



The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris

David McCullough , Edward Herrmann (Reading)

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From two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author David McCullough comes the inspiring, enthralling—and until now, untold—story of the American painters, writers, sculptors, and doctors who journeyed to Paris between 1830 and 1900, ambitious to excel in their work, fell in love with the city, and changed America with what they achieved.

After risking the hazardous journey across the Atlantic, these Americans embarked on a greater journey in the City of Light. 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.

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. Sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and painters Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent, three great American artists, flourished in Paris, inspired by French masters and the city itself.

McCullough tells this sweeping, fascinating story with power and intimacy, bringing us into the lives of remarkable men and women. *The Greater Journey* is itself a masterpiece.

The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris Details

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From Reader Review The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris for online ebook

Edward says

I had an coincidental experience as I came to the end of this book about Americans who lived in Paris during the 19th century. I was at 52% complete on my e-reader and thought it odd that I was only half way through the book, but abruptly, it seemed, the book ended.. Can't be - there must be a lot more Americans to come. But no, that was the end of the narrative - the rest was taken up with detailed page by page footnotes. It raised the question, though of why McCullough arbitrarily stopped at the end of the 19th century when there were many more famous Americans who would go to Paris in the 20th century?

One reason is that during the 19th century it was much more difficult for Americans to go to Paris, given the long and often arduous seas voyages, especially during the first part of the century. What was the attraction for so many well-known Americans? They were not there in any official or diplomatic capacity, as had been Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, or Thomas Jefferson. They came for very specific reasons, "ambitious to excel in work that mattered greatly to them, and they saw time in Paris, the experience of Paris, as essential to achieving that dream . . ." Paris was the cultural capital of the world, and it offered possibilities that existed nowhere else, especially in a new and unsettled country like the United States.

Paris, for example, had a wealth of medical techniques which attracted Oliver Wendell Holmes and anyone who wanted to study the latest advances in medicine and treatment of diseases. Its superb art collection at the Louvre brought people like Mary Cassatt, Samuel Morse (later to invent the Morse code, but painting was what brought him to Paris as a young man), portrait painters like Benjamin West, John Copley, and John Trumbull. Writers came such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Fenimore Cooper, and later Henry James and Mark Twain. Cooper, in fact, wrote nearly all of the Leather Stocking tales, including THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, in Paris. The book concludes with the sculptor August Saint-Gaudens who lived much of his life in Paris and created some of the more lasting and well-known works of American statuary art, including the statues of General Sherman and the Robert Shaw Memorial in Boston

Along with this continuing list of individuals and their activities in Paris, McCullough provides a running history of what was going on in Paris and France. There was the turmoil of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, the mid-century grand scale makeover of Paris by Baron Haussman resulting in the geography of the city as we know it today, the Franco-Prussian war with the horrific siege of Paris and the last stand of the Paris Commune in 1871. A key figure in this tragedy was the American ambassador, Elihu Washburne, one of the few ambassadors to stay in the city during the war. During the siege when people starved to death, he did all he could to mitigate the suffering, and his stature was such that he was even considered to be a presidential candidate .

In 1900 Henry Adams complained that Paris was being overrun by Americans, and that further answers my initial question of why the book stops at the end of the century. Paris had ceased to be the beacon it had been to Americans in the 19th century. It was now becoming just another place to visit, prominent to be sure, but it had lost some of its unique appeal.

Amy says

I LOVE David McCullough; as a matter of fact, I ran out, bought this book, and read it just because it had his name on it. However, *The Greater Journey* is not John Adams, Truman, or *Mornings on Horseback*. While McCullough excels at writing investigating the life of a man facing extraordinary circumstances (the topic of all three above books listed), he falters at writing about many men and women being influenced by Paris. The first third of the book is choppy, confusing, and riddled with short passages with very short paragraphs about a variety of people. I felt that I was not getting the information that I really wanted about each person. I wish he would stop jumping around and finish the story of that person.

The next two-thirds of the book, he began to hit his stride; mostly because he wrote about Elihu Washburne, the US Ambassador to Paris, who was a man facing extraordinary circumstances during the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris. The last third focused on a group of artists-- John Singer Sargent, Mary Cassatt, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and he did a really good job explaining why these artists were revolutionary.

