

Everyone's Reading

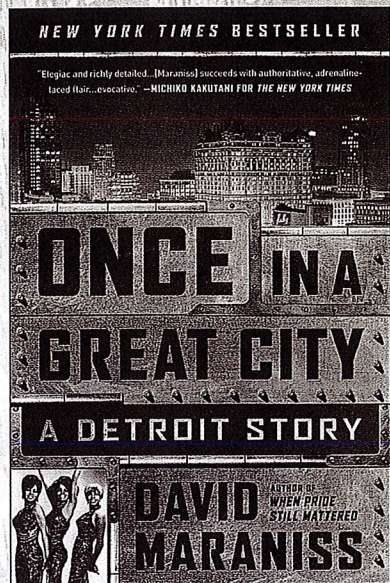
ONCE IN A GREAT CITY: A DETROIT STORY

April 10 – May 23, 2017

READER'S GUIDE

WHAT IS EVERYONE'S READING?

Everyone's Reading is a community wide reading program sponsored by metro Detroit public libraries in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties. Now in its sixteenth year, Everyone's Reading promotes community dialogue through the shared experience of reading and discussing the same book.



The 2017 Everyone's Reading selection is
Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story
by David Maraniss.



This year we are pleased to once again partner with the Detroit Institute of Arts. The DIA is also hosting an appearance by David Maraniss at the museum on Tuesday, May 23.

Previous Everyone's Reading Selections:

- 2016 ***Shanghai Girls*** by Lisa See
- 2015 ***The Inner Circle*** by Brad Meltzer
- 2014 ***Before You Know Kindness*** by Chris Bohjalian
- 2013 ***The Secrets of Happy Families: Improve Your Mornings, Rethink Family Dinner, Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More*** by Bruce Feiler
- 2012 ***Lethal: a Novel*** by Sandra Brown
- 2011 ***The Lincoln Lawyer*** by Michael Connelly
- 2010 ***Presumed Innocent*** by Scott Turow
- 2009 ***Finding My Voice*** by Diane Rehm
- 2008 ***The Beekeeper's Apprentice*** by Laurie R. King
- 2007 ***Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*** by Kevin Boyle
- 2006 ***Shadow Divers: The True Adventure of Two Americans Who Risked Everything to Solve One of the Last Mysteries of World War II*** by Robert Kurson
- 2005 Author Elizabeth McCracken, featuring ***Here's Your Hat, What's Your Hurry; The Giant's House; and Niagara Falls All Over Again***
- 2004 ***Saul and Patsy*** by Charles Baxter
- 2003 ***A Lesson Before Dying*** by Ernest J. Gaines
- 2002 ***Pay It Forward*** by Catherine Ryan Hyde

WHY READ ONCE IN A GREAT CITY: A DETROIT STORY?

In *Once in A Great City: A Detroit Story*, Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist David Maraniss presents a fascinating snapshot of the people, politics and culture of a city at the height of its prosperity in the early 1960s.

From the fall of 1962 to the spring of 1964, Detroit's car companies were seeing record sales, the Motown sound played on radios across America, the Civil Rights Movement was at its apex, and Detroit – a city President Lyndon Johnson coined, "A herald of hope" – was very much at the center of it all.

Maraniss tells the story of Detroit through engaging portraits of the visionary leaders of the time: automobile executive Henry Ford II; labor leader Walter Reuther; Motown founder Barry Gordy Jr.; upstart car salesman Lee Iacocca; and civil rights leader Reverend C.L. Franklin. Other vignettes foreshadow the city's darker future: The Detroit mafia's influence on football players, Commissioner George Edward's raid on the famed Gotham Hotel, a failed Olympic bid, and continuing deep-seated racial tensions.

Maraniss was born in Detroit and spent his first seven years on Dexter Avenue near the Winterhalter School before moving. While he doesn't think of himself as a Detroiter, he holds a great affection for the city and credits his early years with helping to shape his thoughts on race relations.

Once in A Great City provides a richly-detailed historical perspective of Detroit. The book's people, stories, and events will resonate with readers who cannot help but wonder what could have become of Detroit had events unfolded differently.

How to Get Involved

- Check out *Once In A Great City* or one of David Maraniss's other works from a participating library.
- Discuss Maraniss's work with other readers at library programs or with your own book club.
- Check out the Everyone's Reading website at www.everyonesreading.org for programs, events, and book group discussion points.
- Hear David Maraniss speak at one of the author appearances in Birmingham or Southfield. Mr. Maraniss will also be speaking at the Detroit Institute of Arts, a partner for this year's program.

