Contemporary Literary Criticism

GLC 145

### Volume 145

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers





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### **Preface**

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*CLC* provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author's career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Singlework entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included,
- A complete Bibliographical Citation of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief Annotations explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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Yvor Winters, *The Post-Symbolist Methods* (Allen Swallow, 1967), 211-51; excerpted and reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 85, ed. Christopher Giroux (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 223-26.

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ix

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# **Contents**

#### Preface vii

#### Acknowledgments xi

#### Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xv

Stephen Ambrose 1936-	1
American historian, biographer, and editor	
Jacques Barzun 1907	. 61
Fred D'Aguiar 1960 English poet, novelist, and playwright	113
Kaye Gibbons 1960- American novelist	132
Susan Gubar 1944-  American editor and literary critic	204
Janette Turner Hospital 1942-  Australian novelist and short story writer	291
Tama Janowitz 1957	322
Francis King 1923- Swiss-born English novelist, nonfiction and short story writer, and	348
poet	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 371 Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 439 CLC Cumulative Nationality Index 447 CLC-145 Title Index 461

# Stephen Ambrose 1936-

(Full name Stephen Edward Ambrose) American historian, biographer, and editor.

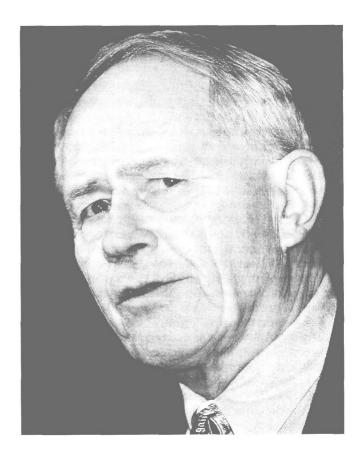
The following entry presents an overview of Ambrose's career through 2000.

#### INTRODUCTION

For nearly forty years, Ambrose has been the author of several major historical and biographical works that focus on significant events in American history. He has written multivolume biographies of United States presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard Nixon, popular narrative studies of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the opening of the American West, and vivid accounts of World War II combat. Ambrose has also amassed the world's largest collection of oral histories related to a single battle, the D-Day invasion, which he used as source material to write D-Day, June 6, 1944 (1994). Ambrose's military expertise came to the attention of director Steven Spielberg, who relied on Ambrose as a historical advisor for the acclaimed film Saving Private Ryan, the plot of which was partially drawn from Ambrose's writing about the Normandy invasion. Often praised for his balanced perspective and the narrative skill with which he presents individuals and historical events, Ambrose is among the most widely read professional historians in the United States.

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Born in Decatur, Illinois, Ambrose was the son of family physician Stephen Hedges Ambrose and Rosepha Ambrose. Early in Ambrose's life, the family moved to Whitewater, Wisconsin, where he attended high school. He matriculated at the University of Wisconsin as a pre-med student, but after he enrolled in a history class, Ambrose became so enthralled with the subject matter that he changed his major. He received a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin in 1957, the same year that he married Judith Dorlester. Ambrose received a master's degree from Louisiana State University in 1958, but returned to the University of Wisconsin for his doctoral work, which he completed in 1963. From 1960 to 1964 he served as an assistant professor at Louisiana State University in New Orleans and wrote his first book, Halleck (1962). This admittedly minor work was to have great implications for Ambrose's career, as one of its few readers was former President Eisenhower, who was so impressed by Am-



