

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Words, deeds & more than just doodles

By Alan Wallace – June 8th, 2013

Experience and theory combine in varying measures in these new or upcoming titles, which illuminate individual stories amid the turning point of America's greatest internal conflict, sum up the underpinnings of libertarianism, advocate a new approach to economic policy and survey the history of political cartooning.

“The Illustrated Gettysburg Reader: An Eyewitness History of the Civil War's Greatest Battle” by Rod Gragg (Regnery History, available Monday) — A wealth of period images and details drawn from first-person accounts distinguish this book among the many seeking to capitalize on this summer's Battle of Gettysburg sesquicentennial. Those elements are woven into historical narrative by a history-professor author who directs Coastal Carolina University's Center for Military and Veterans Studies and has written 18 previous U.S. history books. This book's full of smaller-scale human dramas connected to the vast conflagration involving 160,000-plus soldiers that was the Battle of Gettysburg: a national search for the family of a dead Union soldier found clutching a photo of his children; a New York Times reporter covering the Union forces who witnessed his son's death; a 69-year-old Gettysburg cobbler who volunteered to join the fight, musket in hand, on the battle's first day; troops bound for the battle attaching their names and those of their next of kin to their uniforms beforehand, knowing the odds were high that they wouldn't survive. Such personal stories within Gettysburg's larger story bring home the unquantifiable human costs of the battle — and the Civil War overall — to readers 150 years later in ways that nothing else could.

“The System of Liberty: Themes in the History of Classical Liberalism” by George H. Smith (Cambridge University Press) — Few books are as well-suited as this one for readers who lament the displacement of the classical political meaning of “liberal” — an outlook that emphasizes liberty's central role — by the term's current meaning as a label for those who lean left. And few authors are as well-suited to address classical liberalism as this one, as he wrote most of the libertarian Cato Institute's Cato University Home Study Course. Using such concepts as order, justice, rights and freedom as his themes, he covers individualism, natural rights, utilitarianism, self-sovereignty and what Lord Acton called “the polar star of liberty,” and also answers critics who've taken classical liberalism to task over its supposed “atomistic individualism” and “social Darwinism,” according to Cato and the publisher. Nor does he shrink from issues that divided classical liberals, including exceptions to the presumption of liberty, what “the public good” means, the state's role in education and the rights of resistance and revolution. And he relates classical liberalism's precepts and debates to today's liberal and libertarian schools of political thought in what Cato bills as “a college course in political philosophy in just 217 very readable pages.”

“Knowledge and Power: The Information Theory of Capitalism and How It Is Revolutionizing Our World” by George Gilder (Regnery, available Monday) — This author, a 1960s speechwriter for Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney and Richard Nixon, is no ivory-tower economist. His independent 1970s studies of poverty's causes led to books including 1981's best-selling “Wealth

and Poverty,” which the publisher calls “the economic bible for the Reagan Era boom.” And as a venture capitalist who received the White House Award for Entrepreneurial Excellence from President Reagan in 1986, he's also founded more than 10 companies, sat on many corporate boards and seen firsthand how Silicon Valley startups achieved rapid growth, from which he draws this book's inspiration. “Knowledge and Power” argues for “a new paradigm for kick-starting economic growth” — one built around the free exchange of ideas, unhindered by government. He maintains that government, unable to keep pace with technological innovation, must not stifle growth by trying to regulate industries it doesn't understand, and explores how companies outside the tech sector can benefit from Silicon Valley-style information flow and how the risks inherent in free enterprise relate to accumulation of knowledge. Having seen what works in the real world, he makes an economic case for limited government that's based on practical observation and experience.

“The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power” by Victor S. Navasky (Knopf) — Readers who enjoy Randy Bish's work for the Trib and what other political cartoonists add to Americans' debates of issues and policies shouldn't let this author's background — former New York Times Magazine editor and longtime editor of the liberal journal The Nation — deter them from checking out this book, which explores the political cartoonist's art. Included are Thomas Nast, who established political cartooning as an American art form, and the Danish cartoons portraying Muhammad that sparked Muslim riots some eight years ago. He draws “on his own encounters with would-be censors, interviews with cartoonists, and historical archives from cartoon museums across the globe,” according to the publisher, covering political cartoons as both works of art and polemics that have documented their creators' times and influenced history's course. Along the way, he also discusses this visual art form's unique ability to affect both minds and hearts, contending that political cartooning has too often been dismissed as trivial while its practitioners at times have been subjected to censorship, threats, incarceration and murder. Appearing at a time when electronic media's rise at print's expense makes it difficult to say where political cartooning is going, this book traces where it's been.

APPLE FIGHTS ALONE

The U.S. Justice Department's e-book price-fixing case indeed went to trial last Monday in Manhattan, as scheduled — with Apple as the lone defendant.

Penguin, the largest publisher named as a defendant in Justice's lawsuit, seemingly had been set to go to trial along with Apple. But Penguin agreed to a \$75 million settlement with Justice less than two weeks before the trial began.

With the four other publishers that Justice targeted having reached settlements earlier, that left Apple alone at the defense table — and Penguin Group USA CEO David Shanks among the first witnesses whom the government called to testify.

The trial consolidates the Justice case with other e-book price-fixing cases filed by state attorneys general and a consumer class action. Its outcome will be determined by Judge Denise Cote, not a jury — and if statements she made during her last pretrial conference are any indication, Apple's in trouble.

Stressing that her final decision would await the trial's completion, she nevertheless told Justice attorneys that her “tentative view” was that they'd be able to prove that Apple was behind a conspiracy to raise e-book prices, according to Publishers Weekly.

So, why did Apple — whose multibillion-dollar cash reserves surely could handle even sizable monetary damages — go to trial? Publishers Weekly suggests that decision is about Apple's business going forward: “For Apple, having the Department of Justice monitoring its digital business is the nightmare scenario.”