A Word from David Maraniss

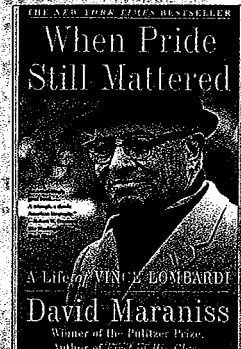
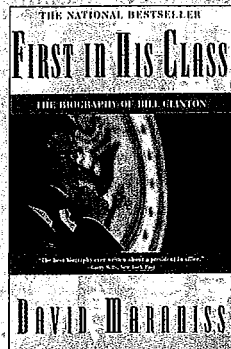
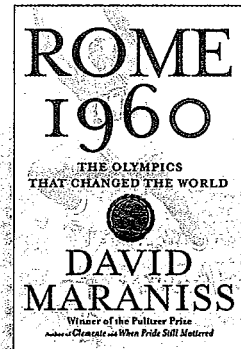
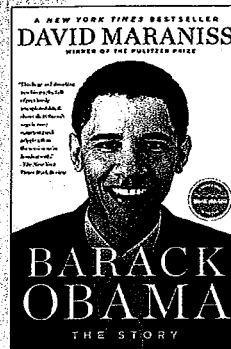
"The book on Detroit came from deep in my heart and soul, and I'm greatly looking forward to returning to the city to talk about it. I was born in Detroit, my earliest memories are of the city – the Boblo boat, Vernor's ginger ale, Hudson's department store, the Rouge pool – and though we left when I was seven, the place had a profound impact on me. *Once in A Great City* was my attempt to honor the city and all that it gave the world while also looking with clear eyes at the roots of its troubles. Every trip I've made back there since the book came out I've seen more and more energy in the city, not just pride in the past but hope for the future."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Maraniss is an associate editor at *The Washington Post*. In addition to *Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story*, Maraniss is the author of six critically acclaimed and bestselling books: *Barack Obama: The Story*; *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*; *First In His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton*; *They Marched Into Sunlight – War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*; *Clemente – The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*; and *Rome 1960: The Summer Olympics That Stirred the World*. He is also the author of *Into the Story: A Writer's Journey Through Life, Politics, Sports and Loss*; *The Clinton Enigma*; and coauthor of *The Prince of Tennessee: Al Gore Meets His Fate* and "Tell Newt to Shut Up!"

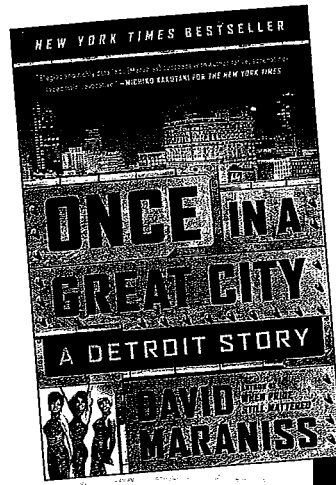
David is a three-time Pulitzer Prize finalist and won the Pulitzer for national reporting in 1993 for his newspaper coverage of then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton. He also was part of *The Washington Post* team that won a 2008 Pulitzer for the newspaper's coverage of the Virginia Tech shooting. He has won several other notable awards for achievements in journalism, including the George Polk Award, the Dirksen Prize for Congressional Reporting, the ASNE Laventhol Prize for Deadline Writing, the Hancock Prize for Financial Writing, the Anthony Lukas Book Prize, the Frankfort Book Prize, the Eagleton Book Prize, the Ambassador Book Prize and the Latino Book Prize.

Mr. Maraniss lives in Washington, D.C.



MEET THE AUTHOR

You are invited to hear David Maraniss speak about *Once in A Great City: A Detroit Story* and his experiences as a writer. A variety of titles by the author will be available for purchase and signing.



Monday, May 22 at 7 PM*

The Community House

380 S Bates • Birmingham, Michigan 48009



Tuesday, May 23 at 11 AM

Detroit Institute of Arts

5200 Woodward Avenue • Detroit, Michigan 48202

Tickets to the DIA-hosted author appearance are free of charge and open to anyone in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. Order tickets at tickets.dia.org or by calling (313) 833-4005.