brose's historical approach that he hired the then-28-yearold Ambrose to edit his papers. Ultimately, Ambrose became Eisenhower's official biographer. Ambrose has since spent thirty years researching the former president, leading to the completion of at least fifteen works about Eisenhower himself, his family, and events in which he played a pivotal role. Ambrose worked as an associate professor at Johns Hopkins University from 1964 through 1969. While at Johns Hopkins, he published three more works of history, Upton and the Army (1964), Duty, Honor, and Country (1966), and Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945 (1967). In 1966, Ambrose's wife died and one year later, he married Moira Buckley. After leaving Johns Hopkins in 1969, he spent a year as the Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the U.S. Naval War College and another year at Kansas State University as the Dwight D. Eisenhower Professor of War and Peace. During his career, Ambrose took advantage of several visiting professorships throughout the United States and Ireland. The bulk of his academic career, however, has centered around his alma mater, Louisiana State University (now known as the University of New Orleans), where he taught from 1971 through 1995 and currently remains as a professor emeritus. He founded the Eisenhower Center at the University as well as the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans. In addition to authoring more than twenty-five books, Ambrose remains a frequent contributor to both scholarly and popular historical journals and newspapers. He currently lives in Helena, Montana.

#### **MAJOR WORKS**

Ambrose has spent the majority of his career concentrating on the history of the United States, with particular interests in World War II, Eisenhower and Nixon, and the exploration of the American West. His work has been heavily influenced by his strong personal belief in the merits of democratic society and his great respect for the individuals who defended the United States against totalitarian regimes. His World War II histories include Pegasus Bridge (1984), Band of Brothers (1992), Eisenhower and the German POWs (1992), D-Day, June 6, 1944, Citizen Soldiers (1997), and The Victors (1998). Band of Brothers is a personal story of war seen through the eyes of the men of E Company, 101st Airborne Division, who were responsible for holding Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge and for capturing Berchtesgaden, Hitler's mountain hideaway. Eisenhower and the German POWs, co-edited with Gunter Bischof, cites abundant historical evidence to refute the assertions of author James Bacque that President Eisenhower was responsible for the deaths of perhaps one million German POWs in the waning days of World War II. D-Day, June 6, 1944 approaches military history unconventionally, by focusing on the experiences of common Allied soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and second lieutenants rather than generals or political leaders. In Ambrose's opinion, the creativity of these foot soldiers and platoon commanders was essential to the Allies' victory over the Germans. The text of *D-Day* is drawn from more than 1,000 oral histories of soldiers present at Normandy on the day of the invasion. Citizen Soldiers also recounts the experiences of ordinary soldiers, from June 7, 1944, through the surrender of Germany. This work reiterates Ambrose's thesis that it was the basic decency, moral determination, and flexible thinking of young American men that led to the Allied victory.

Ambrose's acclaimed biographies include a two-volume work about Eisenhower—Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952 (1983) and Eisenhower: The President (1984)—and a three-volume work on Nixon—Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962 (1987), Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (1989), and Nixon: Ruin and Recovery, 1973-1990 (1991). Ambrose portrays Eisenhower as one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century, a man born to lead and a chief executive who, contrary to some contemporary opinions, held his hand firmly at the helm throughout his two terms in office. While researching the Eisenhower administration, Ambrose also became fascinated with one of

the most vilified political figures in American history—Richard Nixon, who served as Eisenhower's vice-president before ascending to the presidency himself. Ambrose was drawn to Nixon not out of admiration, but through curiosity about what went wrong during his presidential administration. The resulting three volumes constitute a perceptive portrait of a man who is considered one of the most complex political figures in U.S. history.

Ambrose's historical works about the American West— Crazy Horse and Custer (1975), Undaunted Courage (1996), and Nothing Like It in the World (2000)—are vivid narratives that portray the different kinds of personalities who overcame the many physical obstacles to America's westward expansion. Undaunted Courage, perhaps one of Ambrose's most highly regarded works, attempts to restore the reputation of Meriwether Lewis, co-leader of the Lewis and Clark expedition that was originally conceived by Thomas Jefferson. The work recounts the importance of Lewis's shared leadership with William Clark, the friendship between the two men, Lewis's excellence as a natural scientist, and his tragic demise. In Nothing Like It in the World, Ambrose celebrates the legions of anonymous workers who performed the backbreaking labor needed to build the transcontinental railway and describes the engineering, building, and financing decisions that occupied the men leading the effort. Ambrose's historical expertise has also drawn the attention of the producers and directors of various television documentaries and motion pictures. In 2001, the pay cable network HBO (Home Box Office) and director Steven Spielberg produced a ten-hour television mini-series adaptation of Ambrose's Band of Brothers.

