



WELCOME TO OUR DECEMBER BOOK, HISTORIANS!

Our next meeting of The Historians is Tuesday, December 5 at 6:30 to discuss *Hero of the Empire: The Boer War, A Daring Escape, and the Making of Winston Churchill* by Candice Millard. Many of you will remember Millard from last spring when we read her book *River of Doubt* about Teddy Roosevelt on the Amazon River. While *River of Doubt* discusses how Roosevelt drew upon the lessons of a tumultuous lifetime to survive his trip down the Amazon, *Hero of the Empire* focuses on a pivotal incident in Winston Churchill's early life which Millard argues did much to shape the man that he became. This is a story of how Churchill becomes Churchill.

Hero of the Empire is an exciting read. Millard takes us into the ferocity of the Boer War, Churchill's death-defying actions in the railroad battle in which he is captured, and the amazing circumstances under which Churchill escapes the POW camp where he is imprisoned. Alone and totally unprepared, Churchill makes his way across miles of enemy territory to help and to eventual freedom. This book is begging to be made into a movie! Where are you HBO and Netflix? Forget *Game of Thrones* and *The Crown*. Give us *The Wonders of Winston*, please.

Even as you read and marvel at Churchill's exploits, you will also marvel at what an irritatingly ambitious and supremely self-confident young man he was. Churchill never had any doubt that he was bound for greatness. All he needed was the fame, in his own name, not his family name, that greatness required. This meant that Churchill was always in relentless pursuit of medals and acclaim, a character trait that did not sit well with the aristocratic circles he lived within. Yet, it is this unswerving sense of destiny that keeps Churchill going in the darkest moments of his escape. And there are many dark moments because Churchill hates being out of control, hates being forced to wait when he wants action, and most of all, he hates depending on others for his fate. Millard makes a good case for how these circumstances tempered his character in ways which will be important for his future successes as well as guaranteeing the fame that he had so long sought.

As you read, note the things that we learn about Churchill's character and how he makes the decisions that he does. He is genuinely heroic, but is he always smart? And what do you learn about the Boer War and its effect on not just Churchill's sense of self, but on Britain's sense of self as well? Watch for the fun history facts that Millard scatters throughout the book. Do you know where the term "sniper" comes from? Why the British officer's soldier valets are called "batmen"? And if anyone offers you Johnston's Fluid Beef, say no! As you can see, we will have a fun discussion of *Hero of the Empire*.

I wanted to let you know the dates and the books for the Spring semester meetings of The Historians. As you will see, it is a varied list that includes two books suggested by members of the group in last year's survey. I am eagerly looking forward to reading each of these and to talking about them with all of you. Mark your calendars now!

February 6: *The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom: America and China, 1776 to the Present*, John Pomfret

March 6: *Twilight of the Belle Époque: The Paris of Picasso, Stravinsky, Proust, Renault, Marie Curie, Gertrude Stein, and Their Friends through the Great War*, Mary McAuliffe

April 3: *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World*, Steven Johnson

May 1: *Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World*, Roger Crowley

I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday, December 5 at 6:30 to discuss *Hero of the Empire* by Candice Millard. See you there!

Dr. Donna McBride