that I admired your ends I always admired your means. Surely the *New York Review of Books* will publish you. Tell them how often you have been interviewed on National Public Radio, and mention your theory that no one should be imprisoned for a crime unless the victim actually loses his life or is *seriously* injured. Such advanced ideas are always sure-fire with the *Review* people.

I can understand your distress concerning the possibility that the American people are losing their faith. Without their simple faith you would have no means of livelihood. Not only would progressive intellectuals like yourself lose their markets, but think of the hard times awaiting thousands of politicians, millions of bureaucrats, and the frauds of National Public Radio? If the American people continue to lose their faith in government I suspect there will be a lot more freedom in the land, and if they lose their faith in general I suspect they will be a lot richer, though probably not so contented.

—GWP

## Book Review

# Plain Speaking

HARRY TRUMAN has ascended steadily in the estimate of historians, moving from the presidential ash can into which historians had cast him to the Top Ten, even outstripping Ike, "the fella that succeeded me," as he almost invariably referred to General Eisenhower, whom he cordially loathed, and whose (alleged) war-time peccadillos figure in this book. Merle Miller writes that Truman said he had destroyed a correspondence between Generals Eisenhower and Marshall, the latter having informed Ike that Ike's intention to divorce Mamie was unthinkable and would force the Army Chief of Staff, Marshall, to ruin Eisenhower. Miller's superb new biography is far more than just a compendium of such juicy

*An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman*

by Merle Miller  
Putnam \$8.95

gossip, the latter of no more—nor less—importance than the behind-scenes tales of J. Edgar Hoover or Martin Luther King or the Kennedy brothers that surface from time to time in pop literature and only decades later make their way into "scholarly" histories.

At present, Truman has suffered the downgrading of "revisionist" historians, who see him as a trigger-happy cold warrior, simultaneous with the renewed ap-

preciation of old liberals and even conservatives. This is true not because of his domestic policy, but because of his foreign policy. We know now that Truman was quite right to press for aid to Greece and Turkey, the Marshall Plan, Point Four, and NATO. And Truman's intervention in Korea, now an ingredient in the New Left condemnation, likewise seems to level heads a reasoned response, and a just one.

Yet Truman was by no means faultless. Like his biographer, Truman was to the end unwilling to say an uncharitable word about Alger Hiss. And of Stalin? "I liked him," the otherwise shrewd Truman asserted. And on. But he knew his Nixon, and knew him well: "a shifty-eyed, goddamn

liar," which says it all. In fact, Truman listed Nixon as one of but two men whom he absolutely despised, the other a minor Missouri pol who had lied to Harry.

*Plain Speaking* is based on tapes made in 1961-1962 for a TV program that died aborning. Truman was then a decade into retirement, enjoying to the full his "promotion," as he called his return to private life. Private citizen, spry (and how he hated that word), sound in the head, Truman accepted Miller as friend and scribe, came to see him as a vehicle for getting the message across.

What emerged on Miller's tapes is Truman almost at ease; *almost*, because the former President hardly let it all out. He was shrewd, witty, profane, a surprisingly adept historian himself, and his respect for the office of the presidency was huge: he was not about to diminish that office by letting go entirely, nor did Miller push very hard. Indeed, one real criticism of the book

is that its author did not prod enough, didn't ferret out some of the nastier sides of Truman. But then, HST was prickly and initially suffered Miller warily; no doubt Miller felt he could not afford to press firmly. This is no warts-and-all book, and the definitive biography by some future historian will require some reappraisals. This is a puff for Truman as seen from Truman's perspective, amplified by testimonials from, seemingly, every codger in Missouri, not to mention such as Dean Acheson, the patrician whose love of the plain-spoken, somewhat coarse Missourian puzzles lay folk. "I consider him [Truman] one of the most extraordinary human beings who ever lived," Acheson said; Miller concurs, as might the reader after a pleasant amble through his exceedingly pleasant book.

The book has been excerpted in magazines up one wall and down the other, reviewed everywhere, climbed to the top of the best-seller lists before its official publication, and soon it will be out in paperback

and will capture an audience numbering in the hundreds of thousands. It is enough, therefore, here to appraise its fineness and place it in some context.

We have been through the blandness of Ike, the tinsel and show-biz of Kennedy, the overbloated messianism of LBJ, and the chintziness of Nixon and his merry band of crooks. Harry comes up smelling like roses. His toughness, sincerity, decency, decisiveness made Truman unique in the post-Teddy Roosevelt presidency. We read *Plain Speaking* and realize what we have lost in the White House. We read it, moreover, to see what we have lost in America. Not just ward-heeler politics of a dubious variety, which loss we suffer without regret, but also the plainness and fundamental honesty of the real middle American serving country with a minimum of personal aspiration, serving mother land with a maximum of unabashed patriotism.

