

Book Reviews

The Scandal monger, by William Safire, a novel, Simon & Schuster, hard cover, 496 pp., \$27.00, Canada, \$39.00.

The book centers on three people: Hamilton, Jefferson, and James Callender, a scurrilous reporter.

Hamilton, the most important person of the Federalists, was the target of the Republicans (as they then called themselves) whose leader was Jefferson, a member of Washington's cabinet as Secretary of State. While in that office, he employed Callender to bring disgrace to the Federalists. This was done by attacking the character of Washington and stating that Hamilton, while head of the Treasury, used monies improperly. Hamilton defended himself by admitting to an improper relationship with a woman who, with her husband, blackmailed him into sending them money. Hamilton allowed himself to be destroyed to save the reputation of the Washington presidency.

The offensive attack on the Washington presidency angered the Federalists to the place where they used the hated Federal Sedition Act to jail and fine those who used offensive language. Callender allowed himself to be jailed as an example of the corruption of the Federalists. This was done with the understanding his fine would be paid by the Republicans and he would be made a postmaster after the election of the Republicans.

The election went to the House with Burr and Jefferson tied. Hamilton, despising Jefferson but thinking Burr worse, effected the election of Jefferson, making him president.

Jefferson pardoned Callender for his prison sentence, but he refused to make him a postmaster, did not pay his fine, and treated him with contempt. Angered, without money, separated from his children, Callender attacked Jefferson. He did not change his republican opinions but decided that a man, when he climbs into the saddle, becomes corrupted by the new height. "It happened to Hamilton, and I fought to bring him down, and now it's happened to Jefferson, and I have to do the same."

Callender used several items of information. While in prison, a black man who shared his cell told of the orgies by the young men at Monticello with female black slaves. Most people believed that Jefferson had a love affair with a beautiful black slave and lived with her as though she were his wife. Even Monroe noticed that the children of Sally Hemmings received special treatment. Further, as a young man, Jefferson had a love affair, or attempted to have one, with the wife of his best friend. Callender, for publishing this material, was bludgeoned to near death and a false story was circulated that he killed his wife with a loathsome disease. He was found drowned in three feet of water.

The Republicans damned the Federalists for the persecution of editors who opposed them and vowed they would not use the federal law for that purpose; instead of federal law, they would use state law. Harry Crosswell of New York was charged with

. . . deceitfully, wickedly, maliciously and willfully traducing, scandalizing, and vilifying President Thomas Jefferson and representing him to be unworthy of the confidence, respect and attachment of the people of the United States.

Hamilton rose to the defense of the editor, claiming that the truth was adequate defense against libel. He produced as evidence letters of Jefferson to Callender stating that the latter was sought after to publish scurrilous material and was paid for his work.

The book does not give the verdict of the trial in New York but, as a result of his argument, truth as a libel defense was enacted into the New York Constitution in 1821, setting the pattern for many other states.

Callender is the main figure of the book, with Jefferson the scoundrel—clever with his pen but never in the open with his plans, always acting behind the scenes, using others to accomplish his purposes. Hamilton thought him two-faced and a dilettante. Hamilton is the hero, if there is one. He allowed himself to be ruined to save the reputation of Washington's presidency, effected the election of the despised Jefferson because he thought it better for the country, and laid it down that powerful figures could not destroy the freedom of the press.

Clinton has used the possible romance of Jefferson with his slave as a justification for his immorality, but the situations are not similar. Clinton is a serial adulterer. Jefferson perhaps had a true, affectionate, and long-lasting affair with a black woman he respected. We note also that the Republicans of Jefferson's day have become the Democrats of today, emphasizing the centralization of government, the opposite of Jefferson's claims. The Federalists have become Republicans, emphasizing freedom and decentralization, which Jefferson lauded.

The book is legitimate history though cast as a novel. You can tell what is fictional and can check the sources at the back. The writing is magnificent, as brilliant a book as you will find.

—Angus MacDonald

The Prison Called Hohenasperg, by Arthur D. Jacobs. Universal Publishers, 1999.

The significance of this book varies with the level of comprehension with which it is read. It is possible to read it simply as the personal memoir of a retired American Air Force major who tells the gripping account of his experiences during and immediately after World War II, when as the son of German parents living in Brooklyn, he was held in internment first at Ellis Island, then at Crystal City, Texas, before finally, at age twelve, being deported to just-defeated Germany, where he was transported with others in a locked and unheated boxcar and finally imprisoned, as if a Nazi, in the American military prison at Hohenasperg, Germany. The narrative continues to tell how he celebrated his thirteenth birthday in his cell there, but was transferred to a camp in Ludwigsberg. After he, his brother, and parents were released in March 1946, they lived a life of destitution and near-starvation in Germany until finally an American woman made arrangements for him to return to the United States to live with a family in western Kansas. He did not see his

parents again until 1958.

The broader meaning of the book is found in part in what it tells us about Americans of that time. Some were warm-hearted and generous, such as at the internment camp in Crystal City, where everything was done to make the conditions humane, and such as the woman who in effect rescued him and directed him to the family that made him one of their own in Kansas. While he was in Germany seeking ways to help his family survive, Jacobs was befriended by American G.I.s. Other Americans, however, were cold, bureaucratic, often extremely cruel, in ways that readers will be shocked to discover: the FBI's ransacking the Jacobs family's home in Brooklyn repeatedly, and taking away the father, without any explanation; the inhumanity of ninety-two hours in a frozen boxcar without heat or blankets, with only a common bucket for urination and defecation, and with only bread and water to eat and drink; the incarceration of a young boy in a heavily guarded cell, where he was told that the punishment for misbehavior would be hanging. This is a portrait that Americans don't like to associate with themselves. If it came from someone anti-American, it would be one thing; but it comes from a man who, as a native-born American citizen, went on to serve his country until his retirement from the Air Force.

What is perhaps most significant about the memoir, however, is that in very human terms it gives the lie to the claims of alienated Japanese-American activists, and the many others who have pandered to them politically and ideologically, since the 1960s that the United States evinced a vicious anti-Oriental racism during World War II by interning Japanese-Americans, but not doing so with German-Americans. It shows that Germans in the United States were in fact interned and deported—and, with them, their children who, having been born in the United States, were American citizens. This undercuts the cry of “unique victimization” made by the activists.

We know, of course, that much else undercuts their claims. While Japanese aliens were in fact interned, and Japanese-Americans who proclaimed a fierce loyalty to Japan were also held in compulsory custody at Tule Lake, the great bulk of Japanese-Americans were not interned at all, but were evacuated from the west coast of the United States to relocation camps, from which they could then resettle for the duration of the war, if they wished, to any part of the country other than the west coast. Funds were even raised to help send 4,300 young Japanese-Americans to three hundred American colleges while the war was still in progress. Conditions at the relocation camps were along the lines of those described by Jacobs at Crystal City: somewhat spartan housing identical to the barracks in which American soldiers were housed, but with a great many cultural and recreational amenities.

The book is enhanced by an insightful Introduction by Joseph E. Fallon, who adds a point we might otherwise not have thought of: that one of the primary purposes of the internment program was to provide the U.S. Government with leverage in negotiations with Berlin for the return of persons from the Americas who were interned by [the] Third Reich. Thus, Jacobs found by painful experience that in wartime the fate of individuals often turns on larger strategic or tactical needs.

—Dwight D. Muphey