#### CRITICAL RECEPTION

Ambrose's work has been hailed by many critics for its balance, its even-handed approach to men and events, and its engaging narrative presentation. Ambrose's biographies of Eisenhower and Nixon are widely regarded as definitive works on their subjects. Some reviewers have noted that Ambrose's willingness to criticize Eisenhower (his personal hero) and to express admiration for Nixon (a disgraced president) testifies to his judicious and objective historical approach. While his military histories of World War II, notably D-Day and Citizen Soldiers, have attracted considerable praise, some critics maintain that Ambrose tends to romanticize war, overlooking the reality of atrocity on all sides. Other reviewers have faulted Ambrose for not being sufficiently sensitive to political correctness. Also, because Ambrose is unabashedly patriotic and often reveres historical figures, some critics find his works long on adulation but short on analysis. However, it has been noted that Ambrose was unafraid to assail Eisenhower's handling of Joseph McCarthy and the growing civil rights struggle, despite his deep admiration for the man. Ambrose has been criticized for his failure to rely on primary sources, even when they are available, and for sometimes glossing over or omitting key points of history. Ambrose's

books are written primarily for a popular audience rather than a scholarly one, and Ambrose has lamented the trend in contemporary historical writing toward focusing on theory rather than narrative.

#### PRINCIPAL WORKS

Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (history) 1962

Upton and the Army (history) 1964

Duty, Honor, and Country: A History of West Point (history) 1966

Eisenhower and Berlin, 1945: The Decision to Halt at the Elbe (history) 1967

The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower (history) 1970

Rise to Globalism: American Foreign Policy Since 1938 (history) 1971

Crazy Horse and Custer: The Parallel Lives of Two American Warriors (history) 1975

Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment [with Richard H. Immerman] (nonfiction) 1981

Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952 (biography) 1983

Milton S. Eisenhower: Educational Statesman [with Richard H. Immerman] (biography) 1983

Eisenhower: The President (biography) 1984

Pegasus Bridge: 6 June 1944 (history) 1984

Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913-1962 (biography) 1987

Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician, 1962-1972 (biography) 1989

Nixon: Ruin and Recovery, 1973-1990 (biography) 1991

Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne, from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest (history) 1992

Eisenhower and the German POWs: Facts against Falsehood [editor; with Gunter Bischof] (history) 1992

D-Day, June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II (history) 1994

Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West (history) 1996

Americans at War (essays) 1997

Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany (history) 1997

The Victors: Eisenhower and His Boys—The Men of World War II (history) 1998

Witness to America: An Illustrated Documentary History of the United States from the Revolution to Today [editor; with Douglas G. Brinkley] (history) 1999

Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869 (history) 2000

#### **CRITICISM**

#### John Keegan (review date 22 October 1984)

SOURCE: "The Good General," in *New Republic*, October 22, 1984, pp. 43-6.

[In the following review, Keegan offers positive evaluation of Ambrose's two-volume biography of Eisenhower.]

"Eisenhower," this magnificent biography begins [Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890-1952], "was a great and good man," and with that no one of generous spirit would disagree. He was also, for more than half of his life, a poor man-in childhood dirt poor. It is from that fact in his background that a European reader would begin to assess his character. For the officer class in Europe, though often strapped for cash, has never been poor in the American sense. European officers are younger sons, clergymen's sons, sons of officers who have themselves had to scrimp and save. But the scrimping has always had to do with the keeping up of appearances which the haves and have-nots of their social order both accept at face value. Europeans accord their officer class the status of gentlemen, and thereby concede them a standing in society that automatically ensures them authority in their calling.

