ACTA
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"On Teaching History and History Teaching"

By David McCullough

Remarks accepting

The Philip Merrill Award
for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

with

Tributes from
Jay Walker
Daniel P. Jordan
Brent D. Glass
Richard Norton Smith

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The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent non-profit educational organization committed to academic freedom, excellence, and accountability. Launched in 1995, ACTA has a network of alumni and trustees from over 700 colleges and universities, including over 10,000 current board members. The quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe,* reaches over 12,000 readers. ACTA receives no government or university funding and is supported through the generosity of individuals and foundations.

"On Teaching History and History Teaching"

by David McCullough

I'm over the moon. I'm speechless, my head has grown several sizes in the last half an hour. To have three dear friends deliver not just such golden compliments, but with such command of the language and such professional appreciation of what we're about, is to me one of the greatest tributes imaginable. I feel I've peaked tonight here on the shores of the Potomac. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. And, Anne, thank you so much—not just for this tribute to me, but for all the good work you are doing.

I also appreciate more than I can say, so many, not just kind words, but understanding words about Rosalee. And it isn't just that she's brilliant and insightful and remembers everything, but she is with me all the time—literally and figuratively. When Dan spoke earlier this evening about my lobbying on the Hill for the cause of Presidential Papers, Rosalee was not able to go with me on one of those expeditions. So our son Jeffrey, who is an attorney and once worked on the Hill, accompanied me. And we called at various offices to meet several Senators, and I'm accustomed to saying, "Good afternoon, I'd like you to meet my wife, Rosalee." And there stood this six-foot-one young man beside me. Well, it was pretty funny and sort of written off—that is, the first time I did it!

* * *

I collect names—bizarre names, interesting names, names that only novelists (you would think) could make up, but also names of people seldom mentioned in history books—though they do appear in passing, often in biographies: William Small, Margaret Phelps, Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, Margaret McFarland, Pierre Louis, Benjamin Silliman, Gladys Watson.

They all were teachers—some in public high schools, some in universities, some abroad in Paris. And a number of their students turned out to shape or change history.

William Small was Jefferson's favorite teacher. He taught science at William and Mary, and Jefferson said, "Fixed my destinies."

Margaret Phelps was a history teacher in the high school in Independence, Missouri. She was Harry Truman's favorite teacher, and Harry Truman, who never went to college, read history all of his life.

Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, a geologist and professor of natural history at Harvard, was one of Theodore Roosevelt's favorite teachers. Roosevelt glowed in Mr. Shaler's classes to the point where memorably one morning Shaler is supposed to have said, "See here, Roosevelt, let me talk. I'm running this class."

Margaret McFarland taught child psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, and was the favorite teacher of Fred Rogers, "Mr. Rogers" of public television fame—the teacher who reached more children than any human being who ever lived. Fred Rogers and I became friends because of my work in public television, and he told me that everything he did with his programs was based on the teachings of Margaret McFarland. What she taught ought to be taught to every prospective teacher, and that is what matters most in the classroom is attitude—the attitude of the teacher—because, as she said, "Attitudes aren't taught, they're caught." It's the attitude of the teacher toward the material that's most important of all. And you can't love what you don't know, anymore than you can love someone you don't know. If you're going to show them what you love, you have to know that subject before you can love it. So you can't go into the classroom not knowing very much

about your subject, or caring very much about it, because instinctively, intuitively, the student—whether six years old or 16—will get that right away. We all know those teachers who have affected our lives and how enthusiastic they were, how passionate they were.

Pierre Louis was Dr. Pierre Louis who taught at the Ecole de Medecine in Paris in the nineteenth century. He was considered the greatest of the many very great teachers in the schools of medicine in Paris, then the medical capital of the world. One of his students was Oliver Wendell Homes. Holmes was a published poet and essayist—founder of *The Atlantic Monthly*—who also devoted his professional working life to medical science. He was the beloved professor of anatomy at Harvard for 35 years.

When it came time for Holmes to retire, he chose for his topic for his farewell speech Pierre Louis. He said of Pierre Louis, "He had that quality which is the special gift of one born for a teacher—the power of exciting an interest in what he taught."

Benjamin Silliman was the first professor of science at Yale, a young man with a great gift for science. But he was also the one who established the first art gallery on any college campus in America in order to preserve and exhibit the works of John Trumbull, including Trumbull's original painting of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Professor Silliman also had great effect on young Samuel F.B. Morse, who was a painter—a brilliant painter—who never lost his love of science because of the teachings of Benjamin Silliman, and who would, as we all know, invent the telegraph.

What's so interesting and important in this, I think, is that both Oliver Wendell Homes and Samuel F.B. Morse saw no incongruity, no inconsistency or contradiction, in being passionately interested in both science *and* art—which, of course, is the essence of a true liberal arts education.

Then there's Gladys Watson. She taught English at the Monroeville County High School in Alabama. One of her students was Harper

Lee, who attributed her first love of the English language, and of the novel as a form of expression—particularly the novels of Jane Austen—to Gladys Watson. When she finished the manuscript for *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee took it first to Miss Watson to get her approval before turning it in to her editor.

But let me go back to one of the first ones I mentioned—Margaret Phelps, Harry Truman's favorite. Miss Phelps was a spinster lady in a small town in Midwestern America—western Missouri, a hick town some would have said. And she was "only" a high school teacher.

Listen, please, to what this remarkable woman, this great teacher wrote about history. No one from the greatest of our universities could say it more concisely or pertinently.

"History cultivates every faculty of the mind. Enlarges sympathies, liberalizes thought and feeling, furnishes and approves the highest standards of character." Character. History is more about character than most people realize, and that, alas, too few teachers teach. Her connection had a profound effect, we know, on at least one of her young students.

I think our teachers are the most important people in our society.

I think they are doing the work that matters most and will matter most in the long run.

I don't in any way aim to imply that I think they're all doing a good job. There are over five million men and women—Americans—teaching in our country right now. And I don't think we should do anything, large or small, to make their jobs more difficult.

I think we must do much more to show our appreciation for the importance of what they're doing and to show our gratitude, and to let them understand that we want to help at home with our children and grandchildren.

If there's a problem with American education, I am convinced, it's us.

We fathers, mothers, grandparents can all do something about it. You wouldn't be here tonight if you didn't want to do something about it.

Now what would I do about the teaching of history? First of all, I'd raise every teacher's salary, every teacher of history, every teacher. Let them know that they are considered worthwhile in our society, and, needless to say, we'd have to devise a system where the best of them are rewarded, and those who are inadequate are replaced.

I would also dispense, in history, with textbooks. I think there are some that are very good, but I think most of them are inconceivably dull, and their political correctness is sometimes ludicrous. We should not ask young people at any stage in their education to read something that we ourselves would not want to read. We should give them books worth reading. Introduce them to the great literature of American history. Have them read Francis Parkman and Shelby Foote and people of our time—Ron Chernow, Gordon Wood, Bernard Bailyn, Stacy Schiff.

We've never had better history being written than we have right now, including the works of my dear friends Richard Norton Smith and Harry McPherson

And we should bring what I would call the lab technique to the classroom. Don't just preach to them. Don't just require them to have the rote answers. Make the detective work of history, the excitement of the hunt, the thrill of discovery be part of their experience as students. That's when the love of learning takes hold.

We must stimulate their curiosity, and we must not always be after them for answers—correct, proper answers. We must encourage them, teach them, to ask questions. That's how you learn, that's how you find out.

I've lectured or taught in over a hundred colleges and universities over the past 30 years—all over the country. I know these young people. I know how bright they are. I know how attractive they are. I

know how quick they are to respond when the excitement of the work catches hold of them.

And we must encourage them to think beyond just our own history. We must see the connections with the history of other cultures, other worlds, and how that's all affected us. It isn't just that we're becoming one world economically or one world where everybody goes everywhere and can be everywhere and knows everything about everything that's happening everywhere in the world. We have to know who we are and where we come from.

There's a scene in the great movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" where Butch and Sundance are being chased by a posse. And one of the two says, "Who are those guys?" They keep riding and the posse keeps coming on, and they say, "*Who* are those guys?" And then after a while, they say, "*Who are those guys?"*

That's the feeling I often have about the people I'm writing about. Who were they? Look what they did. How did they do it? How can we know more about them? How can we understand them? And how can we give credit where credit is long overdue?

And one place we must give more credit is to our teachers.

I think of everyone who writes history as a teacher. Richard Norton Smith is a great teacher. He's been the head of numerous presidential libraries, and every one of them is spectacular. I remember walking into the Ford Museum and seeing an exhibit such as I had never seen before. And I thought, "Whose imagination? Whose idea?" It's a box about that big, Plexiglas. You can look at it from below and the side and above. And it's hanging on the wall.

Inside are some small tools: a wrench, a screwdriver, maybe a little hammer—I've forgotten what all. They were the tools that were used to break into the Watergate. By showing just those little tools, the story is off and running.

Some think history's all been written. It hasn't. We're hardly getting started. I keep a running list of ideas for possible future projects. I

believe there are 27 ideas on the list—they're all books I would like to read that don't exist.

I've never undertaken a book on a subject I knew much about. If I knew all about it, I wouldn't want to write the book, because I want to learn. I want to make the journey.

The lessons of history are manifold. One of them is, there's no such thing as a self-made man or woman. We've all been shaped by other people: parents, teachers, friends, rivals, and by people we've never met, because they went before us. They wrote the symphonies that move us to the depths of our soul. They wrote the poetry we love, the laws we live by. And they're with us, we're part of them. They used the language in a way we keep quoting day after day, and we don't even know we're quoting other people.

We are all students and just as different as can be. And the great teachers understand that.

One of my favorite poems by one of my favorite poets is called "Scholars." It's by Walter de la Mare.

> Logic does well at school;
> And Reason answers every question right;
> Poll-parrot Memory unwinds her spool;
> And Copy-Cat keeps Teacher well in sight:
>
> The Heart's a Truant; nothing does by rule;
> Safe in its wisdom, is taken for a fool;
> Nods through the morning on the dunce's stool;
> And wakes to dream all night.

J.H. Plumb, a great English historian, said that what we need most are heart-wise historians. Heart-wise teachers who understand the heart that sits on the dunce's stool and dreams away all night, because in those dreams, history is sometimes fashioned as much as by any politician or general. I could not be more grateful for this tribute

tonight. I could not be more grateful for this particular trophy.* It is gorgeous, it is pertinent, and I would like now to finish with a story that I think we all might do well to keep in mind.

One winter night in early 1801, President John Adams looked out the window of the White House and saw that the Treasury Building was on fire. He immediately grabbed his coat, ran downstairs, out the door, across the snow to the Treasury, and joined in the bucket brigade to help put the fire out.

Now, he didn't do that for a photo opportunity. He didn't do it because it might help him win the next election. He had just lost the presidency to Jefferson and would soon be on his way back to Quincy, Massachusetts for the rest of his life. And he didn't do it because anybody told him to do it.

Why then did he do it? Because he was, at heart, a citizen, and, I think, for the very reason the papers the next day gave him credit for: because he knew he would set an example. "Animated by the example of the President of the United States," the brigade put out the fire.

The great Samuel Eliot Morison said history teaches us how to behave.

**In honor of our Merrill Award winner, ACTA presented Mr. McCullough with a "fire bucket," created by artisan Steven Lalioff, that replicates a design by the Fenno company of Boston dating back to John Adams's time.*

The following are tributes given in honor of David McCullough at the presentation of the Philip Merrill Award on November 5, 2011.

Jay Walker
Chairman of TEDMED and Walker Digital, LLC

If the United States had a Historian Laureate, David McCullough would be it.

We all know his work: *The Johnstown Flood, The Great Bridge, The Path Between the Seas, Brave Companions, Truman, John Adams, 1776, The Greater Journey.* Just reciting their titles conjures up entire worlds of experience, of knowledge, of adventure, of human drama and of national consequence. But what makes each of those works so magical and compelling is this: Yes, David McCullough is a powerful researcher, a wide-ranging thinker, a fine stylist… but above all, he is a *storyteller*.

"History," he says, "is the story of people." David said he wrote his first book because "I stumbled upon a story that I thought was powerful, exciting, and very worth telling … it was the life—the people and what happened to them—that was the pull for me." David McCullough sees history as the ultimate time machine, the ultimate broadening experience, a powerful way to travel to other universes. He said, "The past isn't just history in the usual literal sense. It's music, art, history … language, culture, and you can experience all of that, the more you know, because you can go back as far as you want, out as far as you want, and suddenly you're infinitely more alive" because of the power of this story called history.

A few years ago there was a joke going around about a young person who planned to see the movie "Titanic" for the first time. Her best friend said, "Oh, I saw it already, it's great … the special effects

are incredible when the ship sinks." To which the young lady replied, "Gee, thanks for spoiling the ending!" As a storyteller, David knows the value of suspense … of creating uncertainty about the ending, even if the ending is already known.

Attending Yale University in the 1950s, he occasionally ate lunch with Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder. Wilder taught him that a good writer maintains "an air of freedom" in the storyline, so that the reader won't anticipate the outcome, even if the book happens to be non-fiction.

Like every great storyteller, David McCullough is a man in love with his subject. He says, "People often ask me if I'm working on a book. That's not how I feel. I feel like I work IN a book. It's like putting myself under a spell. And this spell, if you will, is so real to me that if I have to leave my work for a few days, I have to work myself back into the spell when I come back. It's almost like hypnosis."

As a storyteller, David has found some great themes and variations in the American story. Here is how he describes his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the 33rd president of the United States. "The story of Harry Truman," he said, "[is the story of] the seemingly ordinary fellow who—put to the test—rises to the occasion and does the extraordinary." McCullough added, "I think we like that story because that's the story of our country."

David is not only a man passionately in love with his subject. He is also a man who feels a passionate responsibility TO his subject. Here's how he expressed that sense of responsibility. He said, "The humanities are immensely important, and the arts are immensely important, and this decline in the teaching of the arts and the humanities in our school system—particularly our public school system, and in the grade schools of our country—is a disgrace. It's a shame. We're cheating our children. We're raising young people who are, by and large, historically illiterate."

David McCullough feels a keen responsibility to history and he does something about it. In addition to his extraordinary books, his

film narration, his hosting of documentary TV series, he is a tireless advocate for historical education. To use his own brilliant phrase about the Truman Committee, David McCullough is the "watchdog, spotlight, conscience and sparkplug" of the nation when it comes to this issue, energetically focusing America's attention on landmark studies that document the historical illiteracy of our own children. It is for this aspect of his storytelling that we honor him tonight.

We find him in good company, because the American Council of Trustees and Alumni is also a "watchdog, spotlight, conscience and sparkplug" when it comes to preserving America's history and its appreciation of that history. Eleven years ago ACTA was responsible for that groundbreaking report called *Losing America's Memory*. This shocking document revealed that if you went to the top 55 colleges and universities in America, you would discover that more than 80% of their students could not pass a high school history exam.

Losing America's Memory was ably publicized by David McCullough, both at the time of publication and later, with his own follow-up stories in the popular press as well as *Reader's Digest*, a story that I highly recommend if you haven't read it.

ACTA was responsible for spearheading the move calling on colleges to strengthen American history requirements—a Resolution that Congress passed unanimously. ACTA doesn't just point out the problems. It actively designs and promotes solutions.

So, when you are "fighting the good fight," one of the best things that can happen to you is finding a strong and admirable ally in your common cause. We can all be glad that David McCullough and ACTA have found each other. They are fighting the same "good fight." They are keeping what Lincoln called "the mystic chords of memory" humming loud and clear in America's consciousness. In doing so, you and they are helping to preserve the very essence of America's identity.

And so, we salute them … we honor them … and we thank them.

Thank you very much to David McCullough.

Daniel P. Jordan

President Emeritus of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation which owns and operates Monticello

Earlier this evening, Anne opened by saying that she was a great admirer of George Washington. Let me say, for the record, that I am too, and my position is "all honor to the Founders." But her remarks reminded me of an accidental conversation I had with former Governor George Pataki of New York. He was leaving an event as I was walking in, and someone stopped both of us and said, "Governor, this is Dan Jordan and he's the director of Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson." And Pataki said in a jocular manner, "Well, I'm a Hamiltonian." I said, "Governor, if you believe in low taxes, limited government, and the Bill of Rights, you're a Jeffersonian." His quip was tremendous. He said, "Actually, I'm a politician. I can go either way."

My wife Lou and I are delighted to be here tonight for this special tribute to our dear friend, America's historian, David McCullough. And by extension, to his wife Rosalee, who is chairman and full partner in the thriving enterprise of Team McCullough. She was introduced to the group earlier, but I think because she deserves so much credit in this story that she should stand and take a bow, and let us all thank her.

I can't think of anyone who is more deserving of this award than David. The award is from the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, and it is for his contributions to liberal arts education. Volumes could be written about David as a worthy trustee himself, as well as about his relentless advocacy of liberal arts education, but this evening I'd like to share one story—a story that's not well known—that links David with both trusteeship and the advocacy of liberal arts education.

The story requires a brief preamble, mainly David's recognition that our nation was founded on ideas—big ideas, transcendent ideas—about freedom, about democracy, about the relationship of citizens to their government, among others. As David knows, the Founding Thinkers, especially Adams and Jefferson and Madison, were products

of a classical education. They were widely read in the works of antiquity and in the works of The Enlightenment in their own day. In short, they were products of liberal educations. Indeed, they embodied the essential meaning of the phrase.

That's the preamble. And now to our man, McCullough. The Thomas Jefferson Foundation, the private nonprofit corporation that owns and operates Monticello, has never had a better trustee than David McCullough, or one who contributed more in as many different ways and especially his timely ideas. During a sleepy moment at a Monticello board retreat, David rose to make a few remarks. (And incidentally, the guy's not a bad speaker at all.) That afternoon David recounted the origins and woeful progress of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, then being published (as now) by Princeton University Press. The project had started in 1943, and Volume I appeared in 1950. From 1950 to the 1990s, over 40 years, the series had just reached the 1790s, and Jefferson lived until 1826. The story of the other Founders was the same. I recall David's comment at the time, which was "a snail's pace is an exaggeration of the speed of these projects." Meanwhile, he continued, the American people were being deprived of an essential part of our national canon. These were idea men, and their ideas were big—ideas that count now and that have shaped our values and our heritage. And the ideas can best be found in their writings.

And then David threw out some red meat by asking, "Just what is the Thomas Jefferson Foundation going to do about this?" Well, the Monticello board at that time was small, but strictly an all-star cast. Around the table that afternoon we had Rodman Rockefeller, the senior Rockefeller of his generation. We had Dick Gilder, the great American philanthropist. We had Martin Davis, who was the head of Paramount. We had Rebecca Rimel, who was the head of The Pew Charitable Trust, and other persons of consequence. Those remarkable individuals agreed with David that the only reason—and this is so important about trusteeship—that the only reason to be on a board is to do something and to do something big. That was the mind set of

the Monticello board. So the board accepted David's challenge. To oversimplify, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation formed a partnership with Princeton University, wherein Monticello is publishing with the Princeton University Press *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series 1809-1826*, while the Princeton staff continues its scheduled volumes chronologically under the new and superb editorship of Barbara Oberg. And Barbara is also the general editor of both series. The collaboration has been an unconditional success and is a model for other editorial initiatives. Monticello publishes a volume a year, with no dimunition in standards and to critical reviews.

How the Monticello series has kept such an unprecedented pace is a story for another time. Except that I should note that David led the effort to create a wasting fund—when the project is completed, the money will have run out and vice versa—of almost $15 million up front and from the trustees themselves. Our editor, who is very capable, can concentrate 100% on doing his job of editing the papers and not spend a minute on what the other editors have to spend an inordinate amount of time doing, and that is going out and trying to raise money. That's part one of my story.

Part two is much shorter and even more consequential. After their active service on the Monticello board, David, Rebecca Rimel, Dick Gilder and others continued to talk from time to time about the national crisis of historical illiteracy, about the terrible reality that more and more Americans—and especially younger Americans—know less and less, and care less and less, about our national heritage. You can't save the world, you can't do everything, but they decided that they would at least light a candle—a candle that might lead, in time, to greater enlightenment about the richness of our own heritage and values. They decided to launch a campaign to make the writings of the six principal Founders—Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Washington, and ideally those of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln—accessible to people, not only in America, but around the world.

The scholarly letterpress editions are handsome and meticulous. This [indicating book] is one such volume, and you can find comparable scholarship for all the other Founders. These are monuments to erudition. These are incredible as sources for scholars, teachers, the general public. But these volumes are published in a limited number. These volumes are very expensive, and these volumes are not always available in even the finest libraries in our country, much less abroad. So the group's big idea was to seek a Congressional appropriation to digitize and distribute in a word-searchable format all the writings of the seminal American thinkers. A big idea. Once again, David led the charge. He walked the corridors of Congress, pressing the case one-on-one with Senators and Representatives alike. He gave McCullough-esque quotations to the media, always with singing phrases of course. And he provided compelling testimony before a select committee of Congress itself. The result was an appropriation of $4.5 million for the project. Now, those iconic writings will be available free and internationally over the Internet for the edification and inspiration of people in every circumstance across the globe. Think about it. The ideas and the ideals of the Founders, free and worldwide. As one close observer of this process commented, "It would not have happened without David McCullough." And I think we owe him a round of applause.

So, in conclusion, I offer my sincere congratulations to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni for its good judgement in presenting the Philip Merrill Award to David McCullough, who richly deserves it as a model trustee himself—as perhaps our nation's foremost advocate for and personification of a liberal arts education.

Thank you very much.

Brent D. Glass

Director Emeritus, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institute

Thank you for the opportunity to join you tonight at this event honoring David McCullough with the Philip Merrill Award. I am pleased to note that Phil Merrill was a member of the board of the National Museum of American History when I became its director in 2002, and I appreciated his intellect, wit, and enthusiasm.

Tonight I find myself with an unusual dilemma. Whenever I am asked to talk about American history and the importance of preserving it, I invariably refer to something written by David McCullough. So I tried to think how I could say something about David McCullough without quoting him. Well, I finally decided it was not possible.

But I compromised a little by referring not to a book or a speech or an article or an essay David has written that is already known to the public. Instead, I selected something from some correspondence that I have had with him on our favorite subject—American history.

A few years ago, I began to compile a list of the most significant events in American history, events that represented turning points in our national experience. My goal was to identify 101 events and create an interactive exhibition at the National Museum of American History. The result, I had hoped, was to provide visitors with a chronological overview of our history and inspire them to learn more.

To develop this list, I sent a preliminary draft to colleagues in the Museum and around the country and encouraged them to recommend additions and subtractions as long as I ended up with 101 events to stay within the exhibition goals. Naturally, I sought David's counsel. I was pleased that he responded so quickly and not at all surprised that he had some comments to make.

"You've made a commendable start at it," he wrote. "My chief recommendation is that more landmarks of American art, music, theater, literature, architecture, and motion pictures be included. As it is the books on your list are only those that had social or political

impact. There should be others as well. Just as there should be poems and music that have become part of who we are." And then he added, "Are two boxing matches necessary?"

He enclosed a list of more than 20 events that included Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost and Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream" speech. He recommended *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee and described it as "the most widely read American novel, ever." I could hear him saying that line. He agreed that there were many events on his list that "can be debated and a few that are absolute musts—the Inauguration of George Washington, the Mexican War, and the Influenza Epidemic. And let's not leave out the founding of the Smithsonian."

In his final paragraph, he said "the larger question I'd like to raise is whether it's right to imply, as your list does, that American history begins in the eighteenth century. I think of Meadowcroft Rockshelter, just south of Pittsburgh … or Acoma in New Mexico … or the Salem Witch hysteria, or the French and Indian War, etc. One further suggestion: If the time-line is to be part of a large display, include a parallel time-line showing events of importance elsewhere in the world."

A few months later I received a second letter in which David wrote "your time-line strikes me as excellent, and particularly the variety included, though I urge you to consider two (in my view) all-important additions, and I offer an additional alternative or three." This time he listed *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Marshall Plan, Truman's desegregation of armed services, Eisenhower's military-industrial complex speech, and Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." He gave me a choice between Bingham's painting of Jolly Flat Boatman or Saint Gauden's Shaw Memorial, although he allowed that the Shaw Memorial was of greater consequence. He closed by saying "a good list always sets one to thinking. That's the fun. And I thank you for the fun I've had with yours."

A few weeks later, he called me and asked "how is it going with the list of 101 events?" On one call he mentioned that he had told Rosalee about my project and she thought it was wonderful. He knew that if he invoked Rosalee's name, I would have to pay attention to his suggestions.

I said politely the project was moving forward and I deeply appreciated his suggestions. "But David," I said, "you haven't suggested anything I should take out." "Oh Brent," he replied, "I have confidence in you. You'll figure it out." Needless to say, the final list incorporates nearly all of David's suggestions.

My point is that David's love of America and American history is encyclopedic and inspiring. If I compiled a list of his achievements as a historian, a teacher, an activist, and an advocate, it would be very long indeed. I will simply say that those of us in the field of public history are especially grateful that he has taken up the cause of historical literacy and its connection to the preservation of a democratic society. David makes the case quite directly. "You cannot be a citizen in a democracy," he has said on many occasions, "without knowing the past." He has been the leader, the general, the commander in chief, and national spokesman in the battle to raise this issue on every occasion. And he is being heard.

He has also recruited a small army of lieutenants and foot soldiers and I am privileged to serve in that army. I have enjoyed a friendship that extends more than 25 years and I especially value his support during my tenure as director of the National Museum of American History.

David, Cathryn and I offer our congratulations of your receiving the Merrill Award tonight, another well-deserved recognition of your extraordinary leadership.

Thank you.

Richard Norton Smith

Presidential historian and former head of six presidential libraries

History goes by many names. It has been called argument without end; a conversation between the dead, the living, and the unborn; and "one damned thing after another." To David McCullough, as to his countless readers and fans, "history is the story of people." This idea alone sets him apart from those in the modern classroom who decry the storyteller's art in favor of statistical analysis. Besides being the teacher we all wish we'd had, David is at once a narrative historian in a class by himself—and a public intellectual in the grand tradition of Bruce Catton, William Manchester, and Barbara Tuchman. That's pretty good company.

Like them, he combines academic rigor and literary grace, inspiration as well as information. With the perseverance of a detective, the curiosity of a child, the imagination of the artist, and a journalist's determination to get it right, David has spent half a century enlarging our outlook by multiplying our experience. In the process, he has enabled us to escape, if only for a short while, a culture that often feels as shallow as it is self-regarding.

There is a passage in his latest book, *The Greater Journey*, which gets to the heart of his genius, and of his essentially optimistic outlook about the human adventure. It transports us to a Paris under siege—the sixteenth such ordeal, we learn, in a history dating to 53 BC—where Krupp guns rein shells upon the Left Bank, and jewelers display fresh eggs in their windows in place of fine silver. Wood riots break out among the poor as starving Parisians devour their mules, dogs, rats—even the two elephants in the municipal zoo.

In time heroic resistance to the Prussian invader gives way to the butchery of the Commune. Paris makes history by making war on its history. With the same ferocious precision that will one day raise the Eiffel Tower, the mob brings down the Column at the Place Vendome that celebrates the victories of the first Napoleon. Eventually an army

is raised and marched into the rebellious city. Fresh atrocities ensue. Noble structures are put to the torch.

And then, at the least likely of moments, in the most improbable of places, the irreplaceable Venus de Milo is discovered, undamaged, amid the ashes of the police headquarters where it has been secreted. In that instant Paris is redeemed. And civilization can get about its business, battered and traumatized, yet, finally, intact as the marble Venus. Welcome to eternal France, as portrayed by the most joyous American in Paris since Gene Kelly, a man whose lips have never tasted a freedom fry.

It is the latest stop on a journey that began with Hitchcockian suspense over the fate of an earthen dam in western Pennsylvania, and a social structure equally straining under the weight of Gilded Age inequality. Over the years David has taken us deep beneath the East River, into the jungles of Panama, and a thousand feet above the Champs des Mars, as visionary genius and raw courage collaborate on the engineering wonders of their age. He has rowed us across the Delaware on Christmas night, 1776, and admitted us to the rear platform of a presidential whistle stop where Harry Truman makes himself the patron saint of underdogs everywhere.

Guided by his shimmering prose, we have journeyed in a cramped ship's hold on the storm-tossed North Atlantic, as a patriot father and his precocious son risk their lives for a nation in the making. We have shared the desperate exhilaration of a midnight ride through the streets of Victorian Manhattan, as Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., frantic to force air into the diseased lungs of his namesake son, drives into the winter wind. It's hard to tell which gallops fasters—the Roosevelt horses or the McCullough sentences.

It takes a very special wizardry to conjure such phantoms. David once asked me who I thought of as the true heroes in our society. And then he answered his own question. He said the real heroes are all the people who get up every day and go to work at jobs they may very well detest—but which they do without complaint in order to provide

for those they love—to put food on the table and shoes on the kids. Such insight into the American character tells us a lot about David's character.

And it hints broadly at his empathy, the quality of sympathetic understanding, which allows him to recreate the past so credibly; to interpret an artist's brushstrokes, and understand a president's motives from the inside out. Such empathy is undoubtedly polished by those who are the first to hear his stories; and who keep his feet firmly on the ground when he is showered by White House dinner invitations and Pulitzer Prizes. I'm referring, of course, to the woman with whom he has made his greatest journey across six decades—his beloved Rosalee—and to their five children and eighteen grandchildren.

The one thing I vowed not to call David this evening is a national treasure. For one thing, I'm not sure what a national treasure is. But it has a distressingly posthumous sound. And, as you can see—and read—David is at the peak of his form. What a journey it has been, and continues to be. There is no one more deserving of this year's Phillip Merrill Award than David McCullough, the most empathetic historian I know.

David McCullough

David McCullough has introduced generations to the wonders of American history. His lively and popular accounts have responded to a vast public thirst for engaging historical narratives. Through writing and public advocacy, Mr. McCullough has advanced the importance of a rich liberal arts education and helped draw attention to the urgent need for Americans to understand their history and heritage. In 2000, when ACTA issued its first report on historical amnesia, *Losing America's Memory*, McCullough came to ACTA's side, saying: "Anyone who doubts that we are raising a generation of young Americans who are historically illiterate needs only to read this truly alarming report."

McCullough is a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was the 2003 National Endowment for the Humanities Jefferson Lecturer and continues to be a frequent contributor to discussions and symposia concerning history education. His many award-winning books include *1776*, *John Adams*, and *Truman*. His latest work, *The Greater Journey,* about Americans in Paris from the 1830s to the 1900s, was released in May.

In a remarkably productive career, he has been an editor, essayist, teacher, lecturer, and familiar presence on public television—as host of *Smithsonian World, The American Experience*, and narrator of numerous documentaries including Ken Burns's *The Civil War*. A gifted speaker, Mr. McCullough has lectured in all parts of the country and abroad, as well as at the White House. He is also one of the few private citizens to speak before a joint session of Congress.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Mr. McCullough was educated at Yale, where he was graduated with honors in English literature. Mr. McCullough and his wife Rosalee Barnes McCullough have five children and 18 grandchildren.

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

ACTA is most pleased to be presenting the seventh annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. The awarding of this prize, made on the recommendation of a distinguished selection committee, advances ACTA's long-term goal to promote and encourage a strong liberal arts education.

The Merrill Award offers a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization and is presented to inspire others and provide public acknowledgment of the value of their endeavors. Past recipients of the award are Robert P. George, the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and founder and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University (2005); Harvey C. Mansfield, William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University (2006); Gertrude Himmelfarb, Professor Emeritus of History at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (2007); Donald Kagan, Sterling Professor of Classics and History at Yale University (2008); Robert "KC" Johnson, Professor of History at Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York; and Benno C. Schmidt, Jr., Chairman, Board of Trustees of the City University of New York.

The prize is named in honor of Philip Merrill, who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland Foundation, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the Aspen Institute and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Mr. Merrill was also a founding member of ACTA's National Council.

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