



Booknotes: Life Stories: Notable Biographers on the People Who Shaped America

By Brian Lamb



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Conversations with the most admired biographers of our time on the people who have forged our contemporary landscape

C-SPAN founder Brian Lamb invites readers into a virtual conversation -- via the art of biography -- with the legends and luminaries who have helped define America. This informal dictionary of biography peers into the personalities who have left a mark on our world -- a Who's Who of American history, and the next best thing to chatting directly with the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Walt Whitman, Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, J. Edgar Hoover, Elijah Muhammad, Amelia Earhart, Katharine Graham, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Frank McCourt, Bill Clinton, and many others.

Based on C-SPAN's popular weekly Booknotes program, this absorbing collection of life stories presents illuminating profiles and often surprising details from our favorite biographers. Booknotes follows the evolution of American history chronologically, and covers the lives of writers and thinkers, inventors and scientists, politicians and soldiers. Lamb reacquaints us with the great figures of our times, in an engaging conversation about America.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It wouldn't be entirely unfair--or necessarily a criticism--to call this anthology "Biography Lite." Not that the authors or protagonists of the 85 books it covers are by any stretch of the imagination lightweights. Such distinguished scholars as David Herbert Donald and Nell Irwin Painter share space with respected popular historians like David McCullough and Doris Kearns Goodwin; those profiled include no fewer than 23 American presidents (from George Washington to Bill Clinton), such intellectual heavyweights as Albert Einstein, and capitalist titans on the order of John D. Rockefeller. Since the material is drawn from interviews the writers gave on the popular C-SPAN series *Booknotes*, however, it unsurprisingly tends to be "brief and anecdotal," as Lamb (the show's host) puts it in his introduction. Still, the anecdotes are often hilarious. Readers learn that Rockefeller chewed each bite of food 10 times and that British prime minister Margaret Thatcher saved the leftovers from state dinners and served them at home, and the interviewees do a commendable job of summing up their subjects' significance in very few words. Like the television program, *Booknotes: Life Stories* cheerfully promotes in a pleasantly populist manner worthy books you might actually get around to reading someday. --Wendy Smith

From School Library Journal

YA-A collection of 8- to 10-page articles based on interviews with the biographers of famous men and women for the C-SPAN cable television program *Booknotes*. They describe Americans from the founding fathers to Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich as if they were old family friends, warts and all. Although most of the biographers are scholars, the tone is light and conversational. These writers know many intimate details of their subjects' lives and the interviews provide colorful and well-rounded portraits. These historians also offer insight into what made these men and women great. Richard Norton Smith feels that George Washington was able to hold the country together and the egos of the founding fathers in check because he was a great psychologist. David Herbert Donald emphasizes that for Abraham Lincoln there was no possibility of breaking up the Union. He would brook no discussion of how many young boys must lose their lives to save the country. Readers will feel that they know each one of these individuals as a person, not just as a picture from a history book.

Jane Drabkin, Chinn Park Regional Library, Prince William, VA

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From Library Journal

Lamb, host of C-SPAN's *Booknotes*, has compiled an anthology of interviews focusing on the lives of 75 prominent people from the 1700s to the present. The result is chatty and informal though sometimes slightly disjointed when topics switch abruptly in response to a question. This chattiness is, however, part of the charm. As only one example, there is the story of Sam Houston, who beat up an Ohio congressman on Pennsylvania Avenue, inspiring President Jackson's comment that "he wished he had more Houstons to cudgel the brains of Congress." With only ten women featured, an admittedly heavy emphasis on presidents, and a definite bias toward Americans or American connections, this is not a source for research. Nonetheless, its interesting snippets of information will be appreciated in public libraries and may well encourage readers to look for longer biographies. AKatherine K. Koenig, Ellis Sch., Pittsburgh

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Users Review

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Raul Joyner:

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