

A SEASON OF YOUTH: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination

Michael Kammen. Knopf, \$15 ISBN 0-394-49651-6

In a profound but enjoyable reinterpretation of the meaning of the American Revolution for the people of the United States, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Michael Kammen reexamines many aspects of American culture. By turns he looks at the music of Charles Ives; political humor; poems and historical novels from Cooper, Melville and Holmes to Ezra Pound, Gore Vidal and John Jakes; equestrian statues and historical paintings from Trumbull to Grant Wood and N. C. Wyeth; popular histories and biographies; and how the Revolution has been seen in 75 years of films. Kammen believes that the Revolution—our "season of youth" and national rite of passage—has significantly shaped our national character, influenced our thought and culture and become the single most important source for our national sense of tradition. 16 pages of illustrations. [September 25]

SAIL FAR AWAY: Reflections on a Life Afloat

Robert Carter. Norton, \$11.95 ISBN 0-393-03214-2

Covering the high-(and low) lights of 10 years of extensive and enviable cruises, this relaxed and anecdotal account should nurture the summer sailor through at least part of a long winter ashore. The 44-ft. ketch *Cynthia R* voyaged first from Maine to the Bahamas, and later went transatlantic from Charleston to Gibraltar via Bermuda and the Azores. Since then it has logged many miles in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, cruising the coasts of Turkey, Yugoslavia and Scandinavia, as well as touring inland via Europe's rivers and canals. Robert Carter, charter captain, amateur archeologist and observer of people and places, is generous with hints for the yachtsperson about venturing into unaccustomed parts, including some on the nitty-gritty of mechanical repairs and such useful miscellany as how to find ice in Turkey, deal with customs officers, navigate a canal lock, explore an undersea city and weather a riot in Rhodes. Illustrations not seen by PW.

[September 25]

THE WAYS OF THE WORLD: Comedy and Society

Robert Bechtold Heilman. University of Washington Press, \$17.50 ISBN 0-295-95587-2

Comedy has been explained by various schools of critical thought as a social corrective, a voice of spontaneity and freedom, a mirror of the incongruities of existence. Writing primarily for an academic readership, Prof. Heilman (University of Washington), author of

numerous books, seeks a middle ground amid these conflicting theories. The key to comedy, he writes, lies in acceptance, though not in the sense of passivity. Rather, acceptance of what is possible, contemplation of the incurable ironies of life. This is a debatable viewpoint, but in surveying a multitude of plays from "Twelfth Night" to Nichols's "The National Health," Heilman makes many acute observations. He notes, for example, that British preeminence in comedy reflects a strong gift for compromise, and that the foes of comedy are ideologues of every stripe and persuasion. [September 25]

WHO WAS JACK RUBY?

Seth Kantor. Everest House, \$10.95 ISBN 0-89696-004-8

Who was Jack Ruby? He was Jacob Rubenstein, a small-time gangster who organized a union with mob connections in the '30s. He was involved in casinos and gun smuggling in Cuba, probably under orders from Meyer Lansky. He was a shady nightclub operator, a police informer, an errand boy between the syndicate and a corrupt Dallas police force. He was, Kantor cautiously speculates, part of a conspiracy to kill JFK that combined Mafia, CIA and anti-Castro Cuban forces. All this will be familiar to readers of various assassination books. Following up these leads with dozens of interviews and archival digging, *Atlanta Constitution* reporter Kantor adds weight to the case against Ruby and tears to shreds the Warren Commission's portrait of this paid killer. Several points in Kantor's research are contradicted by other experts' accounts; for instance, he too abruptly dismisses evidence that Ruby knew Oswald. Still, he turns up valuable material. On the day of the assassination, Ruby, chronically in debt, was seen with thousands of dollars in hand at a Dallas bank. Perhaps this hard-hitting book will shake the House Assassinations Committee out of its slumber. Index, etc. [September 25]

THE POLITICS OF PAIN

Helen Neal. McGraw-Hill, \$9.95 ISBN 0-07-046140-6

There's a readymade market for this excellent book about pain. In his foreword, Ronald Melzack, Ph.D., director of pain research, Montreal General Hospital, points out that "chronic pain . . . is a major medical problem in its own right," and that it is only recently that "important advances in research and theory are being translated into effective clinical techniques." Health journalist Helen Neal, spurred by a personal experience, examines the problem of chronic pain so that 35- to 40-million sufferers may learn of the choices available for pain control and how and where to get help. Since pain

is an economic problem as well as a medical one, the title is singularly appropriate, and Neal includes a discussion of scientific and governmental neglect along with her exploration of types of pain, the cancer industry, suffering in children, medical-surgical attitudes, the psychological ramifications. Progress is being made and Neal notes, too, the importance of consumer action to its continuance. A practical, sound, much-needed book that offers information and hope to chronic sufferers. Notes, bibliography, appendix, index.

[September 25]

nappy edges

Ntozake Shange. St. Martin's, \$7.95 ISBN 0-312-55905-4

The gifted young woman who wrote "for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf," the most original Broadway hit in some time, is quintessentially a poet. Since she is very definitely a woman (and "colored"), her experience has made her a very special kind of feminist—which gives her poetry, in addition to its exquisite sensibility, a tough intellectual thrust that makes itself felt in the opening piece in this, her second book. That is a "poem-speech" delivered at the National Afro-American Writers Conference, Howard University, last year. Shange's pitch is eloquent: "i know you know the difference between elvin jones & tony williams. if you take us as seriously as you take a set of traps/a saxophone/maybe we'll have decades of poems you'll never forget." "Black poetry," she is saying, needs no patronizing; it is—it will be—as uniquely the contribution of men and women of "color" as jazz, soul, rhythm and blues, the music of such legends as Bessie Smith, Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and the generations of black musicians who seem to own Shange's soul. That strong opening is followed by a stream of Shange's recent poems—unevenly effective (Jazz "effects" seem invariably self-conscious) but truly beautiful in their raw honesty: "daughters choosin to be women/lick their wounds with their own spit/til they heal." This is Shange still growing, but already a major force. *National ad campaign; author tour, major cities.* [September 27]

WEASEL WORDS: The Art of Saying What You Don't Mean

Mario Pei. Harper & Row, \$9.95 ISBN 0-06-013342-2

Teddy Roosevelt explained the term "weasel word" in 1916: "When a weasel sucks an egg, the meat is sucked out of the egg; and if you use a weasel word after another, there is nothing left of the other." Robert Littell suggests it's "the adman's way of crossing his fingers behind his back when he makes a somewhat elastic statement." So