Tuesday, May 23 at 7 PM*

Congregation Shaarey Zedek

27375 Bell Road • Southfield, Michigan 48034

**Due to popular demand, a ticket will be required for David Maraniss's appearances in Birmingham and Southfield. Tickets are free but limited. Contact your local participating library for more information and ticket availability.*

PARTICIPATING LIBRARIES

Everyone's Reading *Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story* is sponsored by the following Metro Net Consortium libraries:

Baldwin Public Library
(248) 647-1700
www.baldwinlib.org

Bloomfield Township Public Library
(248) 642-5800
www.btpl.org

Farmington Community Library
(248) 553-0300
www.farmlib.org

Rochester Hills Public Library
(248) 650-7130
www.rhpl.org

Southfield Public Library
(248) 796-4200
www.southfieldlibrary.org

West Bloomfield Township Public Library
(248) 682-2120
www.westbloomfieldlibrary.org

In addition, the following public libraries are participating in Everyone's Reading.

Berkley Public Library
(248) 658-3440
www.berkley.lib.mi.us

Chesterfield Township Library
(586) 598-4900
www.chelibrary.org

Clarkston Independence District Library
(248) 625-2212
www.indelib.org

Franklin Public Library
(248) 851-2254
www.franklin.lib.mi.us

Plymouth District Library
(734) 453-0750
plymouthlibrary.org

Royal Oak Public Library
(248) 246-3700
www.ropi.org



For a complete list of this year's Everyone's Reading programs, check your participating library or visit www.everyonesreading.org.

Once in a Great City Discussion Questions

1. Compare the re-birth Detroit is currently experiencing with the period 1962 – 1964 that the author calls “a time of uncommon possibility.”
2. The author writes about Detroit dying from its own design - from the construction of freeways rather than mass transit, to the growth of the suburban shopping malls and the predominance of single family homes purchased by the factory workers earning a good living wage. Do you agree and do you think these phenomena persist today?
3. Based on the details laid out in the book regarding Detroit before 1967, what do you think Detroit would be like today, had the 1967 riots never taken place?
4. Maraniss talks about how the 2011 Chrysler Super Bowl Ad inspired him, not to buy a car, but to write about what the city meant to America. Do you feel he accomplished his goal? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel the people, stories and events in the book adequately and fairly depict the city at the time? Are there other stories or events that you felt could have been included to give the reader a better perspective?
6. What events or story surprised you most about book? Did you learn anything about Detroit that you didn't know?
7. Did the author feel like the music of Motown changed the city? Would you agree with his opinion? If you were a young person in the 60's, how did Motown music influence you? Does it still matter in the music world?
8. The city of Detroit made a great effort to welcome Martin Luther King during his visit in 1963, even telling him that he would find no dogs or fire hoses here. How important was it that the white government – from the governor to the mayor to the police chief – made such an effort?
9. The unions played a great role in the building up of the middle class and of the city. Walter Reuther was a big player in that. Were you surprised to read of his commitment to the civil rights movement?
10. Would the city have taken a different course if it had been awarded the Olympics? Where do you think it could have gone?
11. The author spoke of many of Detroit's iconic buildings and landmarks. Which do you remember and why?
12. While the city was at a peak during the time of the book's content, we are trying to make a comeback today. Do you see similarities between then and now? Where do you think this once great city is heading?



About the Author

Full text biography:

David Maraniss

Birth Date : 1949

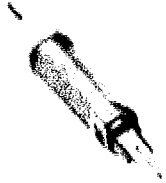
Place of Birth : United States, Michigan, Detroit

Nationality: American

Occupation : Journalist

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about this author

Awards:

Reporter of the Year, Madison Press Club, 1973; first place awards for columns and news stories, New Jersey Press Association, 1975; Front Page Award, Newspaper Guild, 1983; Hancock Prize for Financial Reporting, 1989; Grand Medal, National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1991; Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting, Columbia University School of Journalism, 1993, for articles on Bill Clinton; George Polk Award for national reporting (with Michael Weisskopf), Long Island University, 1995; Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for Distinguished Reporting of Congress (with Michael Weisskopf), National Press Foundation, 1995; Jesse Laventhol Prize for individual deadline news reporting, American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1997; Frankfurt eBook Award, grand prize for best original e-book, International eBook Award Foundation, 2000, for *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*; *Los Angeles Times* Book Award nomination, 2003, and Pulitzer Prize nomination for history, Ambassador Book Prize, English-Speaking Union of the United States, and J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, Columbia University School of Journalism, all 2004, for *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*; International Latino Book Award, Latino Literacy Now, best biography--Spanish or bilingual, 2007, for *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*; Pulitzer Prize (as member of *Washington Post* staff), 2008, for reporting on the shooting at Virginia Tech; honorary degree, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2014; Eagleton Book Prize.

