

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Five notable reading-list additions

By: Alan Wallace – April 6, 2013

Each of these five upcoming titles is notable for a different reason, from “quickie” publication to brevity, practicality, insider insight and bucking conventional wisdom about food.

“Pope Francis: From the End of the Earth to Rome” by the staff of The Wall Street Journal (HarperCollins, available April 16) — Electronic media and corporate synergy combine to produce this example of what the “quickie” book — which aims to capitalize swiftly on interest in a major world event via publication as soon after the fact as possible — has become in our high-tech age. Available only as an e-book, its release is scheduled for just 34 days after the conclave of cardinals chose Argentina's Jorge Mario Bergoglio to succeed Pope Benedict XVI — a publication schedule no doubt made easier by the fact that both The Journal and the e-book's publisher are part of News Corp. HarperCollins promises a book consisting of content from Journal reporters that will cover Benedict's surprising decision to retire, the life story of the new pope, “new insight on the bargaining and drama that surrounded his rise” and the outlook for his papacy, which must grapple with the 1.2-billion-member Roman Catholic Church's ongoing scandals and shortages of priests, and what many consider its declining relevancy for an increasingly secular world. Consider this e-book the electronic publishing world's equivalent of an old-style Polaroid photo: not quite as instant a picture as one taken with a cellphone camera, but a snapshot nevertheless — quickly developed, and very much of the moment in time that it captures.

“The Truth About Gun Control” by David P. Kopel (Encounter Books, available April 16) — This latest addition (No. 32) to Encounter's Broadside series of brief, tightly focused books explores one of today's most controversial and prominent issues, from its centuries-old roots to its contemporary politics. The author — adjunct professor of advanced constitutional law at Denver University, research director of Denver's Independent Institute and associate policy analyst at the Cato Institute — concisely explains what Encounter calls “the central question in the American gun-control debate”: Are the American people or elitists who see them as unable to make their own choices and are bent on ruling them sovereign in this country? In his view, Americans have always supported the right to keep and bear arms — and opposed gun control — because it's “central to the American identity” and bound up with the nation's creation. He says that what would become the Second Amendment grew out of resistance to British gun-confiscation attempts and a post-Civil War change to the Constitution aimed “to defeat the nation's first gun-control organization, the Ku Klux Klan.” America's pro-gun attitude was hardened by seeing Hitler and Stalin order gun registration and confiscation as preludes to genocide, according to Kopel, who maintains that gun rights are essential to prevent tyranny by governments and criminals, and to protect the Constitution.

“The Ultimate Obama Survival Guide: How to Survive, Thrive, and Prosper During Obamageddon” by Wayne Allyn Root (Regnery, available April 15) — Referring to President Obama's second term, the publisher says about this book: “Don't get mad about it. Get even.” Written by a former presidential candidate, talk-show host, best-selling author and frequent Fox News commentator who was the 2008 Libertarian vice-presidential nominee, the book aims to live up to its title by providing step-by-step instructions on protecting “your liberty, your hard-earned cash, and your opportunities,” all of which Obama — who already has “a leg up on his redistributionist, anti-personal-freedom agenda” — is “working to steal.” Root dispenses advice on “practical, real-life ways you can fight back” for workers seeing taxes taking a bigger bite out of their paychecks; “unwary investors” who'll otherwise “get slaughtered” in the stock market; business owners and entrepreneurs who want to protect their assets; Americans whose liberties have been victimized by the TSA, gun restrictions, violations of religious freedom and regulatory red tape; and patients trying to manage their health care as ObamaCare takes full effect. Carrying endorsements from such conservative luminaries as Ann Coulter, Steve Forbes and Mike Huckabee, “The Ultimate Obama Survival Guide” should find a warm reception among readers who share their outlook and concerns.

“The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat” by Vali Nasr (Doubleday, available April 16) — Sure to be controversial, this book by the dean of Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies draws on his stint between 2009 and 2011 as senior adviser to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, U.S. special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The picture he paints isn't pretty; it's one of divisions between the State Department and the Obama White House, which the author says was so preoccupied with domestic affairs and so worried about political backlash and terrorism that it perpetuated Bush-administration Middle East policies, thereby blowing its opportunity to improve relations there. In the meantime, China and Russia quietly built their influence in the Middle East — where, Nasr says, a second Arab Spring is on the horizon, one fueled by anger over U.S. assassinations by drone, not by democratic hopes. He suggests that America reassess and reposition itself in the region by focusing less on what the publisher calls “failing relationships,” such as with Saudi Arabia, and more on “productive, and less costly, partnerships” with other allies, such as Turkey. Readers of varying political persuasions at least should agree with one central theme of “The Dispensable Nation” — that world leadership and aversion to risk don't mix.

“The Food Police: A Well-Fed Manifesto About the Politics of Your Plate” by Jayson Lusk (Crown Forum, available April 16) — The author, an Oklahoma State University agricultural economics professor who has published more than 100 articles in peer-reviewed journals, bristles at what the publisher calls “fascist food snobbery” and “myths propagated by the food elite.” Laying out truths that stand in sharp contrast to alarmism over trans fats, pesticides, corporate farming and food-industry labor concerns, he reminds readers that organic foods cost more but aren't necessarily healthier or tastier, that genetically modified foods have sickened no one but have boosted farmers' profits and can help feed impoverished Africans, that agricultural policies don't make anyone fat, that “locavores” don't help the environment or economy, that “fat taxes” won't shrink waistlines and that “fixing” school lunches won't make students smarter. And he goes beyond such practical myth-busting, rooted in economics, to explore how those who think they should dictate which foods everyone else produces and eats intrude on individuals' right to choose. With Michelle Obama trying to solve childhood obesity

through schools' cafeteria lines and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's super-size soda ban halted (at least initially) by a judge, this book's message is both timeless and timely.