However, his scope was too large-- Paris, itself, is quite a demanding study alone, and I feel it would have been better had he chosen to focus on a few Americans to show the influence of Paris-- rather than many who happened to visit/live in Paris and enjoyed it.

If you are interested in American figures and in Paris, it definitely worth the read; I did learn a lot and he does still tell a good story.

Elizabeth S says

McCullough's work is always excellent, though I would argue the author is at his best when he focuses on one person rather than a plethora of figures, which is the reason I deducted a star.

Just as its subtitle says, *The Greater Journey* recounts the stories of many famous Americans who went to Paris. Whether to learn, travel, absorb culture, or hone skills, all of these now-impressive voyagers have interesting tales of their own. McCullough breathes great life into each of these people, and also frames their experiences in Paris with fascinating insight as to why they went and what resulted from the journey.

I read this book too many years ago to get very in-depth with my review, but one aspect I remember finding both surprising and wonderful was how some of the Parisian pursuits undertaken had no evident relation to what certain people are so known for today. This gave me a greater appreciation for these historical figures, and also kept me even more intrigued.

McCullough's writing style is just as great as always, and he does give greater attention to some people than others, which helps keep this from turning into an overwhelming tome. One of the best parts of *The Greater Journey* is how it heads through almost a century of Paris' history by focusing on the Americans visiting at the time. Whether a doctor's efforts lead you to better comprehend illness in Paris, or a painter's huge undertaking allows you to envision the setup of museums at the time, there's such a breadth of knowledge covered here. Narrating the period through specific individuals helps the book to flow in a way it otherwise may not have managed.

Especially because this is not a single biography, there will likely be parts that interest a reader more than others, since it's hard to know everything you're signing up for when beginning. Nonetheless, it's all executed in a clean, interesting, and informative manner. I would highly recommend *The Greater Journey* to anyone interested in Parisian history, Americans abroad, or who just want to branch out from the most famous of

McCullough's books.

Grampus says

Dear Goodreads Community:

This is not easy for me to do and I am sorry to have to do this in this forum. I realize it is a bit cowardly and beg your understanding but you need to know it is not you, it's me—well, maybe it is you.

Yes, over the last four years we've had some good times and I will cherish those books you've recommended through your insightful reviews and ratings. Those were wonderful times and I trusted you then. However, over the past year or so, it seems more and more that you've taken that trust and mocked me, and dare I say, wasted my time?—the ultimate slap in the face in the book reading world.

You are not entirely to blame. Sometimes relationships just drift apart. People become interested in different things as they grow and perspectives change. I've grown tired of being a contrarian in this relationship and feel that it is time for me to step back and re-evaluate your opinions.

What? You want me to give you examples? Do I really have to tell you? This is so like you—wanting me to spell everything out for you. Okay, take this book for example. I list David McCullough as one of my favorites and you have generally supported my viewpoint regarding him with your ratings. For this book, 87% of you gave it 4 or 5 stars. Slam dunk decision to read it is what you're basically telling me. Disappointingly, through my reading of this based upon your recommendation, you have embarrassed me in public as I found the book to be a see-saw read of good chapters and ho-hum chapters about various people. Most of the time I did not care about these people at all (and I'm a history lover). I was not drawn in to these lives nor did you warn me about vicissitudes of the chapters. Still, I did trudge through it and as you can see, I did give it two stars meaning it was "OK" but based upon your ratings I was expecting so much more. Relationships are about being there for each other and I didn't feel as though you were in this case.

Another example was *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. Eighty percent gave this 4 or 5 stars but yet again, I did not understand the inordinate praise that was heaped upon this book. From my review of that book, *"I was moved by the tragic story of Henrietta's life. She deserved much better. However, the story seemed to drone on about the life of her descendants to the point I didn't care about them anymore. They began to annoy me with their antics to the point that the sympathy I originally had for them disappeared. I understand their socio- and economic background and understand their plight but as Henrietta's daughter said, 'times were different back then' and nothing was done intentionally to defraud or short-change the family."* So that was my take and I could not see the love that everyone had for this one either.

These are just two examples and I could go on but I think you get the point.

