

lenders; low rates helped borrowers. Little wonder, then, that money was a political hot potato until 1913, when the Federal Reserve Act bureaucratized and thereby largely depoliticized monetary policy, ending a roughly century-long money war and shifting politicians' attention to taxes.

H. W. Brands, author of some 20 books and a history professor at the University of Texas, Austin, relates the history of that war through the lives of five fairly familiar figures: Alexander Hamilton (1757?–1804), America's first treasury secretary and founder of the country's first central bank; Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844), the financier who served as president of the second Bank of the United States until Andrew Jackson succeeded in killing it; Jay Cooke (1821–1905), who mobilized the Northern masses to buy the bonds that partially financed the Civil War; railroad magnate and financial speculator Jay Gould (1836–92); and investment banking titan J. P. Morgan (1837–1913).

Nothing of such practical and widespread use as money is so misunderstood, and *The Money Men* does little to educate readers about money and finance. The discussion of restrictions on colonial bills of credit is garbled, for instance, as are explanations of early banking and securities markets. Brands's grasp of finance improves as his narrative advances chronologically, but one might say of him what he writes of Andrew Jackson, that he "knew next to nothing about banks, a little more about money, and a great deal about democracy."

It is in the political arena where Brands shines. His biographer's knowledge of the policies, rhetoric, and backroom shenanigans of important players such as Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, and Theodore Roosevelt brings his account to life. He has a knack for keeping his yarn moving while generously peppering it with interesting and occasionally telling anecdotes and quotations, as when he dramatically describes William Jennings Bryan's famous "cross of gold" speech, which cemented Bryan's 1896 presidential nomination, writing that "the audience absorbed the rhythms of Bryan's voice."

And he has a sharp, observant eye for the big picture, noting, for example, that "the Civil War began as a revolt by Southern democrats and ended as a revolution by Northern capitalists."

Overall, Brands's account of American history as a series of monetary struggles is a fruitful interpretation well worth a reader's dollars.

—Robert E. Wright

Painting the Truth

DURING WORLD WAR I, photographers and cameramen commissioned by the U.S. military produced more than 35,000 still photographs for the files of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

This work, largely done by the newly established Army Signal Corps Photographic Section, was intended to provide military intelligence, a historical record, and educational and propaganda materials. At the same time, a much smaller and less-remembered image production project was under way: The AEF commissioned eight prominent illustrators as captains to produce a "historical record" of what became known as the Great War.

In *Portrait of War*, historian Peter Krass takes his readers from the artists' initial enthusiasm when they signed up to the beginning of the Allies' occupation of Germany. The men met numerous difficulties as they sought to reach the frontlines and capture scenes of war: fears about their own safety, military stonewalling and physical roadblocks, and a desperately frustrating lack of transport. Like the military's official photographers, the artists reported to the War Department and to the Committee on Public Information, the government agency that packaged the war for American consumption. They struggled to reconcile Washington's expectations (drawings of "action" and heroism that would appeal to the press and the public) with what they felt moved

PORTRAIT OF WAR:

The U.S. Army's First Combat Artists and the Doughboys' Experience in WWI.

By Peter Krass. Wiley. 342 pp. \$30

to cover (wounded soldiers and civilians, devastated villages). From Krass's account, it appears that the artists' work was published only sporadically during the war, though afterward the original sketches and paintings were exhibited publicly.

With the aid of a rich record of letters and journals, Krass meticulously recounts the illustrators' war careers, and his subjects emerge as more than the stolid faces in sepia-toned World War I-era photographs. But Krass fails to explore the significance of the eight illustrators' artistic efforts, the reasons for their recruitment, or how the art was used. It is not until late in the book that we learn that the artists had "their own, self-designed specialties," or that one pro-

What could illustrators bring to coverage of the Great War that photographers could not?

duced only 30 finished works while others created several times that many. Belatedly, he discloses that, in all, the eight men produced 507 works of art for the AEF—a trifling

number compared to the tens of thousands of photographs.

What could illustrators bring to coverage of the Great War that photographers could not, especially if their mandate was the same—to make a visual historical record? There's the hint of an answer in artist Harvey Thomas Dunn's observation about one subject proposed for a picture: "The idea of the two old soldiers talking together is good, but is not successful because they have no foil. . . . It would have been better to have a little child all dressed up in fluffy ruffles rolling a hoop, perhaps, in front of them." This addition, Krass comments, "would add meaning; now there would be the innocent victim of man's inhumanity or hope instead of weary resignation. It was time to seize the truth of human existence." Yet Krass never grapples with what "truth" is—or should be—in wartime.

Nor does he acknowledge that today we believe that fabricated elements detract from

rather than augment a historical record. Visual documents untouched and free of manipulation, such as the amateur snapshots from Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison or the security camera video of the attackers who bombed London's subways in 2005, appear to us to convey what's true. So how could the AEF's eight illustrators, recruited by the government, end up creating images that, as a *New York Tribune* reviewer at the time noted, prompt viewers to "kindle . . . to their truth, to their unmistakable value as records"? Has our understanding of truth changed over the last century? Or are artists—even if they're soldiers—exempted from faithfully documenting specific moments in war in order to capture some larger essence of "war"? It will require another book to answer these questions.

—Susan D. Moeller

ARTS & LETTERS

Allegories of the Caves

THE PEOPLE WHO PAINTED in caves in France and Spain millennia ago are at once deeply familiar and utterly baffling. The images they left on stone walls and ceilings are imbued with an almost spiritual power: the

sheer weight of the bulls that stalk the great cave of Lascaux, the colors and grace of the elegant beasts at Altamira, the near-worshipful placement of bear skulls alongside the proud lions of Chauvet. These figures are not simply recognizable as great artistic achievements; they also move us as the products of an evidently human sensibility. Though we know little of these ancestors who produced humanity's first art, a thread of continuity binds us to them, across some 600 generations and 20,000 years.

Greg Curtis, a former editor of *Texas Monthly* whose 2003 book on the Venus de Milo was a

THE CAVE PAINTERS:
Probing the Mysteries of the World's First Artists.

By Gregory Curtis.
Knopf. 278 pp. \$25