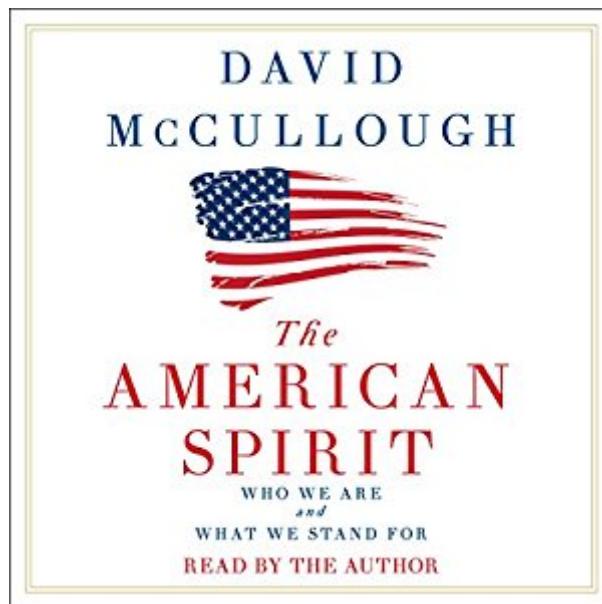


The book was found

The American Spirit: Who We Are And What We Stand For



Synopsis

A timely collection of speeches by David McCullough, the most honored historian in the United States - winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, two National Book Awards, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among many others - that reminds us of fundamental American principles. Over the course of his distinguished career, David McCullough has spoken before Congress, colleges and universities, historical societies, and other esteemed institutions. Now, at a time of self-reflection in America following a bitter election campaign that has left the country divided, McCullough has collected some of his most important speeches in a brief volume designed to identify important principles and characteristics that are particularly American. The American Spirit reminds us of core American values to which we all subscribe, regardless of which region we live in, which political party we identify with, or our ethnic background. This is a book about America for all Americans that reminds us who we are and helps to guide us as we find our way forward.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 4 hours and 13 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Audio

Audible.com Release Date: April 18, 2017

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B06XDFHSVH

Best Sellers Rank: #2 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Essays & Correspondence > Speeches
#5 in Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Essays #8 in Books
> Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Literary Collections

Customer Reviews

This book is a short collection of speeches by David McCullough, one of America's foremost historians. The speeches span about twenty-five years and were delivered in a variety of locations and to mark a variety of occasions. Most of them are college commencement addresses - in Boston, Ohio, Missouri and Pittsburgh - and a few mark the anniversary of important monuments (the White House) or events (the Kennedy assassination). Some of the speeches are inspiring, some of them are informative, and many are both. McCullough's thrust in all of them is to stress the

importance of history as a guide to American character and values. He fears that many Americans, and young Americans in particular, are ignorant of the kind of history that can enrich and guide their views of the present and future; his fears are realized by a meeting with a bright young college student who did not know that the original thirteen states were all on the East Coast. He is convinced that not only can history inform people's understanding of contemporary events, but that it can remind people of the values and men and women that made this country what it is. In an interview, McCullough mentioned that he put together this collection specifically for these politically troubled times. At the very least they should reassure people that their concerns and fears have been felt - and overcome - by many others in the past. In most of his speeches McCullough focuses on one or more great Americans. He is not bashful about taking this 'Great Man' view of history, since many of the characters he picks exemplify well the essential qualities of this country. He recognizes their flaws, but also sees their greatness. Famous Americans like John and Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson and JFK make regular appearances, but so do less famous but still important ones like Benjamin Rush, Simon Willard, James Sumner and Margaret Chase Smith. In speeches intended to commemorate buildings, McCullough also lovingly describes the rich history of monuments like the White House and Capitol Hill and cities like Pittsburgh and Boston. Throughout the book, McCullough emphasizes many of the qualities that exemplified this country's history: "the fundamental decency, the tolerance and insistence on truth and the good-heartedness of the American people". Relationships with France and other countries played a critical role, and so did the hard work of immigrants. There is also bravery here, exemplified by the Founding Fathers' decision to defy the King of England under threat of execution, by abolitionists' denunciation of slavery and by the ceaseless optimism of scores of politicians and common Americans who wanted to change the direction of this country for the better. There was Margaret Smith who stood up against Joseph McCarthy and said that she did not want "to see the Republican Party ride to political victory on the four horsemen of calumny - fear, ignorance, bigotry and smear". There was physician Benjamin Rush who emphasized "candor, gentleness, and a disposition to speak with civility and to listen with attention to everybody". And there was Adams who famously said that "facts are stubborn things". All lessons for the present and the future. If there is one common theme that emerges most prominently from all the speeches, it is an emphasis on education and an appreciation of history. McCullough tells us how many of the most important Founding Fathers and presidents put learning and books front and center, not just in their own evolution but in their vision for America. Jefferson once said to Adams that he could not live without books, and Adams himself told his son John Quincy that with a poet in his pocket he will never feel

alone. McCullough talks about Carpenter's Hall in Philadelphia where Benjamin Franklin established the Library Company that evolved into the country's first public library. As he describes it, the biographies of many famous people tell us that learning is not elitist, it is as American as apple pie. It is what turned this country into a beacon of democracy, science and finance. And for learning it is critical to read: "Read for pleasure. Read to enlarge your lives. Read history, read biography, learn from the lives of others". The same goes for history. McCullough is deeply concerned that younger Americans are losing touch with their history. He urges parents to take their children to historic sites at a young age and Americans of all ages to read and ponder their history. He constantly refers to American presidents who loved to read history; Theodore Roosevelt and JFK even wrote history books themselves. Ultimately, he says, "the pleasure of history consists in an expansion of the experience of being alive". And if nothing else, history should inform Americans of strategies and insights from the past that they can adopt to solve contemporary problems. The overriding message that comes across from many of these speeches is that of optimism, hope and a constant drive in the American people to reinvent themselves. It should be a potent message in today's times and should hopefully further encourage the study of this country's history. As McCullough puts it, "It is a story like no other, our greatest natural resource. It is about people, and they speak to us across the years".

David McCullough is a master historian. The speeches in this book, like the storytelling of his last ten books is flawlessly factual, detailed and entertaining. The American Spirit is an excellent read.

This is a book which should be offered to many young students helping them understand our history and appreciate those who have helped to give us the country we have.

A book that everyone who is interested in our history and heritage should read! David McCullough is a superb writer and a knowledgeable historian who reveals numerous little-known facts!

David McCullough is one of my favorite historians. His speeches are spot on, inspiring and thoughtful.

Mr McCullough has returned to the core of American history with this collection. A lot of these are no longer read or used in text books or taught school settings. This book is not over large. And would make a great graduation gift. Great reading and a positive reminder of our history and heritage. Our

republic needs to remember these bedrock foundations.

McCullough is an American treasure! As the book is a compilation of his speeches at various functions, they vary in their content. But what each represents is the type of minute research that typifies all of the books he's produced over his lifetime: precisely detailed with the facts that capture the reader's interest in his usual story-telling manner. In the case of this book he has as his objective of indicating to the reader the need for everyone to both study and honor the study of American history. Many of the stories he shared with the audiences he addressed allowed them to almost place themselves in the situations of such individuals as Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Washington and to subsequently admire the courage of their decisions. While a slim book, it was a real "paper turner" and unfortunately ended too quickly. The reader was left hoping for more pages to digest. I guess that says it all!

The compilation of McCullough's addresses provided an outstanding review of important moments in American history which, taken together, provided insight into how and why the American spirit evolved. May it forever be.

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