Don't get me wrong, we can move forward and maintain a relationship as there is still more than a soupcon of trust between us but it will take work to build that back up over time. Oh, we'll still continue to see each other just as much and that's why I'm hoping we can still be cordial and friendly but I need some time and space until I see that our ratings dovetail more closely. Don't hate me. . .

Still Friends,

Grampus

Stephen Escalera says

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. With each of these and others, McCullough writes of how their time in Paris influenced their artistic abilities or, as was the case with Charles Sumner, their political/humanitarian views.

When I first heard of the subject matter of the book, I wasn't sure it would be as interesting as McCullough's other works that dealt with more sweeping changes such as 1776. But while watching an interview of McCullough about the book, he made a statement that convinced me otherwise. He said "History is much more than just politics and generals. History is about life. History is human. And music, art, literature, poetry, theatre, science, the whole realm of the human spirit is all part of history."

As captivating and readable as his other books, *The Greater Journey* offers a unique glimpse of the more cultural side of American history and the huge role Paris life played in shaping this culture.

Jill Hutchinson says

This book is atypical of McCullough's others works which are usually concentrated on one person's life. This is a dual biography.....that of Paris between 1839-1900 and of the Americans who visited/worked/studied and lived there.

Paris was a magnet for artists, writers, and scientists....the center of European life and knowledge and Americans came in droves. McCullough paints a delightful picture of a beautiful city which was vibrant and and totally different from anything found in the US. Life was casual, slightly amoral and in constant movement, with architecture that was alive with history. During the years covered by this book, France went through many changes.....the reigns of Louis-Phillipe and Emperor Napoleon III, the Commune, two Republics and the Franco-Prussian War. Through it all, Paris prevailed.

The author then concentrates on the talented Americans who flocked there, mainly to learn from the masters of art and medicine/science and each is the subject of a mini-biography. They include such luminaries (most at the beginnings of their careers) as James Fenimore Cooper, Samuel F.B. Morse, Mary Cassat, Oliver Wendell Holmes (the elder), Henry James and Augustus Saint-Gaudens (I always thought he was French but was American with a French father). Some had the family money to live comfortably but many were poverty stricken and lived by their wits. But such was the attraction of Paris that they stayed until they felt they had developed their talents to the point that they could return to America. But in almost every case, they returned again and again even after they had reached the apogee of their careers.

This may not be my favorite book by one of my favorite authors but it still ranks very highly. His description of the magical environment of Paris is fascinating and the strongest point of this history. It makes one yearn to have been there. Recommended.

Rachel says

I can see how, in all the wild *Sturm und Drang* of this modern world, you just might get in the mood for a couple of peaceful evenings in the parlor listening to a softly ticking clock and a mild, grandfatherly-type person amble gently through his stock of anecdotes. And if you happen to like your anecdotes very gentle and discursive indeed, and you've a yen to untangle bits about some pretty interesting Americans in Paris between 1830 and 1900 from the anecdote skein, then this is the book for you:

“Ah, yes. Did I ever tell you about how Charles Sumner arrived in Paris...now was that back in 1837 or was it '38? Very bright fellow he was, too. If you can wait a moment, I have some of his letters to show you, if I can just find my? Yes, yes, here we are. He did return to Paris much later, you know, after that terribly unpleasant Congressional incident. Needed a complete change of scene and a break, poor fellow...”

I say none of this from a place of hate. This was a rather pleasant read, actually. I get the sense that David McCullough has an enormous affection for his subject matter, and spent many happy months burrowing through the writings of these 19th-century Americans, major and minor, to bring them to us here, in this book. And there are some fascinating and under-appreciated characters to be met – Charles Sumner, later Congressperson and 1860s abolitionist; Oliver Wendell Holmes; Samuel Morse, ardent artist and telegraph inventor/promoter; dogged diplomat Elihu Washburne, whose Yankee grit shone during the Prussian siege of Paris; sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens; Impressionist Mary Cassatt...the list goes on.

And on and on and on, as taking “Americans in Paris between 1830 and 1900” as one's topic opens a field wider than a Haussmanized boulevard.

