



Boston Authors Club

December 2021 Newsletter

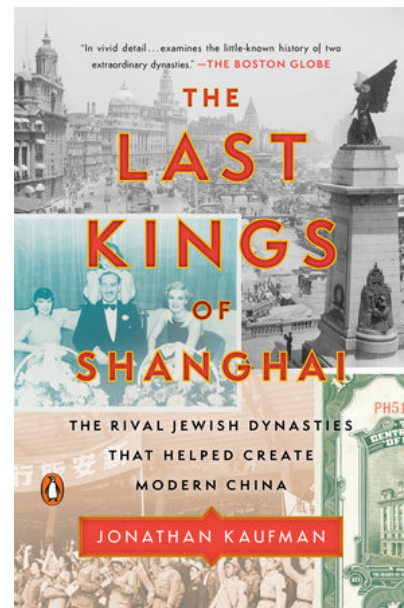
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Featured Interview With Jonathan Kaufman

Jonathan Kaufman is a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, nonfiction author, and the Director of the School of Journalism at Northeastern University. *The Last Kings of Shanghai*, Kaufman's sweeping historical saga about the intersection of family business and politics in 20th century China, was honored as a JWH finalist and it has been optioned as a movie or series. The heart of the book is a deeply human history of two Jewish family business dynasties and the family members who played a key role in the rise of Shanghai as an international center of commerce and culture.

In this interview, Kaufman talks about his inspiration for learning more about the Sassoon and Kadoorie families and their role in shaping 20th century Shanghai, and the research that shaped his book.



Q: What was your original motivation for writing *The Last Kings of Shanghai*?

As a foreign correspondent in China I kept coming upon signs of these families in Shanghai, and of a once robust Jewish presence: a once-glamorous hotel that had been built by a Jewish playboy millionaire in the 1920s; a grand mansion in the middle of Shanghai that looked like it belonged in "Downton Abbey" rather than Shanghai--and had once been the home to a prominent Jewish family, with more than 40 servants for three residents; the shadows of mezuzahs on the doorposts of tenements in a poor neighborhood of Shanghai, a relic of the 18,000 Jewish refugees who had found haven there during World War Two. As the questions kept building--who were these people? how did they get to Shanghai? what happened to them? I wanted to find some answers. And so my research began.

Q: In the Introduction, you mention that the city of Shanghai is as much a character in the book as the Kadoorie and Sassoon families you chronicle. Could you talk more about what you meant?

Shanghai is by far the most interesting and compelling city in China. It is the city where many Chinese

first encountered the West and capitalism--with good and bad results. It was also the place where the communist party was founded. It was a city of extremes--great wealth and great poverty, globalization and fierce nationalism, turbulent politics and a thriving cultural and social scene. It was like writing a book about London, or New York or Paris--a world-class city shaped the people who lived there and that was also shaped by these two families.

Q: It's clear that an amazing amount of research went into this book. How long did it take you from the original idea to the finished manuscript?

About five years. The research took me literally around the world, from Hong Kong to Shanghai, to London and Jerusalem, and to New York and Dallas. These were global families, and their archives, along with current family members, were scattered across the globe. I was fortunate that the families shared so many archives and stories with me.

Q: Did you develop a special affinity or feeling for any particular member of the Sassoon or the Kadoorie family as you learned about each of them?

The book has been optioned for a movie or series--and certainly if one is made, Victor Sassoon, the playboy millionaire who presided over Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s will be the star. He threw lavish parties, had multiple affairs and, at a crucial moment, played a pivotal role in saving 18,000 Jewish refugees who were fleeing Nazism. I also came to admire Lawrence Kadoorie, who turned out to be very prescient about China and did all he could to rebuild Hong Kong after the Second World War and maintain cooperation with China. For many years, Lawrence lived under the shadow of his father. When he took over the dynasty he not only drove it to new financial heights--the Kadoories today are one of the richest families in the world, worth more than \$13 billion--but also helped bridge the gaps between the West and China

Q: Are you currently working on any research projects that might become your next book?

Yes, I am working a book on the 1980s and how that decade transformed American business, politics and media in ways that laid the groundwork for the world we live in today

Interview by Many J Cronin

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER!

