

You Can Quote Me on This

By David Boaz

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Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, Sixteenth Edition, edited by Justin Kaplan. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992, 1405 pages, \$40.00.

The new edition of *Bartlett's* offers much fascination, combining the wealth of (mostly) Western civilization with a new attempt to be multicultural and attuned to popular culture.

There are two basic arrangements for books of quotations: by subject or by author. For most purposes, such as looking for a quotation to illustrate a point, subject is more useful, and most quotation books are arranged that way, including H. L. Mencken's New Dictionary of Quotations and George Seldes's Great Quotations. *Bartlett's* and the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations are arranged by author, which is useful if you want to find a quotation from a particular author. *Bartlett's* also has a lengthy index of keywords, in case you're trying to remember just who said "My love is like a red, red rose" (Robert Burns).

It's helpful to have at least one of each kind of book at hand. Why, though, does *Bartlett's* list authors by date of birth, requiring the reader to look in an author index first? Surely alphabetical order would be easier.

Chronological order does allow one to note that some years seemed to produce bumper crops of quotable notables. The period 1818-20, for instance, gave us Emily Bronte, Frederick Douglass, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, George Eliot, Herman Melville, Queen Victoria, Walt Whitman, Susan B. Anthony, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Herbert Spencer. Almost a century later Leo Durocher, J. W. Fulbright, Greta Garbo, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Koestler, Ayn

Rand, Jean Paul Sartre, C. P. Snow, and Lionel Trilling first saw the light of day in 1905.

The 1992 edition is the first to include a significant number of baby boomers (Stevie Wonder, the only one to make the 1980 edition, has fallen off the charts), and it's revealing to note which of my contemporaries have achieved this degree of immortality: David Stockman, Oliver Stone, Arlo Guthrie, Joseph C. Stinson, Leslie Marmon Silko, Bruce Springsteen, Melinda Mathison, Louise Erdrich, James Gleick, and Michael Jackson (the youngest entrant) and Lionel Richie, as well as our foreign-born contemporaries Steve Biko, Elton John and Bernie Taupin, Salman Rushdie, Prince Charles, and Jimmy Cliff. One can only hope that books take longer to write and to seep into popular culture than rock music and movies. It's *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, remember, so Jefferson's wisdom and Dorothy Parker's wit take their place alongside "don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle," "keep on truckin'," and "me want cookie."

Despite the heavy representation of pop culture, editor Justin Kaplan wisely seems to have included fewer quotations culled from newspaper interviews than were in the previous edition. He has also, in the spirit of the age, made the volume more multicultural, a change most apparent in the pre-baby-boom generation, many of whom came to prominence in the Sixties, when white men account for only 57 percent of those cited. Even then, virtually all of the citations are to Americans.

This book is slimmer than the 1980 edition, but that seems to have been achieved with smaller but still readable type rather than fewer quotations. Some 340 authors have been added and about that many deleted, with no losses that bothered me.

The dozen years since the fifteenth edition have been marked by a worldwide turn toward markets, from Reagan and Thatcher to the New Zealand Labor Party's free-market reforms to the fall of Soviet communism. This historical trend seems to have escaped editor Kaplan, of Cambridge, Mass., who has given us *more* quotations from Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Robert Heilbroner, while virtually eliminating F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, the intellectual

gurus of the free-market revolution. A bust of Hayek now sits in the Kremlin, but Cambridge is holding out against the tide.

Hayek has been reduced to two quotations, neither of which reflects his particular contributions to social thought. Friedman is represented by three, including the wrongly attributed aphorism, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Meanwhile, the towering figure of John Kenneth Galbraith receives 11 citations. (William F. Buckley, Jr., is unrepresented.)

As in 1980, the Bible is second only to Shakespeare in the number of quotations included. But Ayn Rand, who came in second to the Bible in a 1991 Gallup survey on most influential authors, gets only three citations. Margaret Thatcher likewise is represented with three quotations, none of which captures her free-market radicalism.

Quotations from recent presidents offer a similar surprise. John F. Kennedy leads the pack with 28 quotations, followed by Richard Nixon with 10, Lyndon Johnson and Jimmy Carter with 6, George Bush with 4, and Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan with 3. Again, Reagan's impact on the world, not to mention his reputation as the Great Communicator, seems to have bypassed Cambridge. However, when one tries to remember which Reagan phrases ought to be included, one is struck by how many of them are derivative: "city on a hill," "Evil Empire," "rendezvous with destiny," "Where's the Rest of Me?" (Surely John G. Magee's "I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth" was added to this edition because Peggy Noonan used those lines in the remarks she wrote for Reagan after the *Challenger* disaster, yet there is no reference to Reagan.)

Still, one would think that a few of his off-the-cuff remarks--"There you go again" or "We begin bombing in five minutes"--might warrant inclusion, along with some Reaganesque phrases about politics and government, such as "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" or "the ant heap of totalitarianism" or "The nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this earth is a temporary government agency."

Which reminds me, where is Barry Goldwater's "A government that is big enough to give

you all you want is big enough to take it all away"? (For that, you'll need Bruce Bohle's *Home Book of American Quotations*.)

One might assume that these curiosities don't represent any conscious bias on Kaplan's part, just a blindness to the political and economic changes going on in the world. Dictionaries of quotations are perforce behind the times; they represent the distilled wisdom, or at least memorabilia, of centuries. As market liberalism sweeps the world in the 21st century, its architects will get their due. Still, it's disappointing to see a 1992 edition offering *fewer* selections from thinkers such as Friedman and Hayek. And Kaplan's response to an earlier criticism about the lack of Reagan quotations suggests a determined refusal to grant Reagan an important place in the world. Presumably the same animus is in fact reflected in the lack of quotations from Hayek, Friedman, and so on.

In the final analysis, I wonder if it's a good idea to have eight books of quotations sitting next to my word processor. Perhaps that leads to too much reliance on the thoughts of others and too little original thought. As Emerson said, "I hate quotation. Tell me what you know."

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