Which brings me to a big old bunch of questions the book left unanswered for me. I am not a historian (betcha couldn't tell), nor have I read of McCullough's other, highly acclaimed books, so maybe you can help. Why 1830 – 1900? Is there a compelling, unifying historical reason for the book to be bounded by those 70 years? Or was there just a conveniently located gap between all that done-to-death Ben Franklin/Thomas Jefferson stuff* and the whole *Midnight in Paris* crew? And McCullough focuses mainly on artists of various stripes, with a smattering of political and medical types, but how did he choose which Americans to include or which to emphasize? Quality of primary sources? Fame? General interest? Significance to the big picture?

And speaking of the big picture, darned if I was able to make one out. Aside from the odd statistic on the numbers of Americans in Paris at various times, the book tends to keep a very narrow focus. McCullough successively zooms in on an American, or very small group of Americans, during their time in Paris,

occasionally following individuals back stateside for major life events. Aside from a few generalities about medical training and such, he doesn't pull out many unified themes about his subjects. Okay, fine. Seventy years and thousands of Americans – perhaps there isn't much unity to be pulled out. But neither does he spend a lot of page time connecting their stories more firmly to the larger forces at work in France. Not that the book takes place in a complete American vacuum; McCullough does mention relevant historical and cultural happenings in Paris, but he de-emphasizes the French context like, whoa, modernism: blink and you'll miss it.

Which leaves us with that skein of anecdotes, a creaky rocker and a slowly cooling cup of tea.

This book would probably pair well with: any of the untold thousands of meatier offerings about the Paris, art, medicine and/or Americans of this period, of which offerings I have read, all told, about six. I can recommend Olympia: Paris in the Age of Manet, The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers, and, flawed as it is, Paris: The Secret History. Even the featherweight The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America, so help me, will give you more solid stuff on the significance of Universal Expositions the Eiffel Tower. And from the fiction side, perhaps even, oh, Henry James's The American, a charming book about the greater journey of *an* American in Paris between 1830 and 1900, would be a tasty complement.

* And yes, I saw McCullough stated he started in 1830, as that was when Americans started coming to Paris in large numbers for non-diplomatic reasons...as he did cover a diplomat, and vividly, I was a bit puzzled.

Allie says

With a nod to Rachel's excellent review, this was the literary equivalent of a cup of cocoa (the chalky kind from a tin, without marshmallows) with your grandfather. It was perfectly pleasant and you will learn quite a few things about various American intellectuals and reformers who spent time in Paris during the 19th century, but the slow pace and overly detailed anecdotes are apt to make you nod off. Also, the lack of clear connections between the various characters (other than the fact that they all had a stint in Paris) made the narrative feel rambling and a bit incoherent to me.

I would rate this somewhere between 3 and 3.5 stars. The synopsis on GR describes the book as "enthraling and engaging." Er, no. But it was well-written, reasonably informative, and would probably be a big hit in my grandparents' retirement home.

Michelle says

Magnifique! I should have known--McCullough is one of my favorite history writers, and he's writing about nineteenth-century Paris, one of my favorite places to read/think/dream about. This was even better than I thought it'd be. When I was young I always wanted to go to Paris--but not Francois Mitterand's Paris. No, I wanted Degas' Paris, Balzac's Paris, Toulouse-Lautrec's Paris. Well, this was an extended visit to that same Paris but through fresh eyes. Much of what was in this book I knew little about, despite the many, many books I've read on the people, places and events of nineteenth-century Paris. For example, I knew little about the American medical students in Paris in the 1830's and 1840's. And much of the rest, although I'd reach much, was still from a fresh perspective--like the fascinating account of the Prussian Siege of Paris in 1870 and the Commune--I'd read many books, but none from the viewpoint of the American ambassador to Paris. I'd had no idea how influential he had been. Excellent book, this may go on my "reread someday" list.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

A new McCullough! Squee!

Diane says

This book made me wish I could travel back in time to Paris in the 1830s. The collection of artists and writers there was remarkable.

In "The Greater Journey," David McCullough tells stories of a varied group of Americans who went to Paris in the 19th century, and then returned home with new ideas, new art, new writings and even new inventions. The group included James Fenimore Cooper, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mary Cassatt, among others. One of my favorite chapters was about Samuel Morse, who studied to be a painter, but also ended up inventing the telegraph and Morse Code.

