An American hero and his dream

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES books today

Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King Jr.

By STEPHEN B. OATES. Harper & Row. \$19.95.

Martin Luther King Jr. is one of those world figures whose life story is destined to be chronicled many times over. His extraordinary impact as shaper of history and articulator of the spirit of the age, his vibrant personality, the stormy times in which he rose to fame, the controversy that followed his every move — all these factors mark him as a fitting subject for the masterly biography.

masterly biography. If biographer Stephen Oates has not produced the classic we might have hoped for, given the passage of time since King's death and the opening of his private papers to scholars, *Let the Trumpet Sound* still evokes the man and his epic struggle with all the you-are-there vividness of a firstrate documentary movie. In this stirring book, King grows up, finds his cause and dies a martyr's death — unfulfilled in his search for justice, but living on as a symbol of unceasing nonviolent resistance to evil.

BECAUSE IT is based on the King papers at Boston University and the King Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, and interviews with the King family and associates, Let the Trumpet Sound is more detailed and more thoroughly researched than earlier biographies. It shares the pro-King sympathies of Lerone Bennet Jr.'s What Manner of Man and L.D. Reddick's Crusader Without Violence. King, by David L. Lewis, a young black scholar, is far more critical of its subject.

The strength of Oates' book — his telling of the story through King's eyes — is its chief weakness as well. The author identifies so closely with his subject that *Let the Trumpet Sound* reads too often like an authorized biography designed to keep King safely enshrined in the American pantheon. Not that Oates has avoided mention of his subject's failings. The King whose frequent trips took him away from his wife and into the arms of other women is here as much as the great orator and civil-rights advocate. But Oates cites those episodes more to condemn the FBI, which learned of them through wiretapping, than to embarrass his hero.

Oates, a historian at the University of Massachusetts, is also the biographer of Abraham Lincoln, John Brown and Nat Turner. If Let the Trumpet Sound has a thesis at all, it is that King's life and work represented a continuation of the unfinished business begun by those fighters for black freedom. Thus this book completes what he calls a "Civil War quartet."

Oates announces this thin connective thread early on, only to abandon it for story-telling. For he is not really interested in comparing the slaves' struggle for equality, nor does he stop to analyze whether King was ill-advised, for instance, to take his crusade from the South to Chicago, or to attack U.S. participation in the Vietnam War. Instead the narrative marches King along a predestined and larger-than-life path. When King says, for example, that God expects great things of him, Oates merely records the event without comment.

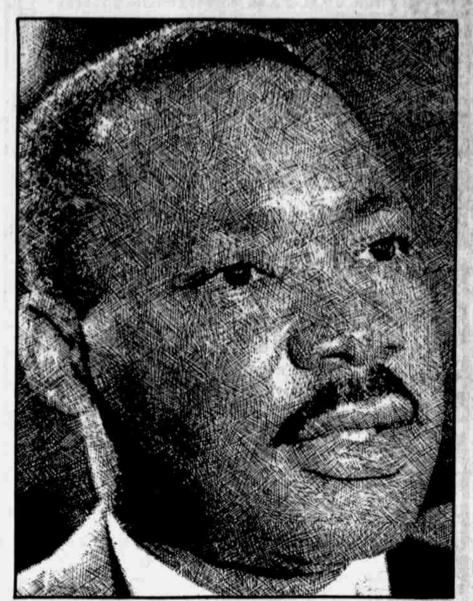
SO IT IS narration, not analysis, that makes this book worth reading, as Oates moves fluidly over all the familiar stations of the cross — from middle-class boyhood in Atlanta to martyrdom in Memphis fighting for garbage collectors. Oates' use of interviews and the King papers allows him to go behind the scenes at numerous points in the story, but it has not resulted in insights unavailable to observers at the time.

