



On the Bookshelf



BY MICHAEL GILTZ

The Discoverers/Daniel J. Boorstin

First and foremost, *The Discoverers* is a history book. However, it is a superlative history book, one of those rare textbooks that is intelligently written with a dash of humor and almost addictively fascinating.

A major key to Boorstin's success is that he approaches history as a story. Columbus and Michelangelo are not portrayed as one-dimensional figures; they are treated as flesh and blood people, as characters that are developed by exploring the culture around them and the motives that drove them.

Boorstin breathes life into the clay figures of the men that have been dead to us for so long. Giants like DaVinci are portrayed as real people. This literary treatment of discoverers gives us an historical perspective that is much more accurate than the stilted players of more pedantic history books.

The Discoverers is so named because of another unique approach of Boorstin. He views history as a constant discovery, as "... man's search to know his world and himself." This leads to an untraditional approach to the presentation of history.

Rather than structure his tale along a timeline, Boorstin chose to classify man's discovery into four categories. This allows him to roam around and delve into the past at will. For example, the first

category is "Time" and in one paragraph our guide jumps from ancient Greece to Egypt to Babylon.

However refreshing Boorstin's insights into the main areas of discovery may be, the true delight of this book is the care he takes in selecting little side-trips. At one point, not only do we learn where,



when and by whom the modern calendar was adopted, but we are also let in on the petty politics and religious squabbles that helped shape it.

Still, this is a history book and, like any voyage of discovery, the going gets rough at times. But, after a little plodding along, the reader is invariably rewarded with the thrill of an uncharted vista or new horizon, not to mention the humorous and idiosyncratic baubles that litter the path.

The Discoverers is a journey well worth embarking on. ■