I also liked the story of Charles Sumner, who studied at the Sorbonne. When Sumner saw black students in the class with the same desire for knowledge as white students, it profoundly changed how he thought of African-Americans. After he returned home to the States, he became a powerful spokesman for abolition.

"It would be a while before Sumner's revelation -- that attitudes about race in America were taught, not part of 'the nature of things' -- would take effect in his career, but when it did, the consequences would be profound. Indeed, of all that Americans were to 'bring home' from their time in Paris in the form of newly acquired professional skills, new ideas, and new ways of seeing things, this insight was to be as important as any."

This is the third McCullough book I've read, the others being "Truman" and "1776," and I really like his writing style. He is a gifted storyteller and weaves in interesting details from history. I listened to this on audio (read by Edward Hermann), but I was glad I had a print copy to review because it includes some great photographs and pictures, especially of the artwork that was created in Paris.

There were so many fascinating people and great stories in this book, and I would highly recommend it to fans of history.

Randy Auxier says

(This review appeared in the Carbondale Nightlife, February 28-March 6, 2013, p. 14.)

David McCullough became a household name in the most unlikely way. He wrote a biography of John Adams, who was tedious on his best day. Somehow the little guy came to life in McCullough's prose. But there's a back story. McCullough's great secret? He's not a history professor; he's a writer. He has nothing beyond a Bachelor's degree, and that's in literature (albeit from Yale, where he studied with Thornton Wilder, Robert Penn Warren, etc. etc.). McCullough always made his living as a writer and over the decades won every conceivable award – two Pulitzers, two National Book Awards, and The Medal of Freedom

among them. All that acclaim did not add up to staggering book sales, however. Then came Adams. It's like scoring a number one hit with a remake of "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald." And how do you follow that?

First McCullough cleaned off his desk and tossed the leftover research into a chronicle of the year 1776 (for those who hadn't had quite enough Adams) and surveyed the options available to a best-selling author. Poor David. Forced to spend the next years in Paris, researching *The Greater Journey*. The title is drawn from a line at the end of the prologue chapter: "Great as their journey had been by sea, a greater journey had begun, as they already sensed, and from it they were to learn more, and bring back more, of infinite value to themselves and to their country than they yet knew." (p. 24) "They" is the first batch of Americans to become expatriated to Paris in the early 1830s. There would be a half dozen more batches before the book ends around 1900. Who really cares what a bunch of backwater barbarians think about the center of the civilized world. There is a certain Tarzan in New York quality to the tale. But I discovered that I'm a backwater barbarian and this was just the primer I needed to put in order that very confusing history.

For the first time I understand the difference between the first and second empires and the first – third republics. I confess that before this book worked its magic, I was just annoyed with the image of excitable Frenchpersons rushing to the barricades for reasons only they could fathom. What I needed was the first-hand fathoming of others like me. McCullough has chosen about 50 Americans – you'll recognize most of the names, but you won't know their stories – and ransacked their letters and diaries for narration of the pivotal events. A dozen of these expats become the leading characters while the rest are supporting cast. Among the former we find James Fenimore Cooper, Samuel F. B. Morse, Charles Sumner, Oliver Wendell Holmes (Sr.), George P. A. Healy, Ellihu Washburne, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. By the end of the book, these people will be your favorite neighbors, the ones you love to hate because they come home with such fantastic stories of sojourns abroad. Painlessly, you will understand the Cholera Epidemic of 1831, the Revolution of 1848, the Franco-Prussian War, the Paris Commune, and why on earth the French were moved to give us the Statue of Liberty. That is no small service to a barbarian *tel moi*.

McCullough pleads his case for the fine arts and humanities, along with humane science, by detailing, as if from within, the trials and triumphs of his Americans in Paris. I hated to see the book end. It is so beautifully written. I really need to go back to Paris. And I don't like Paris, with its fascist-feeling uniform architecture. (I now know that was the work of a totalitarian regime the French finally overthrew. To the barricades!!!) So now I blame the vanquished for reminding me of all those murdered and exploited Algerians and Tunisians, while a handful of snooty people, without even the decency to speak English, lived it up for a century. Those bastards! But I just saw Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, and that softened me. No, more than softened, I was educated. No matter what Paris you visit, you really yearn for something you wouldn't have appreciated until it was too late. Momentous events and memorable personages are knocking about the streets even now, but I know neither what nor whom. McCullough conveys, tantalizingly, that history happens behind our backs and the next great work of art is, quite possibly, being made down some tiny alleyway that I passed by without a thought. Well, I guess I was thinking of something that already happened instead of attending to the exciting prospects of the present moment.