The author notes, for example, that "Daddy King" was a tough disciplinarian, and that M.L., as Martin Jr. was called, sought out his paternal grandmother more than his mother for loving attention. Twice, for love of his grandmother, the boy threw himself out of a second-story window in suicide attempts. But Oates does not even try to make sense of this or discern how it may have affected his adult life.

Or consider King's determination and courage in the face of countless lifethreatening situations. They were in part a gift from his father, who was active in Atlanta's NAACP chapter well before his son's birth. Paradoxically, they also might have been a by-product of the effort to throw off the shackles of a stern father, who once demanded that his son (then a student at Morehouse College) publicly apologize to their fundamentalist congregation for engaging in social dancing. Readers will have to decide for themselves, since Oates doesn't bring up the question.

King spent much of his adult life under the shadow of threat and surveillance. Oates relies on earlier accounts of J. Edgar Hoover's unceasing efforts to discredit King. FBI officials passed along gossip about sex (some of it accurate), secret Swiss bank accounts and communist advisers (none of it accurate) to congressman and news reporters.

King and his circle learned to live with the wiretapping, joking about Hoover listening in on the telephone. And King



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THROUGHOUT KING'S career, nonviolent direct action was his political lodestone. Beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, which in its original form challenged segregation only tan-gentially, through the campaigns of Birmingham, Selma and St. Augustine, in which protest marchers fed on the media's insatiable appetite for colorful stories, King refined direct action into an increasingly sophisticated tool of change. Marches did not break the back of local prejudice, but flashed across the country by way of TV and newspapers, they put pressure on Congress for change at the federal level. King's juggernaut of activist love rarely faltered until it came face-to-face with the subtly interlocked problems of racism

Chicago-style.

If only because it reminds us of the power of nonviolent direct action, *Let the Trumpet Sound* is an important book. As Oates points out, King was never the keeper of middle-class values that his detractors from the Left charged. He wanted to revamp society, not just open the door to black professionals. Before he died he had shaped nonviolence into a mighty weapon against poverty and the Vietnam War; had he lived longer, who knows where he would have taken the struggle? Oates' narrative implies that in Chicago he may have reached the end of the road.

Let the Trumpet Sound is a passionate defense of an authentic American hero. For all its faults, it is clearly the best biography of Martin Luther King we have thus far.

Reviewed By DAN CRYER

Portraits of women are strictly originals

Particular Passions By LYNN GILBERT and GAYLEN MOORE Potter. \$9.95.

Particular Passions is subtitled "Talks With Women Who Have Shaped Our Lives." A less grandiloquent label might have been "Talks With America's Female Role Models." On the other hand, to shape one's life is the role model's role; she (or he) provides the pattern for others to copy.

copy. The women in this book, however, seldom speak of copying anyone. Not only did few of them have role models themselves (although the scientists among them point to Marie Curie), but they also don't appear to have missed them. What they do have are healthy egos and a sublime contempt for sexist discrimination.

"EVEN IN PERIODS when I felt discrimination," Dr. Rosalyn Yalow, a Nobel Prize winner, says, "I never felt second class. There was something wrong with the discriminators, not something wrong with me."

And although these women may be self-absorbed, they are not necessarily self-conscious. Any one of them might have coined, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." A few, those whose profession is feminism, are angry; the rest, successes all, are angry only in retrospect. Just one of them is bitter. Not only does she work in a field where all the gurus are male, but also she is married to a head guru. To love one's husband is one thing; to have one's work presumed to be his is another, and terrible.

I wish that the authors had deleted the photographs for which there are no accompanying texts. I also wish that they had not settled for so little from Barbara Walters and had been more severe about scrapping the occasional dreary interview.

STILL, THERE IS information here and insights and sometimes a truly distinctive voice. Alberta Hunter speaks as distinctively as she sings. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross is unnerving, as spooky as her subject, death and dying. Frances Steloff, who founded the Gotham Book Mart, elicits tears.

