



“Compared with the creatures of the Amazon, including the Indians whose territory they were invading, they were all—from the lowliest camarada to the former president of the United States—clumsy, conspicuous prey.”

*The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey* by Candice Millard is the story of Theodore Roosevelt's journey to map the unexplored River of Doubt deep in the Amazon rain forest. After losing the presidential election of 1912, Theodore Roosevelt did as he always did after a bitter experience—he set himself a challenge that would require immense physical and emotional courage. This time the experience was also a chance to be a real explorer, something that Roosevelt had always dreamed of. This time the challenge was the Amazon.

*The River of Doubt* is the story of that challenge, but more than that, it is the story of men versus nature. Roosevelt is only one of the intrepid band of explorers which include his son Kermit, the Brazilian explorer Colonel Rondon, and the famous naturalist and adventurer, Dr. George Cherrie. But the character that looms largest in the book is the Amazon rain forest and river. Millard does an astonishing job of describing the jungle in all its immensity and complexity. It is a world unlike any other, notable for the diversity of wild life, most of which will kill you. Millard makes it very clear that in the eyes of the inhabitants of the jungle, the intrepid explorers are nothing more than prey.

As you read, you will marvel at the determination that propels the men forward down the river, especially as they reach the point of no return. They could have died, and they almost did. I read the book with my thoughts divided between admiration for their audacity and courage and astonishment that anyone would do anything so stupid! *The River of Doubt* is an intense read, and you will find that the further the men venture down the river, the harder it is to put the book down.

In our discussion, we will do as Millard does in the book and focus on the individuals. What do you learn about Theodore Roosevelt? What about his relationship with Kermit? Pay attention to what drives Colonel Rondon and the mixed reception to the way that Rondon insists on dealing with the Indians. But as much as anything else, what will you remember about the Amazon? And what drives explorers to take on these impossible challenges? Is it doubt in themselves and a need to prove their self-worth that sends these men down the River of Doubt?

I look forward to discussing these questions as we explore Millard's book when we meet on Tuesday, May 2 at 6:30 for The Historians. See you there!

*Donna McBride*