American officers, in the early days of the Republic, may have enjoyed a comparable head start. But by the time of Eisenhower's birth in 1890, when Manifest Destiny and open emigration had transformed the American class system out of all recognition to Europeans, the social certainties had gone. Some "southern gentlemen" continued to make West Point their goal. A few rich Americans allowed determined sons to go there; Patton, the most overrated of America's Second World War generals, was one of those. But the majority who arrived at the academy in Eisenhower's time were of the middling sort downwards. Marshall's family had fallen on hard times. Bradley had never known anything but the dawn-to-dusk deprivation of log cabin life. For both of them it was the free education West Point provided which drew them to the army. So it was with Eisenhower.

Eisenhower's father was a failed storekeeper (as, incidentally, Grant had also been). The town in which he sought to restore his fortunes, Abilene, Kansas, offered no bonanzas and few ways out for his six sons. But although he had lost his money, he retained two assets of inestimable value, family pride and a wife of character beyond price. The Eisenhowers were old Pennsylvania Dutch stock. So, too, were the Stovers, whose daughter Ida he married in 1885. They shared an upbringing in River Brethren fundamentalism and a veneration for education; indeed, it was the latter that brought them together when they prevailed on their families to let them attend a sort of college the Brethren ran in Lecompton, Kansas, in 1884. There he

learned Greek well enough to read the Greek New Testament nightly for the rest of his life and she the Bible so thoroughly that she took pride in never needing to check any reference she chose to quote.

Stephen Ambrose's description of the upbringing this couple gave their sons, often done before but never more tellingly, prompts one to ponder the whole question of whether children got a better or worse start in their century than they get in ours. Neither Abilene High School nor the Eisenhower household could offer any of the Eisenhower boys a hundredth part of the athletic, library, laboratory, or computer facilities that modern suburban-even inner-city—parents regard as their offsprings' birthright. This did not stop three of the Eisenhowers from making immensely successful careers and a classmate of theirs from becoming president of Cornell. Had the Eisenhowers been Jewish and Abilene High School in Brooklyn, that might not prompt surprise. But neither was the case. Might it not be, however, that what family and school provided in nineteenth-century Kansas was something that few institutions, except perhaps the Jewish family and Bible class (and their power may be waning), do today? David Eisenhower's Greek Testament reading, Ida's mastery of the apt Bible reference, surely translated—linked as both were to an exigent moral code and, through their financial tumble, to an acute concern for social rehabilitation—into rigorous intellectual demands on their sons.

One way of explaining Jewish intellectual excellence is through the concern for textual precision, as a basis for an ethical synthesis, that the biblical tradition demands. The Afrikaners have it, too; so in their time did the Scots who, through the outlets provided by the British Empire, enjoyed career opportunities that the Transvaal could not provide and achieved fortunes, positions, and intellectual reputations as glittering, in a subfusc way, as anything that Vilna or Vienna could display. One effect of modern educators' devotion to the computer will be to ensure that its devotees will altogether lack that built-in facility for automatic switching and reprogramming of highly charged memory banks—a skill that all those children of the Book imbibed almost with their mother's milk.

Ida Eisenhower transmitted to her sons much more than sustenance, material or mental. She may already have found a biographer. If she has not, she would make a splendid subject for the burgeoning band of feminist historians, for she stands high in the ranks of remarkable Victorian mothers. Like the matriarch of the Buchan brood, she drove her children to great worldly success within a lively fear of the Lord; unlike John Buchan's mother, she did so with wit, fun, and good cheer. One of the most charming features of Stephen Ambrose's book is its reproductions of the family snapshots, in which the famous Ike grin stands forth unmistakably on her very un-Mennonite prettiness. Her husband had the inarticulate goodness of a John Ford itinerant preacher; she overflowed with a zest for life that, as her most famous son freely and gladly admitted, was a major force behind his rise to the White House.