Some of the women were born comfortable; some, like Miss Steloff, whose childhood was Dickensian, lived on the far side of poverty. An astonishing number were widowed young, which may tell us something. Many are Jewish, which may tell us that a passion for education outweighs sexism. Some have children, some do not, which tells us nothing. Most of them had parents who told them they were the cat's pajamas. That may be what tells us the most.

Reviewed By MARY CANTWELL



ELISABETH KUBLER-ROSS

The shooting stopped but the doubts remain

to run the world, try to define where our vital interests lie and concentrate our powers and concerns there."

A little progress there, one might sense, from

On patrol with Company A

The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience By WALTER H. CAPPS Boscon, \$12.98.

I picked up somewhere — it must have been as a little kid at the knee of an intimidating adult - the notion that human maturity was another word for perfect. I'm now among the many who've had to adjust to the sadder reality that coming of age is in fact coming to terms with one's physical, mental and moral limitations - with what you are, what you can be, and what you'll doubtlessly never be, like it or not. While maintaining the quest for improvement, maturity must include graceful accommodation to creaturely imperfection, a sighing resignation to one's shortcomings. Cast in theological terms, it's to rely finally not upon ourselves but upon the succor of divine forgiveness. I think to deny mortal flaws is to court a despair that lasts as long as breath.

These things can also be said about the world's nations attaining maturity, and Walter Capps explores similar ideas as the United States tries even now to extricate itself from its terribly traumatic coming of age in Vietnam.

WHERE HAS Vietnam left us? Not only, says Capps, with a nationful of psychically scarred, uncomprehending veterans (some shamed by their defeat, some shamed by their involvement), but with the conscience-stricken nation itself still split down the middle. One camp calls for a more contemplative orientation toward human life, and a more benign American role in it. The other chafes to re-establish vibrant, vigorous and unrepentant American resolve through a reawakening of religious and political conservatism.

And whither America? Are we, in our

chagrin, to fall back into an arrogant adolescence, a blustery defensive posture that itches for a nuclear shootout? Or can we grow up healed and whole, at peace at last with ourselves and with the world we share?

Though Capps is impressively conversant with his subject and its literature (he has directed Santa Barbara's Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions and is now a professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara), he cannot foretell which future awaits us. But in this admirably nonstrident study of the "consequent malaise" of Vietnam he has posed the questions with thoughtful precision and clarity.

How the war's veterans and their families will recover (if they do) from either the casualties of combat or the unprecedented social punishment inflicted upon them is problem enough. Henry Kissinger tells them the Vietnam War was "a terrible tragedy into which the United States should never have gotten involved," and a one-armed survivor of a battle near Tam Ky is told by a stranger in Denver who observes the wound: "Serves you right." For such people the war remains unfinished as long as there are Vietnam-related suicides, criminality, family disintegration and physical reactions to Agent Orange.

BUT WHETHER the two Americas we live in can ever be reconciled — can ever find together an equanimity of middle age — is more gravely troubling still. Many, for example, hear the voice of unassailable reason (maturity?) in the words of Arthur Schlesinger Jr. "It would seem to me," he said not long ago, "that the lesson of Vietnam is that our motives aren't all that different from those of any other country, and that there are limits to our power and our virtue, and that we're not omnipotent and we're not omniscient, and that we must, instead of trying the time a Washington official declared that other nations have "interests" whereas the United States has "a sense of responsibility." But such a stance of measured humility and confidence is seen by the religious Right (and plenty of others not so religious, but equally Right) as a perfidious abnegation of America's biblically enjoined commission. And that is? To drive from the face of the Earth the antichrist, whose deceptive coloration nowadays is godless communism and such related sins of the flesh as homosexuality, deteriorating family life (men doing the cooking), abortion-on-demand and the ERA.

Never mind that Ho Chi Minh was once perceived by the U.S. State Department as a lover of human liberty one might favorably compare to Patrick Henry. It is just such devils God has in Mind, the fundamentalists tell us, and America's divine assignment is to obliterate them — or be obliterated for apostasy. Our faltering resolve in Vietnam was not because of increasing second thoughts that we had possibly launched ourselves on a misguided mission; rather it was because we lacked godly fortitude. It is high time the rascals were shown we are made of better stuff than that!

