If you are a Philadelphian, a lover of art, or a habitué of museums, you likely have a Barnes story. Probably not a story about the modern home of the collection, designed by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien and opened in 2012, but rather one about the saga of trying to visit Dr. Albert C. Barnes’s famous collection of postmodernist art while it was still housed in the building the collector had built in Philadelphia’s Main Line district in the 1920s. Stories of trying to scale the walls of that compound were legendary, the stuff that museum fans dined out on for generations.

My own most memorable attempt at getting into the Barnes involved hosting a visiting curator of a distinguished collection who had written and called the Barnes Foundation for weeks, trying to arrange a visit during a daylong stopover in Philadelphia. “Don’t worry, with our credentials, we’ll get in,” I told her. We didn’t. Getting past the gatehouse was a near impossibility back then. Albert Barnes had left his collection in a trust that limited visitation to very small numbers, with an initial plan that would provide access for in-depth study of his paintings to a fortunate few. Those few could glimpse an unbelievable collection of art treasures installed in a unique style that was all Barnes’s own, juxtaposing works by Matisse, Cezanne, Renoir, and Picasso with classical works and lines of similarity seen in early American furniture and hardware, African carving, and other objects.

Barnes’s limited visitation led to controversy for generations. My tale and most of the others I’ve heard still paled compared to those of a now-deceased friend and colleague, who arrived with a bus full of art-loving senior citizens for an Elderhostel class, to be charged by a camera-wielding neighbor screaming, “You’re not students! You’re old!” Neighbors saw themselves as the guardians of Barnes’s restrictive visitation program on the one hand, and protectors of their own quiet Main Line streets on the other. By the end of the twentieth century, that controversy led to a movement that would eventually move the entire collection to central Philadelphia’s Benjamin Franklin Parkway. To call that move “controversial” would be an understatement.

The Barnes Collection—its contents, its interpretation, its location, and its future—have often been topics of intense debate and Neil L. Rudenstine unpacks that story in The House of Barnes: The Man, The Collection, The Controversy. A longtime faculty member and administrator at Princeton and
president of Harvard from 1991 to 2001, Rudenstine was invited to join the Barnes Foundation’s board in 2005, just after a court decision that permitted the foundation to move its art collection to downtown Philadelphia. Prior to joining the board at that time, Rudenstine conducted an extensive exploration of the foundation’s archives and relevant documents that revealed how Barnes acquired his collection, how he comprehended it and its mission of education that grew out of it, and the often-stormy history of the public’s access to the increasingly famous works in the second half of the twentieth century.

Rudenstine explores the mind of Albert Barnes and how the Philadelphia pharmaceuticals innovator acquired great wealth in business and greater fame (and some infamy) as an art collector and amateur scholar, and the legacy that Barnes’s collecting left after the doctor’s death in a 1951 automobile accident. “Because Albert C. Barnes and his dominant personality lie at the heart of the saga, there is inevitably a major focus on him and his many conflicting impulses and ideas” (1), the author states. In the pages that follow, Rudenstine details the complex nature of Albert Barnes, whose personality might be politely summed up as “challenging,” but whose intelligence and knack for both medicine and marketing were undeniable. As Barnes’s wealth grew, so too did his ability to travel to Europe and acquire works of art far outside the mainstream of collectors of his day.

Americans are generally uncomfortable with the concept of “collectors,” and that discomfort is at the root of some of the remaining controversy surrounding Albert Barnes and the objects he bought, studied, and discussed. Barnes was a very important collector and, as Rudenstine explains it, his personality made that process of collecting a fascinating saga. Barnes’s 1912 trip to Paris is a case in point. Arriving in the midst of the American art collecting community, Barnes held meetings that were not always successful. “In temperament, manner, and style, Barnes could hardly have been more different from this Parisian expatriate colony” (46). The author’s description of the brusque Philadelphian asking Gertrude Stein how much she’d paid Picasso for his now-iconic portrait of her (and his shock that Picasso had given the painting to her), his following of Barnes as he entered studios and galleries (and often offended their proprietors), relate the beginnings of why the collection became more and more controversial once Barnes returned to America and published his theories on *The Art of Painting* (1925) and other works.