West Point was the first step on the way. Not only was the education it gave free; it was also rooted in mathematics and engineering science. As a result, the West Point product, of which there were only a few hundred each year in Ike's day, was eminently fitted to succeed in his America. A cadet left the academy with a sharp practical intelligence and a personality which four years of subjection, succeeded by the demands of cadet-officer responsibility, had perfectly formed for a life of getting on with the other fellow. Throughout his career, Ike was to display to perfection the capacity to see the other fellow's point of view while working to get his own way—even, sometimes, when the other fellow was his constituted superior. If there is such a thing as the complete West Point product, Eisenhower was probably it.

Yet, though a great academy success, the pattern of American army life determined that his service, into middle age, would be routine almost to the point of inanity. One of the glories of American politics is that the United States is not an imperialistic power. The American officer of Eisenhower's vintage was therefore condemned to a round of posts in the American sticks. Their British contemporaries might, over twenty years, come to know the world from the Caribbean to the Himalayas. Eisenhower did not even see China, the only real overseas post open to an officer of the Old Army; his time in the Philippines was spent, as he later put it with uncharacteristic pith, "studying acting under General MacArthur"-to whom he acted as staff officer in Manila from 1936-39. Chance deprived him even of an assignment "over there"; by the time the tank unit of which he had been given command in 1918, as a temporary lieutenant colonel, was ready for action, the Great War was over.

He was therefore never to come under fire; and it would be eighteen years before he was a lieutenant colonel again. Mamie, the sweetheart whom he married in 1916—the author is less forthcoming than he might be about their lifelong relationship—was uncomplaining about the straits to which his slow promotion through badly paid ranks consigned her. But narrow and constricting though the progression through Fort Leavenworth and Camp Meade was, Eisenhower inched ahead. And in the fall of 1941 he got his break. Appointed chief of staff of the Third Army for the Louisiana maneuvers (which were to be for American military reputation what the Italian campaign of 1796 was for the French), he scored a great success. Three months later, on the day after Pearl Harbor, Marshall's aide in Washington telephoned that "the Chief says for you to hop a plane and get up here right away." Eisenhower's career had begun.

It may be that Eisenhower's greatest achievement was to survive ordeal by fire at the hands of "the Chief"—George C. Marshall. For Marshall, who may have been one of the greatest of Americans, was certainly one of the most terrifying. Even Roosevelt seems to have held him in awe, perhaps because of Marshall's fixed habit of never allowing himself to laugh at any of the President's jokes, With

lesser mortals he denied himself even a smile (there is only one photograph of a Marshall smile) and before subordinates he maintained the great stone face.

Eisenhower had therefore to win Marshall's approval by the only route the Chief of Staff recognized, mastery of grinding hard work. "Give me a few hours," was Ike's only counter when Marshall asked him, in effect, to map a war-winning strategy in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. During the next months, in which he allowed himself a bare hour to mourn the news of his father's death, Eisenhower worked every minute God gave to design a scheme for American victory. In a few weeks he had thought through and rejected plans to concentrate American strength in the Pacific. By midsummer of 1942 he was wholly converted to the "Germany First" strategy and was established in a London headquarters where he was to translate principle into practice.

The meandering of Allied strategy, via North Africa and Italy, was to postpone his realization of the strategic concept he formed in the War Plans Division under Marshall. But it was to be the making of his future. Eisenhower may not have been a great field commander—though that could be argued. He was certainly a supreme military diplomat, and in the circumstances of coalition warfare that is a more important talent in a Supreme Commander, which he swiftly became. By the time of Normandy, he had established a masterly touch with the team—Montgomery, Bradley, Patton—that was to beat the German army, and could almost effortlessly defuse the squabbles that regularly arose among them.

Much has been made of Ike's failure to impose his own will on Montgomery and Patton after the break-out from Normandy, when it seemed (though less clearly in retrospect) that the war might have been won, given firmer direction, in 1944. The truth of the matter is that the Allies in France were overwhelmed by the extent of their own success, which was far greater than they had anticipated, and that the prospect of total victory that year was a chimera. Eisenhower saw that, kept his head, and did what was best under the circumstances. If he can be accused of a failure, it was in not insisting that Montgomery clear the Channel ports, rather than striking at Arnhem, a failure of omission rather than commission.