IT IS A silly grown man who forgets his own impurities and who expects (and depends on) the best from everyone else; it is a silly grown nation which does the same. The mature in both cases search for a middle ground of reality between (as Capps says) the impulses of a too-innocent Eden and the expectations of an apocalyptic Armageddon.

Concludes Capps: "A world so easily divisible into such absolute contrasts is already severely fragmented. The real issue is whether healing can occur and wholeness be discovered before the trauma of the unfinished war is reenacted."

Reviewed By HUSTON HORN Los Angeles Times

Huston Horn is an Episcopal priest, and the director of the Caltech Y in Pasadena, Calif.

The 13th Valley By JOHN M. DEL VECCHIO. Bantam. \$15.95.

Vietnam, 1970 — six years after U.S. military intervention. The Tet Offensive and My Lai massacre are history. Lyndon Johnson has stepped down, Vietnamization begun. In less than three years the last American soldier will depart this faraway place where once more than a halfmillion had served. The war is winding down.

But not for Company A of the 101st Airborne. This expert infantry unit is bellying its way — inches by wary inches — into the Khe Ta Laou Valley in central Vietnam where South ends and North begins. The transport helicopters that dropped Company A at the landing zone are heading back to home base. The company is alone.

SOMEWHERE IN the dark are an unknown number of North Vietnamese regulars, defenders of a major supply depot. Guns and food are being shipped through an elaborate network of tunnels under the valley floor. Alpha Company's job is to break it up. Its incursion into enemy territory is the narrative skeleton of a 600-page first novel, a book the author has taken great care to flesh out.

Dozens of characters come under scrutiny, but the interrelationship of three men dominates.

Radio telephone operator Chelini, young and scared, is seeing his first battle experience. In a chilling metamorphosis, he changes from raw recruit to crack soldier to cracked-up killer.

Brooks, the black leader of the combat team, indulges in an unlikely combination of erotic fantasizing and rigorous intellectualization of his situation to maintain emotional balance. The hard-as-nails veteran, Egan, keeps his equipment in perfect working order while shutting down his feelings with a nihilistic catchphrase.

The 13th Valley is an ambitious work that invites comparison with The Naked and the Dead, still the best novel to come out of World War II. John Del Vecchio makes use of early Mailer literary techniques. He too utilizes war to probe values back home and, like Mailer, he is interested in the military as institution, especially the relationship between authority and fascism.

Del Vecchio shows the logistical differences of how war is waged today — the pinpoint accuracy of aerial bombing and artillery firing patterns, the sophistication of field communications, the mobility of the helicopter that drops troops into battle zones like a hovering puppetmaster, coming back to pick up survivors after the scene has been played. This is the real war we watched nightly in living color but turned-down sound from the safety of our living rooms.

Not so real, and the book's only flaw, are the abstract colloquies among Del Vecchio's boonierats — between battles. The topics discussed include territorial imperative, the semantic differences of Chicano and Anglo prepositions, population demographics, infinite nuances of black-white relations, and how language predetermines war. Men whose lives are constantly on the line will communicate their profoundest thoughts, but these averagely educated guys hold forth like a platoon of Platos.

Good imaginative writing has at its core a resonance lacking in historical accounts. *The 13th Valley* has that quality in abundance.

> Reviewed By RALPH B. SIPPER Los Angeles Times

paperback guide

By MARTIN LEVIN

Evelyn Waugh may not be the last of the great letter writers — a species endangered by the telephone — but he is certainly one of the most exhilarating.

is certainly one of the most exhilarating. The letters of Evelyn Waugh (Penguin, \$7.95), edited by Mark Amory, covers 50 years in 840 letters. They are written to family, to friends like Nancy Mitford, George Orwell and Graham Greene, and occasionally to the Times (one a tongue-in-cheek sendup on the "otherwise cultured and intelligent people who fall victims to Senor Picasso.")