A cordial reminder that your membership is up for renewal in January.

Please support the BAC's plans for providing members with more programs and services in 2022 by renewing your membership today.

authors!
AUTHORS!

**SPECIAL JANUARY NEWSLETTER
FEATURING BAC MEMBERS'
RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND 2022
PLANS**

**Submit your news by 12/28/21 to
bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com
THANKS!**



STARTING UP SMARTER: WHY FOUNDERS OVER 50 BUILD BETTER COMPANIES

Mary J Cronin just published *Starting Up Smarter*, featuring companies that are making a positive impact through solar energy, health care, vegan fast food, recyclable consumer packaging, and innovative water filtration.

For more about *Starting Up Smarter*, [click here](#).

PRESIDENT'S NOTE: December Musings

Give a book!

'Tis the season of giving again. I'm sure I don't have to suggest to any of our BAC membership that books make wonderful gifts, nor that there are many fantastic local independent bookstores from which you can buy books. I will actually leave the suggestions to my muse – and I'm sure the muse of many of you – Emily Dickinson.

“There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry –“

she wrote in one of her poems. Like the great majority of her poems, this one bore no title. Today it is either known by one of the numbering systems developed to catalogue her oeuvre (in this case, #1286), or by its first line. I love this poem because, as usual, Dickinson managed in a few sparse words to capture that ineffable feeling so many of us have when we get lost in a book.

So yes, give a book. You're giving a ticket to a journey, setting someone on a voyage to places known and unknown, casting someone off on a boat that will take them on magical adventures.

Happy reading, happy holidays, and all best wishes for 2022!



Julie Dobrow
BAC President

Yesteryear at the BAC: When Hundreds of Boston Authors Frolicked for the Holidays

“A Twelfth Night Frolic was held at Hotel Vendome Monday evening, January 6, by the Boston Authors' Club, with perhaps a hundred and twenty-five members and guests present.” So reports a note in the January 6, 1902, Journal of Education. The Vendome, pictured here, was built in 1871. Beside being the pinnacle of elegance at the time, it was the first hotel in the country to sport electric lights, lights whose installation was overseen by Thomas Edison himself.



THE HOTEL VENDOME (J. W. WOLCOTT, PROPRIETOR),
Commonwealth Avenue, corner of Dartmouth Street.

We will nod politely to the estimable Julia Ward Howe, happily frolicking at the head table with Miss Bertha Runckle, and Mrs. Boswell Field, and and turn our attention to remarks by the evening's keynote speaker, then editor of the Atlantic Monthly, Bliss Perry. (I will resist the urge to call his address a blissful frolic.)

Perry extolled the fellowship of authors, which was due in his view to reading each other's works. The subject of our previous column might have opined that a sense of shared authorial suffering might also contribute to the camaraderie. Perry concluded his address by saying that the fame of the artist is as secure as any human thing can be.

Boston Authors Club stalwart, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, took Perry up on his point about lasting fame. Higginson was just back from doing research on the most-read poets at the British Museum. “The imperturbable judgment of this great library,” Higginson said, “gives them in this proportion: Tennyson 250, Longfellow 200, Lowell and Whittier about 100 each, Poe seventy-five.” The reporter for the *Journal of Education* didn't record what these numbers counted. Readers? Poems? Units of fame? Level of fame security?

A notable member of the Boston Authors Club, Mark Twain sent regrets. “Dear Miss Winslow - If I were there I should rejoice and be glad, and should skip like the lambs on a thousand hills, if lambs do that,

and if it would be decorous in a person of my age to act similarly - but I am not there, the distance is great, the time is winter, and in my gray wisdom I give you hearty thanks for inviting me, and stick to my hearthstone. Sincere'y yours, Clemens. Riverdale-on-the-Hudson, Dec. 14, 1901.

I'll bet Clemens could frolic with the best of 'em.

By Scott Guthery

Become a member for 2022!

Membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#).

If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:

**Nancy Tupper Ling
Boston Authors Club
1600 Providence Highway #247
Walpole MA 02081**

| BOSTON AUTHORS CLUB | bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com |

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