



President Bush Visits and Thanks Troops in Anbar Province

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Welcome to Our October Meeting Historians!

For our October 3 meeting, we will be discussing *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006- 2008* by Thomas E. Ricks. This is the story of the surge, the radical new policy initiated by President George W. Bush and the military in 2006. This new policy required the addition of 30,000 American troops to a war that many Americans, civilian and military, were seeing as a losing proposition without any clear strategy for winning. The surge included a new policy for better protection of Iraqi civilians and a realpolitik policy for dealing with insurgents. Thomas E. Ricks is a well-respected journalist who has earned the trust of military reporters, so much so that he was given unprecedented access to the military command to write this book. Ricks has won two Pulitzer Prizes for National Reporting. And *The Gamble* is the follow-up to his first book on the War in Iraq, *Fiasco*, which is now required reading in the military.

This is a war that is covered daily in the news, then and now. So why read a book on it? The answer lies in the details that provide context for the decisions that were made. The book truly is a behind the scenes account of how policy and strategic decisions are made and the difference between them. We see how friendships and rivalries can drive command decisions as well as the decisions as to who will command. *The Gamble* also takes you into daily life in the Green Zone and in Baghdad. And Ricks tells us the truth behind some “facts” reported in the news. For example, it was widely reported that after marines opened fire on dozens of unarmed men, women, and children at Haditha, there was more of an outcry in the US than in Iraq. But as Ricks explains, “this was not for reasons that were good for the American cause. Some Iraqis said they hadn’t heard the news because they lacked electricity.” It is these details that make *The Gamble* a fascinating read.

As you read, pay attention to personalities. Again, these are names that we know. Ricks was criticized for his unabashed admiration of Petraeus. He argues that Petraeus was really that good. Others disagree. What do you think? And, if you agree with Ricks, do you think his admiration hurts or helps his account of the war? And what of the other figures in the book? Critics have noted that the description of the relationship between the American military command in the Green Zone and the politicians in Washington is particularly compelling. What do you think? Any surprises?

Historians argue about when current events become history. Do we have to wait until the participants die? Is the objectivity prized by historians even possible when talking about something that happens in their lifetime? Think about the strengths and weaknesses of discussing history we remember. (We will not get into a discussion as to whether objectivity is EVER possible, or even desirable. Trust me. You don’t want to go there.)

The Gamble by Thomas E. Ricks is a fascinating book, and I am looking forward to discussing it with you when we meet on Tuesday, October 3 at 6:30 for The Historians. See you there!

Donna McBride