At the time no one, at his own level and above, considered that Ike had done anything less than he should. It was with that reputation that he returned from the war, and the only surprise about his postwar career is that it took one party or the other the time it did to capture him as a Presidential candidate. Stephen Ambrose's second volume, devoted to his Presidency, lacks something of the magisterial quality of the first. It has the appearance of having been written at greater speed and so with less reflection on Eisenhower the President's quality and achievements. Still, it is a superb piece of biography, a detailed and objective assessment of his management of government, spiced with fascinating revelations. Some of these (which carry over from

Volume I to II) concern his relations with the aspirant Vice President Nixon. Given the nature of Nixon's pleas for Ike's support during the Checkers affair—his language descended to the level of the latrine—it is astounding that his distinctly prim master kept him on the ticket.

One would have liked, perhaps, more of an assessment of the Presidency than the author supplies. With his broad conclusion, however, one would not disagree. Eisenhower, a man of war, had the balance and moderation in national security policy and foreign policy that perhaps only a man with prolonged exposure to casualty lists—and direct responsibility for them—can exercise. He was deeply skeptical about the efficacy of force and highly suspicious of the argument that security is a function of large defense budgets. He ended the Korean War. He squashed the Anglo-French efforts to bring Arab nationalism to heel by military means. He opposed single-handedly his own military establishment's inclination to settle affairs in Asia by the threat, perhaps even the use, of nuclear weapons. And he bowed out of his Presidency with a warning about the dangers of the growing military-industrial complex which would have fit better into the life of Gladstone than into the career of a man who self-proclaimed liberal opinionmakers characterized as the golf-playing companion of the common man's enemies.

Eisenhower was indeed a great and good man, because power did not deflect him from the values that his humble, high-minded, and God-fearing parents had given him in his Kansas childhood during the years of America's innocence. Those who continue to trust in the United States' unique capacity to do good in the world do so because they believe that there are still David and Ida Eisenhowers out in the great American heartland, rearing their broods on hope and on respect for the word.

#### Herbert S. Parmet (review date 29 October 1984)

SOURCE: "Unearthing the Real Ike," in *New Leader*, October 29, 1984, pp. 17-18.

[In the following review of Eisenhower: The President, Parmet concludes that Ambrose's work is "by far the best and most authoritative Eisenhower biography available."]

"Eisenhower gave the nation eight years of peace and prosperity," declares Stephen E. Ambrose near the end of his comprehensive and approving life of our 34th Commander-in-Chief [in *Eisenhower: The President.*] "No other President in the 20th century could make that claim. No wonder millions of Americans felt that the country was damned lucky to have him."

Ike's most outstanding quality, as Ambrose sees it, was his deft management of crises—from Dien Bien Phu to Little Rock to Sputnik. And contrary to a widespread impression, the White House was not run by assistants. Ike "kept all the power in his own hands," says the author, who con-

fesses that even he—a scholar steeped in Ikeiana for most of two decades—was impressed by "how completely Eisenhower dominated events." American responses all over the world were his, "no one else's." Virtually nothing uncovered contradicts the President's claim that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles "never made a serious pronouncement, agreement, or proposal without complete and exhaustive consultation with me in advance and, of course, my approval."

En route to such conclusions, Ambrose has virtually guaranteed that it will be a very long time before anyone succeeds in climbing to the next plateau of biographical research on Dwight David Eisenhower. For his work is enriched by access to revealing sources, so that not the least of its virtues are gems of new information shaped by the talents of a judicious and meticulous historian into a smooth, essentially chronological narrative. (What better way to recall the poisonous atmosphere of the period than to point out that of the 221 Republican Representatives in the 83rd Congress, 185 sought membership on the House Un-American Activities Committee?)

