

**LAND OF GHOSTS:**  
*The Braided Lives of People and the Forest in Far Western Amazonia.*

By David G. Campbell. Houghton Mifflin. 260 pp. \$25

A Brazilian woman named Dona Ausira, the last known speaker of Nokini, remembers her native tongue's words for *star*, *moon*, *bird*, and *fish*, but when David Campbell asks if there was a word for *love*, she says, "There may have been, but I have forgotten." Her loss of words mirrors the ecological losses in the Amazon, where bungled attempts at development have wiped out countless species of plants—many, no doubt, before humans even knew they existed. And that's part of the problem, writes Campbell: "It's easy to give away something for which there are no words, something you never knew existed."

A biology professor at Grinnell College, Campbell recounts one of his expeditions into the Amazon to collect and identify plant samples—and perhaps rename those whose indigenous names have been forgotten. For more than 30 years, Campbell has regularly journeyed to Brazil to monitor 18 small plots of rainforest, each of which con-

tains some 20,000 trees representing more than 2,000 different species. He has helped to discover several dozen new species in the process. Measuring and taking samples reminds him of a story about a Tibetan monk who tried to recite the name of every plant, rock, and animal, because each name is one of the names of God. Names can "endow those who know them with understanding," Campbell writes, but ultimately "words of any language are puny tools to describe this forest."

Alongside his careful and clear explanations of rainforest ecology, Campbell offers excursions into the region's anthropology and history. In the 19th century, when the Amazon region had the world's only rubber trees, the owners of rubber estates called *seringais* grew wealthy through the exploitation and forced labor of Native Americans. A few *seringais* survive today, and those who work them still live as indentured servants in an endless cycle of poverty.

Rubber wasn't the only thing that brought people to the forest. As recently as the 1970s, the government of Brazil sometimes transplanted people to the Amazon in an effort to relieve famine and overcrowding elsewhere. Most who came lacked *jeito*, the forest



*A Manaus fish market brings together a cross-section of Amazon River people.*

## Current Books

equivalent of street smarts, and many of the settlements were soon abandoned. Those who did stay often joined the Caboclos, a mixed-race people whose knowledge and enterprise have enabled them to survive in the forest for generations. Now, however, the Caboclos are increasingly embracing modernity—including the Internet—and

losing their *jeito*.

Though Campbell's tone is foreboding and at times overdramatic, his love for the region and his concern about its future are compelling. He doesn't propose a plan for saving the rainforest, but he offers a vivid account of why it's worth saving.

—STEPHANIE JOY SMITH

## HISTORY

*FIVE DAYS IN PHILADELPHIA: The Amazing "We Want Willkie" Convention of 1940 and How It Freed FDR to Save the Western World.*

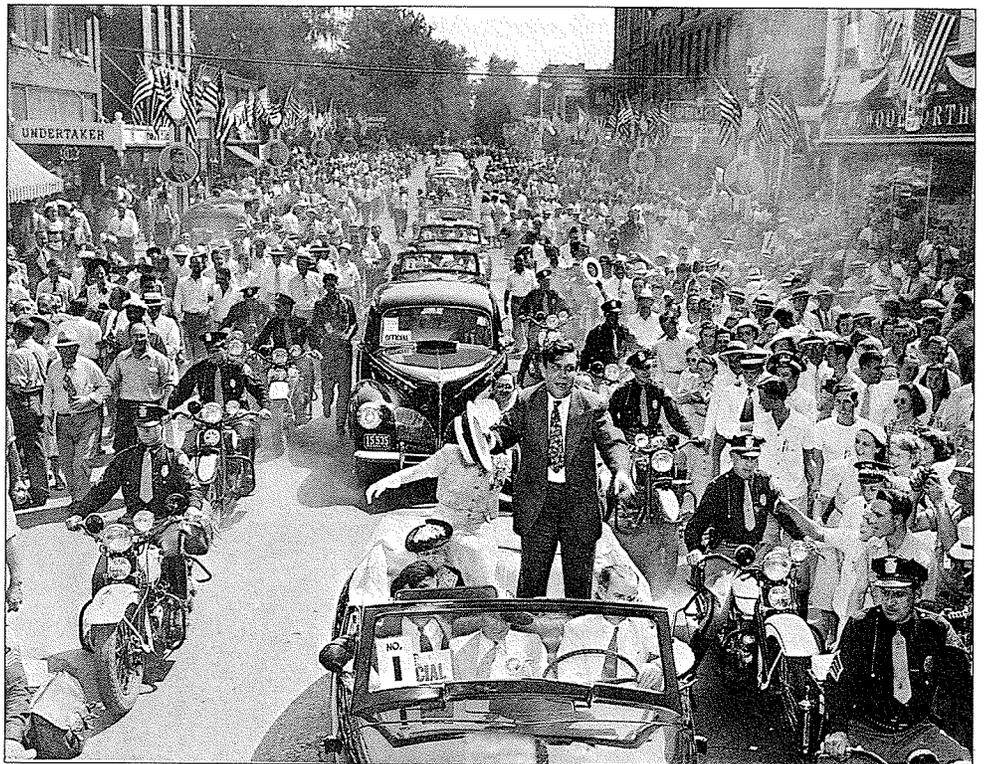
By Charles Peters. PublicAffairs.

274 pp. \$26

To most of us, Wendell Willkie is little more than a name and perhaps a famous image—*Life* magazine's panoramic photo of the charismatic presidential candidate standing in an open car as it moves through a welcoming throng on a dusty Midwestern street. If Willkie is remembered at all, it's as the third hapless Republican to be steam-

rolled by Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the process of losing the 1940 election, though, Willkie played a surprising role in winning the looming war. That's the story Charles Peters, the founder and longtime editor of *The Washington Monthly*, recalls in this riveting book.

The political battles of 1940 took place in a country that's in many ways unrecognizable today. The vast majority of Republicans—and many other Americans—were committed isolationists, adamantly opposed to any overseas "adventures," even as Hitler conquered Europe and prepared to invade



*Wendell Willkie celebrates his nomination in the streets of his hometown of Elwood, Indiana.*