

## Current Books

pany finally canceled it.

Bruce characterizes herself as “an openly gay, pro-choice, gun-owning, pro-death penalty, liberal, voted-for-Reagan feminist,” an ideological blend that didn’t endear her to feminist leaders. When Bruce led the Los Angeles NOW chapter, the organization’s national leadership pressured her not to criticize O. J. Simpson as a wife beater. Alienating black organizations and leaders could endanger the coalition built around race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity. Liberation, Bruce realized, was secondary; the principal goal was defending this alliance of victims.

Though Bruce’s descriptions of the deprivations of the contemporary antiliberty Left are compelling and, from my own experience, on target, her explanations sometimes sound a bit facile. She notes the double standard embodied in university speech codes, for instance, but says little about its philosophical origins. Her concluding chapter equates devotion to capitalism with devotion to liberty, an argument that overlooks the long tradition of leftists devoted to free speech—not to mention the occasional capitalist who would gladly tolerate a police state so long as the trains run on time.

Bruce is at her best when telling stories, some of which are more extraordinary than she realizes. During the Simpson trial, she wrote to Judge Lance Ito and complained that he was treating prosecutor Marcia Clark with less courtesy than he was lavishing on the male attorneys. At Ito’s invitation, Bruce and a fellow NOW leader went to the judge’s chambers for a private, off-the-record meeting. Afterward, Ito seemed to treat the female prosecutor with greater respect. “Although that event did not have an impact on the trial’s eventual outcome,” Bruce writes, “it’s an example of a kind of activism that can and must be engaged in.”

It’s also the kind of activism that, had Simpson been convicted, might well have triggered a reversal. Judges aren’t supposed to meet with partisans in the middle of a trial, even partisans seeking nothing more than courtroom courtesy. But the lack of legal sophistication that allows Bruce to tell the Ito story so innocently also accounts for much of the unvarnished power and directness that make her book a valuable contribution to the literature of liberty.

—HARVEY A. SILVERGLATE

## HISTORY

### *TAKING HAITI: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940.*

By Mary A. Renda. Univ. of North Carolina Press. 414 pp. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper

No one who has been to Haiti is likely to forget the experience, and almost everyone who has been there retains an interest in the country and its culture. It is one of those countries that, though small and unimportant from an economic or political point of view, has a history that reaches beyond its boundaries, a history of unequalled tragic grandeur. Haiti’s heroic but unsuccessful search for security and freedom seems profoundly to epitomize the individual human condition.

President Woodrow Wilson sent American troops to stabilize Haiti in 1915, and they remained until 1934. At first sight, an account of the occupation through the lens of current

academic obsessions with race, gender, and class might seem a depressing prospect, an opportunity for the mechanical repetition of ideological clichés, but Renda transcends the genre by the excellence of her writing, the quality and interest of her evidence, and her temperate voice.

Renda sets out to deal with the American attitude toward Haiti rather than with the Haitian attitude toward America. She first asks what the Americans thought they were doing in Haiti, from presidents down to the marines who carried out the occupation. Were they restoring order to a chronically chaotic country, bringing Christian civilization to benighted pagans, securing a strategic base at Môle St. Nicholas (one of the few deep-water harbors in the Caribbean), seeking new markets and economic domination, or some combination of all these? Although no definitive answer can be

given, Renda conveys the texture of the occupation by examining a number of unusual and revealing sources, such as the postcards the marines sent home and the private correspondence of their commander.

The author writes scathingly about the Wilsonian highmindedness that sent marines into Haiti in the first place. She sides with George F. Kennan, who, in *American Diplomacy, 1900–1950* (1951), saw more of a threat to world peace in a foreign policy that allegedly pursued abstract ideals than in one that openly pursued concrete national interest. Wilson, thinks Renda, was an archetypal liberal humbug who was unable to see any contradiction between the occupation in practice of Haiti and the right in theory of small nations to self-determination. Similar contradictions characterized the occupying troops, whose actions were sometimes philanthropic and sometimes brutal.

The second half of the book concerns representations of Haiti in American pulp fiction, plays, serious novels, films, plastic arts, and even wallpaper. For some years before World War II, Haiti was an object of fashionable interest (Eugene O’Neill’s play *The Emperor Jones* started the ball rolling). It was seen by turns—and sometimes at the same time—as dangerous, sexually alluring, primitive, exotic, noble, and culturally authentic. People used Haiti according to their purposes: American racists saw its history as proof positive that blacks were unfit to rule themselves, while American blacks, smarting under segregation and other disabilities, saw in figures such as Toussaint L’Ouverture and le Roi Christophe proof that black heroes could equal white ones. It is the author’s thesis that exposure to Haitian themes had a profound effect on American race relations.

Renda’s discussion of these matters is subtle, honest, and evenhanded, where it could easily have been strident. One lesson from this most interesting book is that while powerful nations can change small ones, they cannot mold them into any shape they choose. Neither men nor nations are putty. This is a lesson that has still not been fully assimilated in the corridors of power.

—THEODORE DALRYMPLE

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**AMERICA’S FIRST DYNASTY:  
*The Adamses, 1735–1918.***

By Richard Brookhiser. Free Press.  
244 pp. \$25

Why family political dynasties come into being is not altogether clear. Name recognition is important but not sufficient. Franklin Roosevelt benefited from sharing a surname, and to some extent a family, with his fifth cousin Teddy, but no other Roosevelt ever captured the country’s heart. Kennedys have provided endless reams of copy but so far only one president. The present White House incumbent was picked by his party from a group of (arguably) more impressive contenders in part because of his patrimony, yet it required a national emergency to give him the look of a leader.

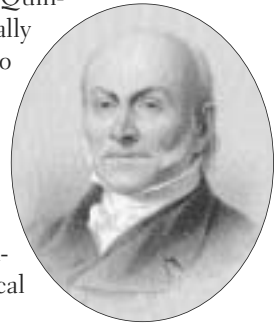
Genetic inheritance might be a factor, although many more sons and daughters have failed to match their successful parents’ careers than have equaled them. What seems more significant is the momentum generated by the founder’s commitment to public service, carried down through each succeeding generation. That and the lash of high expectations: John and Abigail Adams told John Quincy that his career should reflect his “advantages”—if it did not, that would be due to his “*lasiness* [sic], *slovenliness* and *obstinacy*.”

*America’s First Dynasty* is the story of two presidents, John (1735–1826) and his son, John Quincy (1767–1848); Charles Francis (1807–86), John Quincy’s son, an especially valuable minister to England during the Civil War; and Charles Francis’s son, Henry (1838–1918), a formidable historian and political observer. It

chronicles a family whose members, “although admirable, and frequently lovable, [were] seldom likable.” They



Like father: John Adams



Like son: John Quincy Adams