

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