Although Ambrose clearly thinks well of his subject, he delineates rather than celebrates Eisenhower's Presidency, thus preserving his credibility. On two issues, in particular—civil rights and Joe McCarthy—he confirms received opinion by admitting that Ike did not so much lead as attempt to reconcile his personal views with the demands of growing national sentiment and political expediency. The "sum total of Eisenhower's program" to help blacks consisted of appeals to Southern governors chosen by practically all-white electorates "for some sign of progress." When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its 1954 Brown v. Topeka decision, Ike merely commented that the desegregation of public schools was now the law of the land.

His role in the McCarthy affair is equally familiar. Nonetheless, Ambrose manages to enlighten us by making an incisive point: It "was not the things Eisenhower did behind the scenes but rather his most public act"—the assertion of executive privilege during the Army-McCarthy hearings—"that was his major contribution to McCarthy's downfall." As with civil rights, the President's public stance consisted largely of ducking and weaving, hemming and hawing. Once more we are left to ruminate on the possible consequences had the junior Senator from Wisconsin been wise enough to avoid challenging the U.S. Army.

McCarthyism and race relations, however, did not evoke the real Eisenhower. Defense spending did. Ambrose explores in detail the path leading to the celebrated Farewell Address, which pointed to the dangers of the Military-Industrial Complex. He leaves no doubt that the President was not merely the innocent reader of a controversial script sneaked in by political scientist Malcolm Moos.

During the '50s Capitol Hill Republicans, riding the national mood, wanted to raise military outlays and to per-

form whatever budgetary surgery might be needed on foreign aid instead. To Eisenhower, though, cutting back defense spending was a prerequisite for all major goals: reducing the deficit, taxes and unemployment, as well as promoting trade and world peace. Consequently, Richard Nixon's attempt to match John Kennedy's call for a defense build-up during the 1960 campaign worsened Eisenhower's already frosty relationship with his Vice President. Nixon's defection, writes Ambrose, was "the deepest wound of all." Eisenhower felt it was a "cold rejection of everything he had stood for and fought for over the past seven and a half years."

These and other insights provide a clearer view of Eisenhower. The golfer not only read, he also wrote. He thought for himself, and was hardly the "captive hero" of liberal columnist Marquis Childs' imagination. Ike was a general, of course, but his refusal to bail out the French at Dien Bien Phu led opponents of the Vietnam War to cast him in retrospect as an "antimilitarist in the White House": He was a powerful force for peace and sanity guiding with a barely visible hand—while surrounded by would-be bombthrowers like Nixon and Dulles, who began urging military intervention in Indochina as early as 1954.

In addition, this study of Eisenhower's Presidency is especially timely because there could be no more emphatic demonstration of how much the Republican Party has changed. The forces that would ultimately spawn the Reagan Revolution were admittedly flexing their muscles in the '50s, but the President worked to keep the Yahoos at bay. He sided with the conservatives seeking to prevent a takeover by the reactionaries. In fact, the threat from the GOP's Right-wing was one of the major reasons Eisenhower agreed to run in the first place, and its opposition grew steadily.

"Either this Republican Party will reflect progressivism or I won't be with them any more," was Ike's characteristic rejoinder. At a 1957 press conference he cautioned that "any modern political philosophy [has] to study carefully the needs of the people today, not of 1860." Furthermore, he said, "I believe that unless a modern political group does look these problems in the face and finds some reasonable solution . . . then in the long run we are sunk." Occasionally he was agitated enough to contemplate a realignment of our parties.

Ambrose reaffirms Eisenhower's stature. At least among academics, the recent revisionist trend has had its effect. Arthur Schlesinger Sr.'s 1962 survey asking historians to rank past Presidents placed Ike 22nd, saved from the very bottom of the "average" category by Andrew Johnson. Twenty years later, when Robert K. Murray and Tim Blessing tabulated the results of their own canvass, the man formerly best known for his golf landed in 11th place, high in the ranks of "above-average" Chief Executives. After almost two decades of research, Ambrose suggests that Ike deserves to be ranked among the greats—of those who served in this century, behind only Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt.