Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit

Parker J. Palmer

Hope for American democracy in an era of deep divisions

In Healing the Heart of Democracy, Parker J. Palmer quickens our instinct to seek the common good and gives us the tools to do it. This timely, courageous and practical work—intensely personal as well as political—is not about them, "those people" in Washington D.C., or in our state capitals, on whom we blame our political problems. It's about us, "We the People," and what we can do in everyday settings like families, neighborhoods, classrooms, congregations and workplaces to resist divide-and-conquer politics and restore a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

In the same compelling, inspiring prose that has made him a bestselling author, Palmer explores five "habits of the heart" that can help us restore democracy's foundations as we nurture them in ourselves and each other:

- An understanding that we are all in this together
- An appreciation of the value of "otherness"
- An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways
- A sense of personal voice and agency
- A capacity to create community

Healing the Heart of Democracy is an eloquent and empowering call for "We the People" to reclaim our democracy. The online journal Democracy & Education called it "one of the most important books of the early 21st Century." And Publishers Weekly, in a Starred Review, said "This beautifully written book deserves a wide audience that will benefit from discussing it."

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Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit by Parker J. Palmer Review

Craven

Rating: it was amazing

A book about John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway's falling out amidst and as a result of the the Spanish Civil War. This book has everything, art, friendship, betrayal, war. It's full of historical background about the Spanish Civil War which is one of the most fascinating parts of modern history. It's written like a novel and reads like a thriller. I picked this book up after reading Dos Passos' The 42nd Parallel. I had researched the author and was disappointed that he became a bit of a conservative in later life, when he one of the most important radical writers of his time. I feel like I got some answers, but even moreso, I read a fascinating book.

Jon De Leon

Rating: it was amazing

This is a book that you can read in a day (this presupposes that you don't do the exercises) but will take a lifetime to master. It emphasizes that lawyers don't need to use highfalutin words in order to write well, plain English will do. This book is for everyone. You don't need to be a lawyer to appreciate this book. In fact, I'll take this book over Elements of Style any day.

Shaun

Rating: liked it

In part because it was the only one I found, and also because the third book, about German submarines (yawn) didn't interest me, “The Race”, the fourth Isaac Bell book, is the third one I’ve read. I like the series as a breath of fresh air, I’m tired of discovering lost shipwrecks and getting caught up in far-fetched plots with predictable outcomes, and the early 1900s setting of the Isaac Bell novels is a welcome relief. In “The Chase”, I mainly thought that Bell was too intuitive, I mean the man could deduce your blood type by looking at you (a slight exaggeration). In “The Wrecker”, Bell’s abilities are dialed back a tad, where he has good instincts but still isn’t a human Magic Eight Ball (which, all signs point to yes, are ALWAYS right)… Passing over the third book in the series, because Cussler can’t let Nazis go… So then we get to “The Race”, which introduces a new technological marvel to the universe. “The Chase” and “The Wrecker” were train-heavy books, and this one is all about “aeroplanes”. And how does our stalwart hero fare?

In “The Race”, Bell seems particularly flat. He doesn’t seem to do much but fly planes, fire guns, and ask questions, which, instead of driving the plot, feels more like taking up pages. There’s an expectedly lot of technical details about early flying machines, and this becomes repetitive. How many times does “flying machines”, “aeroplanes”, “axiatrix” “mechanicians” and “alettoni” appear in this book? I’ll give you a hint. I opened the book AT RANDOM to see how to spell alettoni, first word I see, alettoni. Alettoni and
mechanicians though were particularly recurring.

Next, and this, to me, is probably what really killed my interest in the book, because I’m weird like that…. But why is nearly every time Bell mentioned in the text, he’s referred to as “Isaac Bell”? There’s only one Bell in the book, and it’s an Isaac Bell book, so you don’t need to tell me every other time you mention Bell’s name that his first name is Isaac. This goes also for the villain, Harry Frost, but probably also for many other characters. There’s only one Bell. Say Bell. There’s only one Frost. Say Frost. My mind works in strange ways, but this repetition was kind of the deal-breaker for me. Bad editing. Combine that with the repeated mentions of flying machines, axiatrix, mechanicians, and alettoni. The book was… messy. And this all helped to add to the word count, and made the book seem to drag on, and my interest wane. That’s in terms of the writing, not at all the storytelling.

Now, the storytelling? None of the characters were intriguing, including Bell. Part of the reason I don’t think I felt anything for him was because he didn’t seem to have any abilities or weaknesses; every gunfight, he is either accurate and/or the bullets miss him by “millimeters”. Every time there’s a plane crash, no matter how bad it is, the person (most often) walks away from it… All in all, there’s an over-riding sense that these are the good guys, they can’t be harmed, and these are the bad guys, the irrelevant goons will be beaten, but the main ones will get away no matter what until the end… I mean everyone knows the hero and the villain will make it until the end, when they have their final confrontation, but to make the hero so impeccably immune to harm, bullets passing by millimeters, terrific crashes and they somehow manage to “hit the ground running” as Bell does in one scene… And there’s a scene where he’s aiming for Frost’s head and before he fires the bullet, I said to myself, it nicks his ear, and guess what? It’s frustratingly predictable, and not engaging.

One last detail about the story (I think)… In both of the other books, the identity of the bad guy is revealed pretty early on, and the intrigue for the reader is how will Bell catch them? And the way one of the two villains is revealed in this book, letting the reader know less than halfway through about… I don’t want to share the spoiler… But.. eh. Regardless. It took whatever suspense was left in the book and blew it. I think it could’ve been made into a decent plot twist late in the book, the whole time Bell is chasing this guy, who by all appearances is most definitely bad, and then late in the book we see ah ha, this guy is causing problems too! … It would’ve made for a much better story. Revealing the identity of the villains in the other two books worked all right because there was still a sense of cat and mouse, the villains outsmarting Bell, Bell outsmarting them… In this book, there’s not really any outsmarting anyone. The major “spoilers” are all spoon-fed to you pretty early, and so the suspense of the story is… what? It’s not the danger, because Bell and his company are all able to avoid disaster by millimeters and walk away from aeroplane crashes… It’s not the skill of the villains, because they never really cause any harm to the main characters, missing by millimeters. There’s no cat and mouse. It’s more like two cats playing on opposite sides of a house, one with a laser pointer, the other with a piece of yarn.

At the last, I don’t like authors co-writing books, but at this point, I think authorship of the book is mostly the other writer, Justin Scott, not Cussler. I don’t really detect anything Cusslerian in this book. So assuming I read more in the series, because I have the fifth book in the series already (“The Striker”), I think I’ll start judging them more as Justin Scott books than Cussler books. And because I like the first two books well enough, I’m intrigued enough that I’d like to try reading a Justin Scott solo book. It’d be nice to see what he does not trying to imitate the style of Cussler, but doing his own thing.

So! Rating… I’d probably go two and a half stars, I really should round down because of all the problems with the book, but it’s at least a nice attempt, writing isn’t easy, I like writers, so I’m going to go ahead and give it three stars. Really, it’s more like a two. But here. Three stars. Buy yourself a car!
In my continuing fascination with lengthy novels by non-US authors, here's Parallel Stories. It would be most accurate to say that, while there are tenuous links between the different stories in this book, there are several different sort of "parallel novels" working within the longer novel. The sleeve description of the book, to a large extent, is inaccurate as to whom the principal characters are, and seems to provide the inaccurate presumption that the book is primarily about the political movements in Hungary (both the collaboration with the Nazis, and the 1956 Hungarian revolution). Accordingly, the sleeve names the 3 primary characters as being three men (Hans Wolkenstein, Andras Rott, and Agost Lippay) whom each have ties with different elements of the various political factions within Hungary during different periods of this history. However, large portions of the book have very little to do with these characters, with the exception of Agost; but the most memorable sections having to do with Lippay involve a lengthy (75 pages) 4 days of sex type of episode with his girlfriend, Gyongyver (whom may, or may not, be a gypsy)...to say that the book in general is about the political I think misses out on the intensely personal aspects of the book. If it has a center, it can be said to be an apartment building that each of the major characters has some sort of interest in (renting, ownership, know someone who lives there, etc). The book's first half is intensely personal, and it's best moments are the aforementioned chapters with Agost and Gyongyver in one of the apartment flats; the depiction of Kristof's gay cruising on Margit Island (another 20-30 page section...Kristof also lives in this same apartment flat)...the second half is more political and shows in particular detail the Nazis' racial/eugenic theories (the primary appearance of Von Wolkenstein in the book is at a school for those with questionable racial/hereditary traits in the eyes of the Nazis); the extent to which the Hungarians cooperated with the Nazis during the war, and so forth. The non-linear nature of the plot will no doubt frustrate many; certain incidents are revisited from different points of view hundreds of pages apart, and characters reappear whom one may not even remember. But the best 300 pages of this 1100 page book are truly unmissable, as Nadas writes with a fervor for detail and an observation of emotion that is so closely broken down into the smallest constituents that anyone could draw a deeper understanding of sexual desire, of madness...it does, however, take some patience.

Q

This, quite simply, is the single worst "book" I have ever read. It is an extreme right-wing conservative's wet dream...Hey, Mr. Author-dude, thanks for your thinly veiled christian views and nut-bang anti-government rantings proliferated throughout 400 pages of THE WORST characters ever put to pen and paper. GOOD GOD, the writing is TERRIBLE. Positively brutal, and worse than just being boringly repetitive, the holier-than-thou slant the protagonists have just grinds on the senses after about 10 pages.

I have never read a book with a solid premise like this one portends and then watch as the author so completely butchers said premise that I often times wanted to punch a wall. This trash reads much closer to some psycho's pseudo-manifesto than a dooms-day novel. If you ever have an opportunity to burn this book, please do so with extreme prejudice.

GOD DAMN, this dickweed is so conservative that even through some truly traumatic events in his characters lives that they not only DO NOT SWEAR, but immediately drop to their knees and begin devoutly praying. "Golly gee willikers, Tommy, I hath runneth a foul-mouth varmint of a Mexican drug lord through with a shiv...let us pray." Ok, not an exact quote from the book, but this next one is, and I shit you
(Andy, writing an email to his fiancee): "My darling Kaylee, I cannot wait to hold you in my arms. Please remain prayerful, and do not worry. All that worrying doesn't accomplish anything. Read Philippians 4:6-7 and Psalm 46 and write them on your heart..."

Write them with some farts, more correctly. This book sucks in ways that would make a porn-star blush. If I'm being really honest it's not his views I found irksome, although completely insane, it's just how damn pathetic his writing style is that kills me. Good guys, villains, and all other characters both major and minor are so colorless and bland that they are nearly impossible to tell apart from one another.

So to summarize, do not read this book as it's not good.

That is all.

Ann Webb

Rating: really liked it

Back in the 80s and 90s I read every one of Dick Francis' novels. I loved them then and I still love them. This is how to write mysteries folks. You have believable and likeable characters set in an arena that the author is obviously familiar with and comes to a nice conclusion without a lot of bombast. In this instance Francis is writing with his son and it is still recognizable Francis fiction. (sometimes collaborations of authors don't go so well)

Max Moreton is a Michelin star chef in Newmarket, but somebody seems determined to kill him after an unfortunate poisoning during one of his dinner services. We've got the world of cookery with only an incidental connection to horse racing this time. No matter. I read it in three days. Good stuff.

SAM

Rating: really liked it

I doubt they'll ever be a more definitive account of Che Guevara's life than this epic tome. Jon Lee Anderson lived in Cuba whilst researching this book and it shows with the exhaustive amount of detail.

A Revolutionary Life is infinitely quotable. I could probably write ten blog pages with the musings of Che Guevara but I won't because it wouldn't make sense. But I am going to post a couple during this review starting with:

"I have sworn before a picture of the old and mourned comrade Stalin that I won't rest until I see these capitalist octopuses annihilated"

I don't mind admitting I knew very little about Che Guevara prior to reading this. There's the famous photo, which is plastered across anything merchandisable usually completely out of context, and his association with Fidel Castro. I was ignorant of the who, what, where, when etc. Thankfully this biography answers every question I was ever likely to have about the great man.

Split into three parts, each section focuses on a different stage of Che's life. Part 1 gives a brief glimpse into
his childhood and goes up to the beginning of his "working relationship" with Fidel Castro. Part 2 covers the battle for Cuba and the Cuban Revolution and Part 3 focuses on life after the Cuban victory up to his death in Bolivia.

There is a huge amount of detail and ground covered in this book, so much so that 'huge' isn't an apt enough word to use. There were times when I was completely enthralled by the story the author was presenting me with, his research phenomenal and attention to detail obviously passionate; I had to keep reminding myself this was true. Despite how Che is depicted in pop culture he wasn't some kind of machine gun wielding Bruce Willis type One Man Army. The battles he fought were under cover, in the dark and in the dirt, fought in close quarters, nasty, brutal and ugly. The author is superb at putting you in the midst of a battle; you can quite easily go from philosophy and politics to blood soaked ambushes.

Sometimes, though, the detail is overwhelming. On a few occasions the author tries to fit too much into too few sentences; minor events, dates, places, names are reeled off in quick succession, becoming too much to process and easy to forget. I understand the author wanted to give a comprehensive account of the story behind the legend but at least a hundred pages could have been cut. This was the only issue I had.

"For Ernesto, the iconography of modern Argentine nationhood was merely a superficial veneer, "a luxurious facade" under which the country's true "soul" lay; and that soul was rotten and diseased"

If you're after a dense and complete history of Che Guevara then I cannot recommend this book enough. Yes, it's 800 long pages and at times hard going but it's still an important book packed with intriguing history.

Yasamin kaheni

Rating: really liked it

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Duane

Rating: really liked it

Published in 1927, this is Hemingway's 2nd group of short stories. This collection contains 14 stories and these were quite good. Of course there is a story about bullfighting and one about boxing, as you would expect. But they've got that Hemingway flair or style that is unique and very recognizable. Another story that was very poignant about a girl on the train, on the way to get an abortion, and her discussion with her lover, although they don't directly say that's what they are doing. All in all, much better than I was expecting.

Nancy

Rating: liked it

Serviceable mystery in the Francis mold, though there are others of his that I prefer more. Not a murder mystery this time, but serial kidnappings.
Profession in Focus: Kidnap preventers and rescuers. Definitely off the beaten path. Sounds pretty neat, actually. Something to live vicariously through reading rather than contemplate for myself!

Protagonist as a Memorable Character: Low. Like most of Francis's protagonists Andrew is youngish, thinish, unflappable, capable, with reserves of inner strength. He's very businesslike and no-nonsense, so he tends to disappear on the page. Gerry and Tony are far more interesting characters. The victims and their families and friends like Andrew because he's a solid rock, delivers logical advice, and he's compassionate.

Relation to Horses: Medium-low. A kidnap victim is a jockey, and Andrew is brought into that world. He himself has no relation to it.

Love Interest: Yes.

Abrupt Ending: Yes. Most Francis novels end abruptly once the killer has been discovered and/or incapacitated without taking the time to ease the reader down gradually.
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