A critical moment in Barnes’s developing commitment to his own beliefs of art interpretation was his loan of items from his collection to a show at
the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1923, a moment in which Philadelphia’s art establishment ridiculed his treasures that created a permanent, significant rift between the contentious collector and his contemporaries. “It became easy for him to see all hostility as motivated by personal animus, academic bias or social-class prejudice. It was not difficult for him to slip into the role of victim surrounded by philistines, or a heroic lone defender of truth in art. Indeed, he could fall back on either or both of these roles quite naturally because he had (whether consciously or not) been cultivating them for so many years” (120).

By the time of Barnes’s death, the items in his collection were growing in recognition, a fact almost matched by growing resentments among some factions of the many restrictions he had placed on their visitation. The doctor had dangled his collection before several institutions of higher education, each with negative results. Sarah Lawrence College president Harold Lawrence summed up his anger at the collector’s condescension: “Let’s get this straight . . . There is nothing you have that I want. As far as I’m concerned you can stuff your money, your pictures, your iron work, your antiques, and the whole goddamn thing right up the Schuylkill River, Pennsylvania, or the Barnes Foundation chimney. You are the one who wrote me, invited me up, talked my head off, tried to make me take your course . . . All I’ve done is try to be polite to you because you are a friend of John Dewey’s and he thinks a lot of you” (141).

The debatable aspects of the collection continued in the decades following Dr. Barnes’s death. While his supporters loved their time in the foundation’s home in Merion, a growing group of art lovers balked at the limited access that Barnes has established. With an administrator’s eye for the bottom line, Rudenstine explicates the growing financial problems plaguing Albert Barnes’s legacy, where investments did not keep up with financial requirements, the collector’s imposed limits on staff salaries did not keep up with inflation, and technological change allowed expanded access to the foundation’s images, proscribed by Barnes’s founding documents of the foundation. All of these factors, and a growing rift between potential visitors and the Barnes Foundation neighbors who wanted to preserve the serenity of their neighborhood, led to the movement to move the collection into more accessible—and more visited—galleries in Philadelphia.

Rudenstine’s book is an important contribution to the study of museums and collections in Pennsylvania (and the nation), and his study of the furor over the collection’s move is a much needed scholarly approach to contrast with Don Argott’s fascinating, if one-sided 2009 documentary *The Art of*
the Steal. Rudenstine’s book ends with the Barnes Collection’s move. Future studies can pick up where he has left off, exploring the exact recreation of the Merion galleries along the parkway, the continuing relevance of Barnes’s ideas about his collection’s presentation and display, and the nature of art and museums in a digital world.

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Rather than repeating the oft-told and sometimes monotonous details of the Lincoln assassination, Martha Hodes’s *Mourning Lincoln* explores the social reactions to the assassination, using diaries, letters, newspaper articles, sermons, and other primary sources. She offers a regional investigation of the aftermath of Lincoln’s assassination, highlighting three individuals who exemplify the differing factions in place at the conclusion of the Civil War. The abolitionists Albert and Sarah Browne from Massachusetts are the first two, and the third is Rodney Dorman, a staunch secessionist from Jacksonville, Florida. Using these figures as representatives of the whole, Hodes is able to compare and contrast the myriad reactions to Lincoln’s death. While the book does indeed achieve its stated goal and produce insightful thoughts, it is not without deficiencies and flaws.

Using the diaries and personal correspondence of the highlighted individuals, Hodes shows the reader how vastly different and complicated the reactions to the assassination were. Here is where the book’s stated purpose truly succeeds. Hodes meticulously chronicles the opposing divisions and viewpoints that existed as a result of the War Between the States. She is careful to note all sides, including abolitionists, average northerners and southerners, soldiers on both sides, avid secessionists, southern unionists, and Copperheads. The sources paint a picture of a nation that was not singularly mourning. Instead the reader is shown that many were in fact elated about the assassination, while others were deeply upset but for reasons far from love of the president. This compilation of opinions is a revealing look at the societal disharmony that permeated the times.