Waugh's comments on work in progress are refreshing, irreverent and focus on the concern of most writers words. ("I have done 2,387 words in one-and-a-half days. It shall be 3,000 this evening and soon I hope to get 2,000 a day." This about *Brideshead Revisited.*)

day." This about Brideshead Revisited.) Waugh's autobiography (A Little Learning) and his semiautobiographical novel (The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold) reveal that there was as much rain as sunshine in his life. But the effect of these letters, creatively stitched together by Amory, is wonderfully effervescent.

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While you're waiting for the Royal Shakespeare Company's premiere of Nicholas Nickleby on the Public Broadcasting Service next season, you might want to read or reread the book. Dickens' novel has never been out of print since it was first published in 1837, but this edition (Oxford University Press, \$4.95) is handsome, handy and illustrated with the original Hogarthian drawings by "Phiz."

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Nicholas Nickleby was pegged on the existence in the north of England of cheap and disreputable boarding schools where children were brutalized. From this iniquity, Dickens spun his first novel with a really complicated plot. It's a plot that wanders a bit because of having first seen life as a magazine serial, but readers have never seemed to mind.

One reason is that part of Dickens' genius is to depict the face of pure evil, minus extenuating circumstances. There are monsters like the headmaster, Mr. Squeers of Dotheboys Hall, who beat starving boys. And there are superheroes like Nicholas who thrash monsters who beat starving boys. It's a durable scenario.

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Yes, another diet book. Controlled Cheating: The Fats Goldberg Take It Off, Keep It Off Diet Program (Avon, \$2.25) by Larry Goldberg includes one of the more dramatic "before" (325 pounds) and "after" (150 pounds) pictures in the weight-loss genre. Larry ("Fats") Goldberg is a pizza magnate and junk food connoisseur who halved his weight 22 years ago and has maintained it ever since. The secret, he says, is a well-balanced diet six days a week (examples provided) "with one day off for gluttonous behavior."

The Harvard Medical School Health Letter Book (Warner \$3.95), edited by G. Timothy Johnson, M.D., and Stephen E. Goldfinger, M.D., is a spinoff from a newsletter started seven years ago. It's a standout in a crowded field.

The HMSHLB offers mainstream wisdom on health that is authoritative but not dogmatic: e.g., in the section titled "Staying Healthy," you'll find opinions on which vitamins to take and on whether muscle building is good for your heart. If you're anxious about stress, you'll find it among the many crises in a section called "Hazards of Living."

If you want to know whether you're getting full value from your doctor, there's a six-part questionnaire you can answer after your next visit. (No. 1: "Have you received an explanation that you can understand?") If the answers to these questions are mainly "no," say the authors, "You may feel you are being cheated and you may very well be right."

best sellers

The top-selling books of the week as compiled by the New York Times:

Fiction

- 1. Different Seasons (Stephen King)
- 2. The Prodigal Daughter (Jeffrey Archer)
- 3. The Case of Lucy Bending (Lawrence Sanders)
- 4. The Parsifal Mosaic (Robert Ludium)
- 5. E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial Storybook (William Kotzwinkle)

Nonfiction

- 1. Life Extension (Durk Pearson and Sandy Shaw)
- 2. Jane Fonda's Workout Book (Jane Fonda)
- 3. Living, Loving and Learning (Leo Buscaglia)
- When Bad Things Happen to Good People (Harold S, Kushner)
- 5. Edie (Jean Stein)

Paperbacks

- 1. Washington (Diana Fuller Ross)
- 2. Cujo (Stephen King)
- 3. The Third Deadly Sin (Lawrence Sanders)
- 4. Chances (Jackie Collins)
- 5. Bread Upon the Waters (Irwin Shaw)