Personal Information:

Born August 6, 1949, in Detroit, MI; son of Elliott (a journalist) and Mary (a book editor) Maraniss; married Linda (an environmentalist), August 16, 1969; children: Andrew, Sarah. **Education:** Attended University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Addresses: Home: Washington, DC; Madison, WI. Office: Washington Post, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20071. Agent: Sagalyn Literary Agency, 7201 Wisconsin Ave., Ste. 675, Bethesda, MD 20814. **E-mail:** david@davidmaraniss.com.

Career Information:

Writer, journalist. Worked for *Madison Capital Times*, Madison, WI; WIBA Radio, reporter, 1972-75; *Trenton Times*, Trenton, NJ, reporter, 1975-77; *Washington Post*, Washington, DC, journalist, 1977--, became associate editor.

Writings:

- *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1995.

- (With Michael Weisskopf) *"Tell Newt to Shut Up!": Prizewinning "Washington Post" Journalists Reveal How Reality Gagged the Gingrich Revolution*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1996.
- *The Clinton Enigma: A Four-and-a-Half-Minute Speech Reveals This President's Entire Life*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 1998.
- *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2000.
- (With Ellen Nakashima) *The Prince of Tennessee: The Rise of Al Gore*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2000, published as *The Prince of Tennessee: Al Gore Meets His Fate*, 2001.
- *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2006.
- (Editor and author of introduction) *The Best American Sports Writing 2007*, Houghton Mifflin (Boston, MA), 2007.
- *Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2008.
- *Into the Story: A Writer's Journey through Life, Politics, Sports and Loss*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2010.
- *Barack Obama: The Story*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2012.
- *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story*, Simon & Schuster (New York, NY), 2015.

Contributor to periodicals, including *Writer*.

Media Adaptions:

When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi was optioned for film by Columbia Pictures; *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* was adapted as a stage play by Eric Simonson under the title *Lombardi* in 2011; *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967* was optioned for a feature film, Playtone, 2003.

Sidelights:

"Writing is in my blood," commented the journalist and author David Maraniss in an article for *Writer*. "My mother was a book editor, my father was a newspaperman and my grandfather was a printer. It is one of the few things that I know how to do. I can't fix a car or build a house, and I certainly can't program computer software. I keep writing to stay alive, and feel alive." The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist has written books on politicians such as Bill Clinton and Al Gore, on sports figures, including the football coach Vince Lombardi and baseball great Roberto Clemente, and on recent American history, examining a turning point in the Vietnam War.

Maraniss won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign and later, as a journalist for the *Washington Post*, covered the Clinton White House. In 1995 he published his debut nonfiction title, *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton*, which covered Clinton's life up to the time he declared that he was running for president. Maraniss shows how even as a youth Clinton was an organizer and an achiever, getting himself elected to Boys Nation representing his state as a sixteen-year-old and famously shaking hands with President John F. Kennedy as a result.

A contributor to the *Economist* found *First in His Class* an "excellent biography," further praising the evenhandedness of Maraniss's narrative: "With equal matter-of-fact fascination, [Maraniss] describes his subject's sincerity and calculation, his boldness and cowardice, his calm and his temper tantrums, his loyalty and his infidelities. ... The interest is in the ambiguity." Maraniss's first book was heavily detailed. Writing in the *National Review*, Ann Lloyd Merriman noted that *First in His Class* "is to biography as saturation bombing is to warfare." Maraniss helps explain Clinton's meteoric rise to the national stage. As Richard Wightman Fox noted in the *Christian Century*, "by giving us a Bill Clinton who is wholly southern in his instinctive intertwining of family, religion and politics, Maraniss goes a long way toward explaining why so many liberals turned to Clinton in the 1990s and even before."

Maraniss gives a similar treatment to Clinton's vice president and the 2000 Democratic nominee for president in *The Prince of Tennessee: The Rise of Al Gore*, written with Ellen Nakashima. Jon Meacham noted in the *Washington Monthly*: "In the tradition of *First in His Class*, Maraniss' magisterial biography of Clinton, *The Prince of Tennessee* began in the pages of the *Washington Post*, and it deftly carries the reader through the stages of Gore's life." However, other reviewers thought the work borrowed too much from newspaper stories.