Beth says

This was the first book I read after returning from a trip to France, and it was a perfect choice. Not only did I enjoy revisiting various Parisian sites in my mind's eye, I was also fascinated to see the city through the eyes of other Americans. Nineteenth century Americans at that.

Told in McCullough's engaging style, this book explores the voyages of various influential Americans to Paris between the 1830s and 1900. I was struck by the unique and changing relationship between the two countries during this period. While this was after the initial French aide given to the American colonists during the War for Independence – after Lafayette, Franklin, and Adams initially forged a bond between the two nations – it was still at a point in history when America was growing and developing as a nation, looking to France as a sort of older sibling to learn from. While American and British relations were still a bit frosty, France was the old world power where ambitious Americans could go to learn art or medicine, to absorb a more settled culture and sense of refinement.

Some of the people described were ones I was very familiar with: James Fenimore Cooper, Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mary Cassatt. Others were less well known: Elizabeth Blackwell (the first female doctor in America), Samuel Morse (inventor of the telegraph and Morse code), George Healy (portrait artist), Elihu Washburne (American ambassador during the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune). The book focused in particular on authors and artists, which was fascinating for me, but might prove somewhat tedious for those more interested in the political side of things. I found it especially interesting to see how the American visitors to Paris responded to chaos and upheaval in France itself – particularly the cholera epidemic of the 1830s, the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, and the tumult of the Paris Commune.

I find picking favorites to be a difficult task, but I think this may be my favorite work of David McCullough's that I've read so far.

If you appreciated this review, check out my blog at pagesandmargins.wordpress.com

Paul says

This is the second David McCullough work that I've read and I must admit I've had the same basic reaction to both - extremely well researched, highly informative, wonderfully interesting. Yet this journey was a bit of a slog – not a book to be run through in a few days like some light mystery.

This work deals with Americans who traveled to Paris during the 19th Century and the effect that “The City of Light” had on their careers, their insights, their accumulation of knowledge. From medical people to artists, from authors to architects, the reader is brought to Paris in the 1800s along with the likes of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Elizabeth Blackwell (considered the first female American doctor), John Singer Sargent, James Fenimore Cooper, Samuel F. B. Morse and many others. In addition, we see the great strides that Paris was taking as the city moved to the forefront of art, culture and science. Did you know that doctors received a better medical education in Paris than anywhere in the U.S. because dead bodies were more readily available for study there? That progress in women's health made greater strides in Paris because the women in the U.S. were loathe to remove their clothing for their male doctors (not a problem for Frenchwomen)? Can you picture the head of the Statue of Liberty peeking over the skyline of Paris as it is constructed? This book is filled with such details. So . . . though this book may be slow reading, it is certainly a “journey” worth taking.

Grade: B+

Andy says

I read 200 pages, then the last chapter and the epilogue. Although any given page was well-written and interesting, I kept waiting for some pay-off of synthesis explaining the point of McCullough's endless lists of loosely connected unimportant events. Do I really need to know about the sordid details of the love life of Augustus Saint-Gaudens? The historian is maybe supposed to be "objective" but the choice of stories and details is a subjective editorial decision and it would have helped to make the point clearer if there was one. If the reader isn't going to get a narrative, then I prefer a book that is trying to prove an argument. This one was neither one nor the other, just lots of "fascinating" anecdotes, and "fascinating" is in the eye of the beholder.

On the other hand, this sort of catalogue approach to history lets the reader see what he wants in the trivia. For example, there was the paradoxical mix of pride and humility Americans had at the time. The pride was about being from a democracy where rank did not matter when other places still had monarchies. The humility was in acknowledging that Paris was way ahead in arts and sciences, but also even in human rights in some ways because race was not a barrier to education, etc. the way it was in America. It seems like it might be good to remember what we should be proud of as Americans and that maybe we can learn something from other countries sometimes to make ours better.

