

HISTORY

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN TIMES OF WAR.

By Carl M. Cannon. Rowman & Littlefield. 331 pp. \$24.95

A great many volumes have been written about our national birth certificate, particularly the phrase “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Almost as many books have dealt with the threat to civil liberties in times of war. In this sprawling meditation, Carl Cannon, a White House correspondent for *National Journal*, looks at how a large cast of notables have spoken of the pursuit of happiness during wartime. The results are sometimes surprising.

“The American people need to go about their lives,” President George W. Bush said a month after 9/11. “Our government will fight terrorism across the seas, and we’ll fight it here at home. And the American people need to fight terrorism as well by going to work, going to ballgames, getting on airplanes, singing with joy and strength.” This advice was much ridiculed by pundits at the time. Surely life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness means something more—indeed, something quite other—than shopping, taking vacations, or watching the Atlanta Braves blow another postseason playoff. The president’s own career as a baseball executive was usually mentioned, as though a man with such a background could hardly be expected to understand that freedom means improving one’s mind, working for social justice, or, best of all, speaking out against war.

Cannon wouldn’t deny (any more than Bush would) that the freedom terrorists hate includes all those pursuits. His emphasis, however, is not so much on the big freedoms enshrined in the Bill of Rights as on the smaller ones Americans exercise every day. Five weeks after Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt, who referred to the pursuit of happiness 14 times in presidential speeches, urged the commissioner of baseball to ensure that the 1942 season would take place on schedule. Even longer ago, George Washington liked to watch his troops play an 18th-century version of the national pastime at Valley Forge. Fair balls and fouls are a more powerful emblem of American freedom

than most historians (with the exception of Doris Kearns Goodwin) probably recognize.

Declaring the pursuit of happiness “the best working definition of freedom that has ever been devised,” Cannon finds in Jefferson’s words “a kind of nightingale’s song to the human ear. Anyone who has been denied freedom and who hears that song wants to sing it himself—or herself—forever.” In 1776, Abigail Adams urged her husband to “Remember the Ladies.” Twentieth-century revolutionaries from Ho Chi Minh to Václav Havel devised their own tunes to the familiar words. These figures, along with every living ex-president and the major dead ones, plus heavyweight baritones such as Frederick Douglass, Hubert Humphrey, and John McCain, make up Cannon’s mixed choir.

Readers who consider the war in Iraq consistent with American ideals of extending liberty will find historical support in this book, despite its occasional sentimentality and careless editing. Those who think otherwise will be less happy with it. In the context of that war, which began while he was finishing the manuscript, Cannon writes, “I became convinced in the research and writing of this book that those rights *are* inalienable, that the yearning for them is universal as well, and that, ultimately, there is no real safety or satisfaction to be had until all the people of the world are free.”

—CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

EUROPE’S LAST SUMMER: Who Started the Great War in 1914?

By David Fromkin. Knopf. 349 pp. \$26.95

Almost as soon as the guns began to fire in that glorious, sunny August of 1914, the arguments started over who was to blame. After the armistice of 1918, the Commission on the Responsibility of the Authors of the War formally found Germany guilty. This verdict led to Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, the notorious “war guilt” clause that was used to justify the \$32 billion in reparations that Germany was required (but proved unable) to pay.

The apparent unfairness of pillorying

Germany inspired historians to reconsider the assignment of guilt. Perhaps the most universally satisfactory new judgment was that of the British historian A. J. P. Taylor, reinforced by the American Barbara Tuchman, who shifted some of the blame to the mechanics of mobilization. Germany planned to defeat France in six brisk weeks and then move its victorious troops by train to face the Russians. Once Russia began to mobilize against Austria, Germany had to invade France or else lose valuable time. This explanation neatly blamed the war on impersonal forces rather than individual statesmen or countries.

But the explanation didn't hold up long. In the 1950s, Franz Fischer discovered archives overlooked by previous historians. His seminal book of 1966, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Bid for world power), showed that Kaiser Wilhelm's generals wanted war, and quickly, before Russia's headlong industrial growth made it too fearsome to fight. In the view of General Helmuth von Moltke, military chief of staff, this would be a defensive war forced upon Germany to preserve its position in Europe against the Slavic tide. His Austro-Hungarian counterpart, Conrad von Hoetzendorf, wanted war, and quickly, in order to preserve the empire against the siren lure

independent Serbia exercised upon Slavic peoples ruled by Vienna. Fischer's conclusions inspired a new generation of historians, who have modified but not demolished his thesis.