Writing in the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani felt that "the authors never pull together ... anecdotes into a coherent portrait of Al Gore." Kakutani added: "Their book hops and skips through Mr. Gore's youth, and it proves even more arbitrary and desultory in dealing with his political career." Similarly, *Philadelphia Inquirer* writer Robert Schmuhl thought the Gore book is "more journalistic than authoritative." Schmuhl further observed: "If the book seems like a collection of lengthy newspaper articles, it's because that is, in effect, what it is." Allowing such criticisms, *Library Journal* contributor Michael A. Genovese opined that *The Prince of Tennessee* "is nonetheless an important contribution to our understanding of Al Gore." Further praise came from *Booklist* reviewer Mary Carroll, who asserted that "readers striving to understand how Gore's dichotomies fit together will learn a good deal from this readable biography."

Maraniss turned to sports figures in two further biographies, *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi* and *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*. Writing in *Booklist*, Wes Lukowsky found *When Pride Still Mattered* a "carefully researched, often poignant three-dimensional biography" of the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers. Maraniss focuses particularly on the positive qualities such as hard work and devotion and loyalty on the part of Lombardi which transcend the sports field. Further praise came from a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly*, who found the work "intricate, ambitious and satisfying."

In *Clemente*, Maraniss presents another sports hero whose qualities transcended mere athletics. Considered by many the greatest Latino player in the major leagues, Roberto Clemente died in 1972 attempting to deliver emergency supplies to Nicaragua following an earthquake. Writing in the *Progressive*, Elizabeth DiNovella felt that Maraniss delivers a "superb story" with his biography. "This is an American story, in the broadest sense of the term," DiNovella concluded. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* had similar praise: "Maraniss deftly balances baseball and loftier concerns like racism." George F. Will, writing in the *New York Times*, described *Clemente* as a "baseball-savvy book sensitive to the social context that made Clemente, a black Puerto Rican, a leading indicator of baseball's future." Will concluded: "Now, thanks to Maraniss, Clemente's legacy is suitably defined and explained."

With *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*, Maraniss examines two days that brought the effects of the Vietnam War into sharp focus. On one day a battalion of U.S. soldiers marched into a trap laid for them by the North Vietnamese; on the following day a protest at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (where Maraniss was studying) turned violent when police and soldiers intervened. By juxtaposing the two events, Maraniss demonstrates how the progress of the war and of public opinion were at a tipping point by October 1967.

School Library Journal contributor Ted Westervelt thought this was "one of the best books to date on the Vietnam War." Noting the familiarity of the subject, *New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin remarked that the author turns the much-reported events "into something we have not seen before." On the West Coast, George Raine in the *San Francisco Chronicle* called the book an "excellent work of history." Fellow Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Halberstam, writing in the *Washington Post Book World*, called Maraniss "one of the most talented members of a gifted generation of authors now writing books even as they continue to practice journalism."

Maraniss continued his examination of sports with *Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World*. The reporter argues that the year 1960 was significant in many ways--set in the midst of the Cold War, the international event provided a venue in which the West, the Soviet Union and its allies, and the unaligned Third World could compete without actually confronting the specter of war. In addition, the political landscape was changing. European powers such as the United Kingdom, France, and Netherlands had either recently divested themselves of their overseas colonies or were in the process of rejecting imperialism, and new nations throughout Africa, Asia, and the Near East were emerging. The Olympic Games gave these new countries a venue for expressing their new sense of

nationhood. "In so many ways, the 1960 Olympics marked a passing of one era and the birth of another," Maraniss said in a Q&A session published on his Web site. "Television, money and doping were bursting onto the scene, changing everything they touched. Old-school notions of amateurism, created by and for upper-class sportsmen, were being challenged as never before. New countries were being born in Africa and Asia, blacks and women were pushing for equal rights. For better and worse, one could see the modern world as we know it today coming into view."

At the same time, the 1960 Olympics were not charged with the same kind of tension that had characterized earlier Games and that later Games would see. In 1936, Adolf Hitler tried to turn the Berlin Olympics into a statement about German nationalism and racial theory (an effort partly countered by the four gold medals won by African American Jesse Owens). In 1972, at the Olympic Games in Munich, Palestinian terrorists seized eleven members of the Israeli team--an event that ended with the deaths of all the hostages. "What was so powerful about Rome was the totality of it," Maraniss concluded on his Web site. "It was a richer canvas, with more stories, more changes, more ways of looking at the modern world, than any of those others. It had not only more issues, but more compelling characters."

