

>> From the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

>> This is Jennifer Gavin at the Library of Congress. Late September will mark the 11th year that booklovers of all ages have gathered in Washington, D.C. to celebrate the written word at the Library of Congress National Book Festival. The Festival, which is free and open to the public, goes to two days this year; Saturday, September 24 and Sunday, September 25, 2011. The festival will take place between 9th through 14th Street on the National Mall rain or shine. Hours will be from 10 AM to 5:30 PM, Saturday the 24th and from 1 PM to 5:30 PM on Sunday, the 25th. For more details, visit www.loc.gov/bookfest. And now it's my great pleasure to introduce Pulitzer Prize winning historian, David McCullough, whose latest book is titled "The Greater Journey, Americans in Paris". And yet, this is not about your usual Americans in Paris of the early or later 20th Century; the ones we're usually reading about or seeing depicted in the movies. It's about Americans in the mid to late 19th Century. Mr. McCullough, thank you so much for joining us. Why did you focus on this period in history, on this group of Americans?

>> Well, it appealed to me that for several reasons, but to begin, I suppose, it's a 70, probably a 70 year period about which very little had ever been written, and it involves a number of very interesting and important characters in the story of our country. It's a big and significant part of the American experience, but I feel, as I've felt with my previous books, that what the strongest pull was the stories of the people themselves; the individual people themselves, and in several cases, they are phenomenal stories, which I felt excited about telling.

>> Well, I am proud to say that I just finished the book, and I found it compelling. It was a real page-turner for me, and it seemed to me it's almost as if these Americans needed to earn their spurs in the old world before they could bring credit to the new world, and they certainly did that.

>> Well, that's a very good analysis. That's exactly right. They needed to go there to learn to do what they wanted to do in a more accomplished fashion, whether they were there to study medicine or painting or to write books, or to become a more accomplished musician, let's say, and to bring that ability to home. But they also wanted to find out by playing in the big leagues, if you will, or earning their spurs, if they were as good as everybody was telling them. Because, people in this country at that point didn't feel that there were sufficient cause to know what was good and what wasn't. You haven't to keep in mind, for example, there were no schools of art here then. There were no art museums where you could go and look at great paintings. There was no school of architecture in the whole country. And, our medical training, medical schools, were woefully far behind those in Europe, and Paris was the medical capital of the world.

>> I must say that this book helped me fill in some of my blanks in French history; which actually was very interesting to me, but I was pleased to get more detail on the lives of Americans, such as James Fennimore Cooper, Samuel F.B. Morse. I didn't that Samuel F.B. Morse was an artist before he invented the telegraph, and I know that because of

the book, I'll know many major artists better when I saw their work in museums; such as Augustus Saint-Gaudens or John Singer Sargent.

>> Well, they're all extremely gifted; they were extremely gifted people, and what's so interesting to me about Morse, let's say, is the very point you raised; that he was both an accomplished painter, really brilliant painter, and, as it turned out, an extraordinary inventor. Invented one of the biggest leaps in human communication ever with the telegraph. And, he nor others of that day didn't see any incongruity about that. They didn't see that as contradictory, because they had more the idea then that everything was interesting. If you were bright and imaginative and inventive in one thing, you could be in another thing. Professions, the paths of curiosity, were not so departmentalized in that time, and I love it for example when Saint-Gaudens writes about how happy he might have been as a playwright or as an actor; rather than a sculptor. And I'm sure; he would have enjoyed either, and would have been extremely good at either.

>> You also shed some light on the lives of some various illustrious American women for that period certainly; the history-changing author, Harriet Beecher-Stowe, the first female doctor in America, Elizabeth Blackwell.

>> It was a really rewarding opportunity, I felt, to write about so many distinguished and accomplished, and talented women, but also American women who had great courage and persistence in pursuing their ambitions, and because they weren't involved with politics or the military, women in general back in that day, in these other fields, there were fewer barriers to their ambitions. Not to say there weren't troubles, because a woman to become a physician in that day was very difficult. And, someone like Elizabeth Blackwell or Mary Putnam is each of those women is a story in determination and backbone, as well as ability. So, these are great Americans, and to write about them. Emma Willard for example; her role in American education should be much better known.