Tony says

We went to see McCullough 'launch' this latest offering. He's 78 now but still looks and sounds like God. (With apologies to Morgan Freeman and Alanis Morissette, who some people also think look like God). He spoke without a note for over an hour with only a rare misspeak, telling the wonderful stories that he unearthed about 19th Century Americans in Paris.

Context: I was always a reader, but McCullough's *Path Between the Seas* is one of the handful of books that turned me into an addict. And, I count McCullough's *Truman* as one of the great single-volume biographies.

The Greater Journey is a beautifully crafted book. He focuses on artists primarily and there are really superb glossy reproductions here. Make no mistake though: this book is history-lite. Good stories, wonderful characters, but you can actually *hear* the Ken Burns documentary as you read this. It's charming. Nothing wrong with that.

Of particular note to Goodreaders, I think, might be the Paris diary of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She went to Paris to avoid the scrutiny and adulation caused by her literary, one-hit wonder success. While there, she took in the museums. As she absorbed the paintings, she likened the artist to writers. Thus, "Rembrandt struck her as very Hawthorne." Reubens was like Shakespeare, "he forces you to accept and forgive a thousand excesses, and uses his own faults as musicians use discords only to enhance the perfection of harmony."

As in books past, McCullough whets appetites. He took me once to Theodore Roosevelt. Now, my Google searches will be 'John Singer Sargent'.

Chrissie says

I wasn't sure how much I would like this even though I know I like the way David McCullough and his team put together books. I was hesitant because the book focuses on **many** different individuals, all Americans residing in Paris from the late 1820s through 1900. Would I get adequate depth about each? The answer? Many individuals **are** mentioned and yet I **was** interested in so many because of the fascinating information provided. I did not get complete biographies of any, but the book does focus in more depth on several. The book moves forward in chronological order. One comes to understand the central figures well as the years pass. The reader compares the choices made by these figures. Those on which the book focuses upon are for example: Mary Cassatt (painter), John Singer Sargent (painter), George Peter Alexander Healy (portrait painter), Augustus Saint-Gaudens (sculptor), Samuel Morse (portrait painter and famed innovator), Elihu Benjamin Washburne (US minister to France 1869 – 1877), James Fenimore Cooper (author), Nathaniel Parker Willis (author and writer for the NY Mirror), Oliver Wendell Holmes (author and doctor), Dr. Jonathan Mason Warren (doctor) and Henry Ingersoll Bowditch (doctor) and Thomas Evans (dentist). Evans was the American dentist who aided Empress Eugénie flee to England after Emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte's abdication! You have never heard of Elihu Benjamin Washburne? Neither had I, but his recount of what he saw, heard and experienced during the Paris Siege and under the Commune is reason enough to read the book.

Besides history, the book focuses on artists and doctors. In the 1830s, when travel to Europe while still dangerous did become feasible, Paris offered unique opportunities in art and medicine. The people on which the book focuses are neither tourists nor those employed by enterprises; they are those who went to Paris to achieve the best education possible. They went to make something of themselves. The doctors on returning to America changed the course of medicine in their homeland.

The book is also very much about Paris itself. Without this focus on the city the book wouldn't hold together. The spirit found in Paris, then and still now, is an essential theme of the whole book.

I loved the clear, informative, easy to follow and moving presentation of history. The book starts under the reign of King Louis Philip and follows through with Emperor Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (with fascinating information about Haussmann's renovation of Paris), the Franco-Prussian War (which led to France's secession of Alsace Lorraine), the Siege of Paris, the Commune and the Bloody Week. We look at the four Universal Expositions held in Paris, the controversy of the Eiffel Tower and France's gift of the Statue of Liberty. **We look at the history of Paris through the lives of Americans living there.** This adds a personal touch; this turns dry history into personal stories. Diaries and letters are quoted. It is a book about what it is to be Parisian, and what it is to be American. It is about individuals loving aspects of both American and French culture. The book is very much about the value of art, literature, knowledge and people's essential need for beauty. Paris is and has for centuries been a city of beauty....and art and knowledge and culture.