One of the compelling characters that emerged in the 1960 Rome Olympics was Cassius Clay, later to become known as Muhammad Ali. "When I would tell people I was working on a book on the Rome Olympics, the first thing people would say was Muhammad Ali or Cassius Clay," Maraniss told David Daley in an interview for *Metromix Louisville*. For Maraniss, however, Clay was not as significant a figure as Wilma Rudolph, the African American runner who won three gold medals in track and field despite having been a victim of polio, or Rafer Johnson, the African American decathlon champion. Maraniss uncovered the stories of many other interesting athletes in the process of compiling the book, including high-jumper Joe Faust, whom Maraniss tracked down decades after his Olympic appearance to find him still high-jumping in his back yard in his sixties, and a Danish cyclist who died of a circulation-enhancing drug he was given before he competed.

Critics celebrated Maraniss's accomplishment in *Rome 1960*. "Maraniss writes in great detail, chronicling the eighteen days of the Games," stated Andrew Bast in *Newsweek International*. "While at first it may seem gratuitous to go so far as to review the passenger manifest for each planeload of American athletes departing New York, the work pays off." Describing Maraniss's account as both "timely" and "illuminating," a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor also found the work very enjoyable, dubbing it "evocative, entertaining and often suspenseful--sports history at a very high standard." Other reviewers also had praise for the account. Maraniss "delivers a compelling narrative," wrote Alan Moores in *Booklist*, "while also seamlessly profiling the major figures of the games." Favorably comparing *Rome 1960* to the author's earlier works, George Raine in the *San Francisco Chronicle* said that it "displays tireless reporting, a sharp focus on character and high drama." Summing the book up in *Sports Illustrated*, one writer called *Rome 1960* "an exquisite portrayal of what the Olympics once were and ... how far they've come."

In 2012 Maraniss published *Barack Obama: The Story*. Drawing from hundreds of interviews, letters, and personal accounts, the biography offers insight into the life of U.S. president Barack Obama and his search for self-identity. Maraniss chronicles Obama's family and the impact they had on his life directly or indirectly. He also describes the changing view Obama had of himself relevant to where he was living before undertaking his legal studies at Harvard University.

Writing in the *New Statesman*, Alec MacGillis pondered: "Where does Maraniss leave us? With even greater appreciation for the tensions at work beneath Obama's equanimity; also with greater scepticism for Obama the author, as Maraniss reveals just how much Obama had contorted his (admittedly embellished) story in *Dreams from My Father* to dramatize his search for racial identity. Above all, one is left with a deeper understanding of why Obama, as president, continued to press his conciliatory line until long after it was apparent to all others that his opposition was set on ruining him." Writing in the *National Review*, Michael Knox Beran opined: "What saves this narrative of Barack Obama's early life from being a data dump (it is very long and marred by superfluous detail) is its account of how the future president recast himself, in his college and post-college years, as a biracial outsider, an exotic golden child tormented by the perplexities of racial allegiance." Reviewing the book in the *National Catholic Reporter*, Arthur Jones remarked: "We've been introduced to a most unusual man whose jolting shifts of place seem dictated by the

restless parents who produced him. By contrast, the man we know politically had already found his anchorage: his wife, Michelle. This is the man before Michelle. We voted for the with-Michelle Barack Obama." He concluded: "We'll not see his likes again in the White House." Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, James Fallows summarized: "We never fully know public figures, least of all one whose identity so much involves cool, deliberate reserve. But after this book we know one public figure much better."

Maraniss discusses the history of his hometown in *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story*. He focuses on the early 1960s, when Detroit's auto industry was thriving and Motown's music was dominating the airwaves. However, conflict was still present despite the good times the city seemed to be having. Racial tensions were high, and the labor unions organized demonstrations. Also, Detroit lost its bid to host the Olympics during this time. Maraniss profiles influential city leaders, entertainers, businessmen, and mobsters, including Lee Iacocca, Reverend C.L. Franklin, Berry Gordy, Jr., and Henry Ford II.