David Brudnoy

## Book Review

# FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny

1882-1928

by Kenneth S. Davis  
Putnam \$15.00

IF NAPOLEON WAS right, if history is a myth that men agree to believe, then historians are the myth-makers who gather the facts which make the truths. The public, statesmen, even historians live within the world of those truths, arranging them so that the mysteries of life may be more easily understood. In this sense the attempt to "mythify" individuals, to reckon with their behavior, appeal, impact, has inspired the biographies which unceasingly deluge us. For better or worse the "movers" of history are mythified according to popular interest, available information, and the effect of their lives. Americans today—those studying international conflict, those yearning to sustain or destroy the images of political heroes, those convinced that current usurpations of political power have important precedents, those simply fascinated by trivia or nostalgia—recognize that U.S. presidents head the list of individuals whom historians and journalists most readily popularize. Kenneth S. Davis, responding to popular interest in one of "the most controversial and complex personality ever to occupy the White House," has made his contribution to historical mythology in *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny, 1882-1928*. This first volume, an account of Roosevelt's life down to the decision to run for governor of New York, is also a history of the political culture in which Franklin D. Roosevelt grew and ultimately emerged as its leader.

If book titles are indicative of more than an attempt to capture public attention, Davis introduces his theme immediately. The title suggests, and the author subtly maintains the theme, that Destiny, an almost unalterable, invincible, predetermined force, somehow fated FDR to greatness. From birth through the years until his bout with polio, FDR came to believe that national preeminence was in-

evitable. Davis' purpose is to relate the background and course of Roosevelt's road to national acclaim. But lest the reader conclude that this tome is 853 pages of Calvinist theology, one might note that Davis' book is the result of careful study, especially of available secondary materials. He acknowledges his debt to such important scholarly works as James MacGregor Burns' *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, Frank Freidel's volumes, Joseph P. Lash's *Eleanor and Franklin*, as well as the reminiscences of Josephus Daniels, Frances Perkins, Eleanor Roosevelt, and many others. In so far as *FDR* believed Destiny beckoned him to greatness, Davis shows how Roosevelt's environment, personality, and the accidents of history attested to this thesis.

Just what part heredity took in determining FDR's personality is difficult to say, but the circumstances of birth and childhood must have been critical. The Roosevelt ancestry and heritage, the social position of his parents, the special relationship between mother and son, were the founding elements of Roosevelt's personality. Add the spiritual growth provided by Endicott Peabody at Groton and the pressures for social achievement at Harvard, and Davis' insistence on the importance of early character formation is clearly justified.

Davis emphasizes the *noblesse oblige* environment in which FDR was reared, the early exposure to politics ("Little man, I am making a strange wish for you," said President Grover Cleveland to the five-year-old Franklin, "It is that you may never become President"), and Roosevelt's subtle rebel-

lion against maternal dominance ("Please don't make any more arrangements for my future happiness," he once wrote his mother). What emerged, Davis stresses, was a personality founded in determination—to learn, to grow, to overcome and achieve.

Never showing signs of intellectual genius, FDR succeeded because of indomitable will, although Davis also notes the special influence of Cousin Theodore: "The boy's admiration of the colorful 'Teddy' became a motivating force: his identification of himself with his famous distant cousin bolstered his self-confidence and suggested, albeit vaguely, a possible career." "By this time Franklin Roosevelt habitually measured himself and his progress against the personality and career of his famous Cousin Theodore." And despite the energy expended to compare the mind and personality of the two cousins, Davis makes a rather peculiar contrast: "There was a strong element of the feminine in his makeup and . . . this was the principal difference, so far as character and personality were concerned."

Roosevelt's political education, from state senator in New York to assistant secretary of the navy to his unsuccessful vice-presidential campaign, helped his development. Demonstrating the courage to tackle Boss Murphy and Tammany Hall, slow to recognize the problems of urban workers and farmers, shrewd enough to align with Progressive Democrats and Woodrow Wilson, mastering the craft of manipulation and dissimulation to make headway against Secretary of the Navy Daniels, and above all learning the art of political "style" as vice-presidential nominee in 1920, Roosevelt became acutely perceptive of his political skills. Devoted less to principle than expediency, he made his way as much through the efforts of Louis Howe