David Fromkin, whose *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989) is a splendid account of the way World War I led to the reshaping of the Middle East, with consequences we all suffer to this day, now claims to have resolved the continuing controversy over the Great War's outbreak. Historians were looking for the origins of one war, he believes, when they should have been looking for the origins of two.

Germany's Moltke wanted a war against Russia, to be waged as soon as the Kaiser's army defeated France. To hold off the Russians while Germany fought the French, Moltke needed Hoetzendorf's Austrian armies heading northeast. But Hoetzendorf wanted a war to crush Serbia, which required his army to move south. Thus, Moltke and Hoetzendorf were allies who pursued wholly different strategic aims via incompatible war plans. To Fromkin, this dysfunctional alliance, in which each chief of staff tried to pull the wool over the other's eyes, explains the speed with which Old Europe plunged into a war that became a collective act of suicide for its empires, its



Kaiser Wilhelm II reviewing his troops in 1915.

armies, and its pretensions to civilization.

Historians will doubtless take issue with elements of Fromkin's case. He may go a little easy on the tsarist court, on British equivocation, and on the French high command. But they should also ponder the second and in some ways more profound argument he deploys in his conclusion. "The decision for war in 1914 was purposeful; and the war itself was not, as generations of historians have taught, meaningless," Fromkin maintains. "On the contrary, it was fought to decide the essential questions in international politics: who would achieve mastery in Europe, and therefore in the world, and under the banners of what faith." That is a far more pungent and arresting matter to ponder than yet another sift through the rumbling bones of blame.

—MARTIN WALKER

*FROM JIM CROW TO
CIVIL RIGHTS:*

*The Supreme Court and the
Struggle for Racial Equality.*

By Michael J. Klarman.

Oxford Univ. Press. 655 pp. \$35

This luminous study explores the relationship between the Supreme Court and the quest for racial justice. Michael J. Klarman, a professor of law and history at the University of Virginia, has produced a sweeping, erudite, and powerfully argued book that, despite its heft, is unfailingly interesting. Klarman maintains that *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and other Supreme Court rulings didn't transform American society as profoundly as "changes in the social and political context" influenced the Court. In his analysis, *Brown* might have come out differently but for a variety of developments during and after World War II.

In the South, the black middle class expanded; black militancy grew more widespread, a result of the war; and many black southerners moved from farm to city, which enabled most to live in somewhat more tolerant settings and allowed civil rights leaders to mobilize the black population more readily. But, according to

Klarman, southern racial oppression was so pervasive that other, external, factors were also essential for abolishing Jim Crow: the northward migration of blacks, which increased their political clout; the ideological shift brought on by World War II, which delegitimized racist thought; and the Cold War, which cast a harsh light on domestic racial oppression as Washington grappled with Moscow in the name of freedom and democracy.

These factors helped reshape American politics, society, and attitudes about race. The new attitudes, in turn, influenced the Supreme Court. Indeed, from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) through the early 1960s, the Supreme Court never "clearly contravened national public opinion," Klarman writes. Even in the case of *Brown*, at least half the country supported the Court's decision.

The book is most arresting and original when Klarman analyzes *Brown's* indirect impact on the trajectory of the civil rights struggle. The ruling made it possible for extremists such as Alabama's George Wallace and Mississippi's Ross Barnett to assume power. As a result, some of the movement's aims in the early 1960s, such as voting rights and desegregated lunch counters, met with unyielding and often violent resistance. The violence in turn provoked white revulsion in the North. Like many Americans, John F. Kennedy was sickened by the snarling German shepherds and the fire hoses that confronted blacks in Birmingham in 1963, and he moved to secure passage of effective civil rights legislation. The following year, Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. *Brown* thus did little to desegregate southern schools in the 1950s, but it helped make possible the Civil Rights Act a decade later, which *did* substantially achieve that goal.

Klarman concludes that the Supreme Court did not stand in the vanguard of the campaign for racial equality. Instead, the Court endorsed changes that were already emerging in American society—changes that had little to do with nine robed men in Washington.

—JONATHAN ROSENBERG