"For all his exhaustive research and evocative scene-setting, Maraniss never seems to find the Zeitgeist of the historical moment he covers," wrote a *Publishers Weekly* critic. Other assessments of the book were more favorable. Paul Clemens, a contributor to the online version of the *New York Times Book Review*, suggested: "The book could have used more Maraniss. Because it has no central character, and no clear through-line other than the calendar, you want less ephemera and more of his controlling intelligence. And even these minor flaws are forgivable, since his researcher's drive to uncover and his writer's tendency to include yield so many illuminating details, among them several that simply light up the sky." "*Once in a Great City* has it all: significant scenes, tremendously charismatic figures, even a starry soundtrack," commented Kelly Blewett in *BookPage*. Ruth Conniff, a reviewer in *Progressive*, remarked: "Global trade, rightwing union-busting, and a terribly insecure, increasingly unequal economy make this portrait of a bygone era particularly poignant." A *Kirkus Reviews* writer described the volume as "an illuminating history of a golden era in a city desperately seeking to reclaim the glory," and *Library Journal* contributor Elizabeth Zeitz called it "a colorful, detailed history of the rise and ultimate decline of Detroit that will appeal to sociologists...and car fans alike."

Related Information:

PERIODICALS

- *Air Power History*, June 22, 2004, George M. Watson, Jr., review of *They Marched into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967*, p. 53.
- *Booklist*, October 15, 1998, Gilbert Taylor, review of *First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton*, p. 396; September 1, 1999, Wes Lukowsky, review of *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*, p. 61; September 1, 2000, Mary Carroll, review of *The Prince of Tennessee: The Rise of Al Gore*, p. 4, Bill Ott, review of *When Pride Still Mattered*, p. 52; September 1, 2003, Gilbert Taylor, review of *They Marched into Sunlight*, p. 3; March 1, 2006, Wes Lukowsky, review of *Clemente: The Passion and Grace of Baseball's Last Hero*, p. 42; October 1, 2007, Wes Lukowsky, review of *The Best American Sports Writing 2007*, p. 14; June 1, 2008, Alan Moores, review of *Rome 1960: The Olympics That Changed the World*, p. 22; July 1, 2015, Vanessa Bush, review of *Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story*, p. 19.
- *BookPage*, September, 2015, Kelly Blewett, "A Shining City on the Brink," review of *Once in a Great City*, p. 24.
- *Christian Century*, September 13, 1995, Richard Wightman Fox, review of *First in His Class*, p. 850; December 13, 2003, review of *They Marched into Sunlight*, p. 22; December 12, 2006, review of *Clemente*, p. 23.
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David Maraniss's 'Once in a Great City: A Detroit Story'

By PAUL CLEMENS SEPT. 25, 2015

Photo



Martha and the Vandellas at a Ford plant in Detroit in 1965. Credit: Courtesy of The Detroit News

David Maraniss's "Once in a Great City" concerns Detroit in 1963 — a crucial year, this book asserts, in the city's history, marking the end of its boom times and the beginning of its end times. Though my Detroit birth and upbringing were still a decade off, 1963 was a big year for me, too. My dad graduated from high school in the city that spring, and my mom would begin her senior year that fall. For their first date, they went to see "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World." The ingredients for the city's apocalypse would seem to have come together along with those of my existence.

The degree of difficulty here is high. Though temporally narrow — the fall of '62 through the spring of '64 — the book's subject matter couldn't be wider, encompassing anything Maraniss deems relevant to his purposes. And he needs to make a reader feel the immediate promise of 1963 even while sensing, in the distance, a drumbeat of doom. His choice of year helps: the uplift of Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech, followed by the crash of the John F. Kennedy assassination — the “seven seconds that broke the back of the American century,” in Don DeLillo's famous formulation.

Maraniss quotes a columnist for The Michigan Chronicle, Detroit's leading black newspaper, who summed up the year wonderfully: “There have been periods, some long and some short, representing all facets of things that happened in 1963, but no one year to our knowledge encompassed and mirrored — with such complete clarity and depth of meaning — the whole dramatic history of the United States.” And no city encompasses that American drama quite like Detroit.

This has been the central conceit of almost every big Detroit book for the last quarter-century, going back to Ze'ev Chafetz's “Devil's Night” — that what happens in this city has an explanatory power that the goings-on in other cities simply lack. (This happens to be true, by the way, though I *would* say that.) So what broke Detroit's back, tipping its half-century rise into a half-century descent that culminated in the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history?

It's a story that's been told before, typically as distinct narratives: Detroit and cars, Detroit and race, Detroit and labor, Detroit and music. The great virtue of Maraniss's bighearted book is that it casts a wide net, collecting and seeking to synthesize these seemingly disparate strands. You finish “Once in a Great City” feeling mildly shattered, which is exactly as it should be.

