



An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War That Came Between Us

By James Carroll

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An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War That Came Between Us By James Carroll

An American Requiem is the story of one man's coming of age. But more than that, it is a coming to terms with the conflicts that disrupted many families, inflicting personal wounds that were also social, political, and religious. Carroll grew up in a Catholic family that seemed blessed. His father had abandoned his own dream of becoming a priest to rise through the ranks of Hoover's FBI and then become one of the most powerful men in the Pentagon, the founder of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Young Jim lived the privileged life of a general's son, dating the daughter of a vice president and meeting the pope, all in the shadow of nuclear war, waiting for the red telephone to ring in his parents' house. He worshiped his father until Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights movement, turmoil in the Catholic Church, and then Vietnam combined to outweigh the bond between father and son. These were issues on which they would never agree. Only after Carroll left the priesthood to become a writer and husband with children of his own did he come to understand fully the struggles his father had faced. In this work of nonfiction, the best-selling novelist draws on the skills he honed with nine much-admired novels to tell the story he was, literally, born to tell. *An American Requiem* is a benediction on his father's life, his family's struggles, and the legacies of an entire generation.

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An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War That Came Between Us By James Carroll Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #216637 in Books
- Brand: Mariner Books
- Published on: 1997-04-01
- Released on: 1997-04-01
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x .79" w x 5.50" l, .68 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 279 pages



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

If the Civil War pitted brother against brother, the Vietnam War is best understood as pitting father against son. Some of Vietnam's longest lasting battles were fought in heavy rages and even heavier silences across the dinner table. James Carroll is a veteran of many such skirmishes. A novelist now, this book is his story of what it was like to be an anti-war priest in the '60s while his father was an Air Force general deeply involved in Pentagon planning. What makes the book particularly moving is that Carroll comes to realize that his father is no mono-dimensional saber-rattler (indeed, he suspects that his father's military career came to its sudden end because of the stances he took inside the corridors of power against expanding and intensifying the war). But the terrible truth was that neither the father nor the son ever managed to transcend the boundaries of their particular roles to meet each other in a candid, reciprocal relationship. And Carroll is honest--he tells us this, painfully. A very fine book, which along the way reports interestingly on some nearly forgotten '60s episodes.

From Publishers Weekly

Carroll, a novelist (*Family Trade*), poet and former priest, has written a moving memoir of the effect of the Vietnam War on his family that is at once personal and the story of a generation. His father was an Air Force general who won his stars by being one of the bright lights of the FBI-and a favorite of J. Edgar Hoover-rather than by working his way up through the military. One of Carroll's four brothers dodged the draft in Canada, another was an FBI agent ferreting out draft dodgers and he himself-a former ROTC Cadet of the Year at Georgetown-became an "antiwar" chaplain at Boston University who demonstrated in the streets but ducked the cameras for fear his father might recognize him. Carroll was earmarked from birth to be a priest (his father had trained for the priesthood but dropped out just before ordination) and received personal encouragement from Pope John XXIII and Cardinal Spellman, a family friend. Carroll's heroes evolved from Elvis to Pope John to Martin Luther King, rebel theologian Hans Kung, poet Allen Tate (his mentor) and Eugene McCarthy-most of whom his father considered enemies. After much personal struggle, Carroll left the priesthood, married and became a father, but the break with his own father was never repaired. At once heartbreaking and heroic, this is autobiography at its best.

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From Library Journal

Carroll, a novelist (*City Below*, LJ 4/15/94) and Boston Globe columnist, presents an absorbing account of his youth and early adulthood in a family dominated by a strong-willed father, a country embroiled in a war in Vietnam, and a Roman Catholic faith caught up in the stress of reinventing itself through the Vatican II reforms. The tense relationship between father and son sets the stage for young James's equally difficult attempts to define himself as an American and as a Catholic priest. Carroll's description of his conflicts over Vietnam with his father (an FBI agent who subsequently became the founder of the Defense Intelligence Agency) will stand as an accurate reflection of family turmoil for countless readers who grew to maturity in the 1960s. Carroll offers a fascinating perspective on generational differences and the enormous challenges each young person faces when choosing a world view at odds with that of his or her parents. An exceptionally well-written work that is effective on many levels; highly recommended for academic and public libraries.

-?John R. Valley, *Siena Coll. Lib., Loudonville*,

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Charles Trask:

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