>> One thing I think we're very proud of here at the library is that you brought to the light the story of an American diplomat, whose diary, which was kept during the starvation and violence of the Paris commune, is now available researchers here at the Library of Congress. Can you tell us a little bit about, Ella Hugh-Washburn?

>> The story of Ellihu Washburne, who was a Congressman before he was appointed by President Grant to become our Minister or Ambassador to Paris, is a remarkable story on about seven levels. But, in this case, he was the only diplomat to a major world power who refused to leave Paris when the Germans were advancing rapidly on the city, and he stayed through the whole siege, while the city was surrounded and the Germans were in effect starving Paris to death. He wouldn't leave, because he felt it was his duty to stay there as long as there were any Americans. And when this part of this Franco-Prussian War was over, again, he could have left, but he didn't, when the subsequent commune, the Civil War that broke out in Paris because an even more horrific experience for everybody than the siege had been. And, his story is utterly amazing, and was very largely overlooked because it was not known that his diary was in

existence to be read and seen, and where did it turn up, but in the Library of Congress. And, I've been writing books for a long time, and doing research for a long time, but I don't think I've ever had a more exciting and valuable discovery as part of my working experience than this one. It's amazing, an amazing accomplishment that he even took the time to keep the diary every single day. And, he wrote very well. It's very vivid in his portrayal of what he saw happening all around him, the horrors and the suffering, and the bravery, and the resilience of the French people at that time under such unprecedented stress.

>> Mr. McCullough, you've been with us at the Library of Congress National Book Festival from the very earliest stages. And now, of course, we're pleased to be going to two days and more than a hundred authors. What role, in your opinion, do books about history play for the average reading American?

>> I think that the books that are available today especially are a more tantalizing and rewarding gate to the past than the general public, the general reading public has ever had. There are marvelous writers who are doing biography and history now, and there's a need for this as never before, because alas, our failure as in teaching our children and grandchildren history in the school systems, has been such that a lot of people have to make up, feel they need to make up for what they don't know because of the schooling that they've been experienced, have been exposed to. It's, in my view, a well-written biography, an appealing history of a great event or a great sequence of events, or periods in the story of a country or profession, is as good reading as there is. And, more and more people are discovering that, that the truth is not only very often more amazing than fiction, but that the truth is valuable to know what happened and why, and to learn from that. Harry Truman once said the only new thing in the world is the history you don't know, and to be cognizant of what our fore-bearers have been through, what dark times have been like in the past, and to come to know and understand the lives of people who solve great problems, or who faced diversity and overcame it, is not only encouraging and fascinating, but it's an aid to navigation in troubled times, and gives one a sense of balance. And I think, you can't have it any other way.

>> Well, and it doesn't hurt at all to have someone as skilled as you are in turning historical figures into real people. I must say, and I can attest to this, that that was one heck of a good read.

>> Well, thank you so much. I love what I do, and I've been very blessed in my subjects, but I've also been very fortunate to have had, and I mean this with all my heart, the Library of Congress as my great treasure house to draw upon. The Library of Congress was the inspiration long ago to turn me in the direction of a writer of history and biography because of certain discoveries I made there when I was quite young. And, I've been relying on it and enjoying not only the material that's in there, but the wonderful advice and counsel and encouragement of the staff. When people go into libraries, they should remember it isn't just the books in there that are of consequence, but the staff, the people that work there, and to draw on their advice, drawn on their answers to questions, and

their suggestions of what you might pursue next if you want to know more. Of course, we always want to know more once we get started.

>> Very graciously said, Sir, and thank you, and we're really looking forward to having you with us once again at the National Book Festival.

>> Well, so am I, I love the book festival; I just love it, and it gets better every year.

>> Well, we'll be seeing you on September 25 in the History and Biography Pavilion at the book festival and thank you once again.

>> Thank you very much.

>> We've been hearing from Pulitzer Prize winning historian, David McCullough, who will appear on Sunday, September 25, in the History and Biography Pavilion at the National Book Festival on the National Mall. Mr. McCullough, thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at loc.gov.