The cast of characters is huge: Kennedy and King, Walter Reuther, the Ford family, Berry Gordy Jr. and his Motown artists, Malcolm X, the Franklins (the Rev. C.L. and Aretha), Lyndon Johnson, Lee Iacocca, various mobsters. Even where the material is familiar, the connections Maraniss makes among these figures feel fresh.

He's even better on the lesser known. There's the progressive police commissioner, George Edwards, keen to improve community relations, who “had arrived in Detroit in 1936 with \$50, his life's possessions in a single suitcase and his hopes resting in the dream that he could write a novel on the industrial urban condition, a Detroit auto plant variation of ‘The Jungle.’” There's Esther Gordy, Berry Jr.'s oldest sister — “the keeper of the castle,” as he called her — who, when her little brother was feeling inferior to their father, “was the one who gave him a copy of Rudyard Kipling's ‘If’ and had him memorize the lines.” I was familiar with neither figure before and came away feeling I could read a whole book about either, along with a muckraking novel by Edwards.

Motown is clearly where Maraniss's heart is, and it is where his materials — music, race, civil rights — come together most naturally. The story of how Motown Records was staked deserves to be as famous as Ben Franklin's plan for self-improvement. Berry Gordy Jr. received \$800 from "the family fund, a money pool into which all blood relatives and their spouses contributed \$10 a month. . . . The parents and all eight brothers and sisters had a vote on when and how loans could be distributed." The interest rate on the loan, Maraniss tells us, was 6 percent.

In a blurb, Gay Talese applauds the book's "prodigious research." You come away awed by Maraniss's legwork while wishing he had included somewhat less of it. There's a lot of who, what, when and where. (Maraniss is a newsman at The Washington Post and a Pulitzer Prize winner.) He gives street addresses to family homes, the exact departure times of flights, the precise duration of a helicopter ride. This accretion of unilluminating details adds a degree of verisimilitude, certainly, but it leaves out analysis — the why.

In an early Motown section, there's a sentence that approaches 100 words and details the itinerary of the Motortown Revue, the 1962 roadshow that would expose Motown artists to America. Reading it, you're reminded of the advice Maraniss quotes Gordy giving to an aspiring songwriter just pages earlier: "You need the hook and the song structure, with a beginning, a middle and an end. You gotta do it like a story." The book has a great hook, but you can go a little while without hearing it.

Another problem, stemming from the fact that the pages are full of so many public figures, is that it is overfull of their public pronouncements. Not everyone is at the level of a Kennedy or a King. The book contains too much speechifying boilerplate.

These are small criticisms, embedded in which is a much larger compliment: The book could have used more Maraniss. Because it has no central character, and no clear through-line other than the calendar, you want less ephemera and more of his controlling intelligence.

And even these minor flaws are forgivable, since his researcher's drive to uncover and his writer's tendency to include yield so many illuminating details, among them several that simply light up the sky. "Along the route," Maraniss writes of the Walk to Freedom, the civil rights march that ended at Cobo Hall, with King delivering an early version of the Dream speech, "three observers were injured in falls, seven marchers fainted from heat and exhaustion, 26 children were separated from their parents, and four people were arrested, including two drunks and a pickpocket." Such details — selected by the author, properly contextualized and clearly put — are like gifts from the nonfiction gods. They work in and of themselves, and they illuminate the larger point: that despite the fears (or hopes) of naysayers, the march went off without a hitch. At such moments, you can practically hear a click as the machinery of Maraniss's book comes together.

The book ends where it must, just down the road from Detroit in Ann Arbor, with Lyndon Johnson's announcement of the Great Society. (We know that what's to come in Detroit isn't so great, and the book's characters do not. Thus, the mildly shattered feeling.) Let's not dwell, however, on the depths that the city would hit — and from which, slowly, it is beginning to rise. Instead, let's stay at Detroit's high point in 1963 — the high point of Maraniss's book as well — which was the Walk to Freedom. Several pages after telling us of the march's two drunks and its lone pickpocket, in a superb parenthetical aside, Maraniss notes the following: "Inserted into the official programs for the Walk to Freedom were brochures outlining travel arrangements for Detroiters to attend the March on Washington . . . at a cost of \$28.25 per person." That 28.25 is like 27 outs in baseball: It's the perfect number. It couldn't be anything else. It tingles the spine. American history, you can't help thinking, must be littered with such bargains. Maybe, you can't help hoping, it might be again.

ONCE IN A GREAT CITY

A Detroit Story

By David Maraniss

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