Edward Hermann narrates the audiobook. He reads slowly, and he reads clearly. This is necessary because the book is chock-full of details you want to remember. He reads with heart and feeling. While it has a very good narration, it is not perfect. French words are spoken with an American accent, but you can recognize the French words.

This proved to be much better than I thought it would be! McCullough never fails me. I didn't give it five stars because some sections didn't interest me as much as others.

Other good books by David McCullough
Mornings on Horseback 5 stars

Truman 5 stars

John Adams 5 stars

The Wright Brothers 4 stars

The Johnstown Flood 4 stars

For me this author is one of the best non-fiction authors.

Clif Hostetler says

This is the story of Americans who traveled to Paris during the seven final decades of the 19th century. It's a history of the young years of individuals who ended up being famous and important Americans in their later mature years. Generally speaking, many of them were single, affluent individuals (mostly men) in their 20's intent on learning the artistic, scientific, and medical skills of the French who were perceived to be leaders in these fields.

I too spent some time traveling in Europe when I was young, and reading of the experiences of these early Americans reminded me of my own excitement of being young in a foreign country. So I would like to think that I was able to identify with some of their experiences, particularly their commiserating with other Americans they met abroad.

Here's a partial list of individuals covered by this book:

- Oliver Wendell Holmes (physician, professor, lecturer, and author)
- James Fenimore Cooper (author)
- Charles Sumner (abolitionist politician)
- Samuel F. B. Morse (failed artist and inventor of the telegraph)
- Elizabeth Blackwell (America's first female physician)
- Harriet Beecher Stowe (author)
- Augustus Saint-Gaudens (sculptor)
- Elizabeth Fisher Nichols (wife of Augustus Saint-Gaudens)
- Mary Cassatt (artist-painter)
- John Singer Sergeant (artist-painter)
- James Abbott McNeill Whistler (artist-painter)
- James Adams (author)

In the process of telling the story of the Parisian adventures of these individuals, the book also provides a summary history of France during these same years. This includes the Franco-Prussian War and the terror of the temporary reign of the Paris Commune.

There's a story in the book that I enjoyed because it gave an example of the advantages of speaking bad French. During the reign of the Paris Commune an unruly mob came to an estate owned by a rich American and demanded every animal on the premises. He replied, ". . . *you may have 'le cheval' but not the 'le vache' using the masculine pronoun le for cow, it was more than they (the mob) could bear.*" The mob convulsed with laughter. So they took the horse and left the cow; The bad French thus defused a potentially deadly confrontation and turned it into a funny story.

The book contains an epilog that briefly tells what happened to many of these individuals after they returned home.

Joy D says

Non-fiction about numerous Americans who lived in Paris during the period 1830-1900. It fits my definition of a 3-star reading experience: overall, I liked it but didn't care for certain aspects. The author covers a lot of ground here— artists, musicians, sculptors, diplomats, authors, doctors, entertainers, and socialites. It reads like a series of short stories of interesting people.

What I liked a lot:

- It was well-written
- Gave some very interesting observations about the work of artists such as Samuel Morse (before the telegraph), George Healy, James Whistler, Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens (sculptor), which was one of the primary reasons I read the book
- Provided insight into medical history I had not previously known
- Inclusion of photos of people, artwork and architecture of the period

What I didn't care for:

- Due to the number of people, and the passing of time, it seemed a bit unfocused – it was difficult to tie together the lives of so many, some of whom received very little attention to the point one wonders why they were even included
- It ventured a bit far afield into the history of France during this era
- Covered what happened, but very little of WHY (which to me is rather important)

If you enjoy glimpses into the lives of people of a specific time-period, you may enjoy this book.

Hadrian says

A fine history, but unfortunately not up to McCullough's (extremely) high standards.

McCullough is an excellent biographer, and an excellent narrative historian. However, this book, trying to cover such a broad topic as Americans in Paris in the 19th century, he seems to almost flounder. Many of the chapters are excellent, and his usual skill shines here.

Unfortunately, some of the order and presentation of all this information seems erratic. There are lots of interesting narrative stories, and background information, and you really get a narrative feel for Paris. But again, things just seem almost thrown together.

I'd give it 3.5 or 4 stars if possible, but I'm forced to round down. If it was any other author, it would be a guaranteed 4. Don't take it too hard, David, I still love you.
