



"Nice guys finish seventh": False phrases, spurious sayings, and familiar misquotations

Ralph Keyes

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Leo Durocher is best remembered for saying, "Nice guys finish last." He never said it. What the Brooklyn Dodgers' manager did say, before a 1946 game with the New York Giants, was: "The nice guys are all over there. This is just one of hundreds of misquotations that Ralph Keyes dissects in this informative and entertaining book. Keyes discovered that "The opera ain't over 'til the fat lady sings," comes from an older saying: "Church ain't out 'til the fat lady sings." He determined that Winston Churchill did not originate the phrase "iron curtain," and never said, "blood, sweat and tears." Keyes also confirmed that "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing," was the slogan of UCLA coach Red Sanders, not Vince Lombardi. According to him such words voice observations we want made. Freud may never have said "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar," for example, but we certainly wish he had. Keyes calls this "the flypaper effect." Orphan quotes or comments by unknowns routinely gravitate to noted figures such as Churchill, Lincoln, or Twain. Other syndromes Keyes discusses include bumper stickering (condensing a long comment to make it more quotable), lip syncing (mouthing someone else's words as if they were your own), and retro-quoting (putting words in the mouths of famous dead people). "Nice Guys Finish Seventh" is a fascinating, eye-opening book. It's both fun to read and a reliable work of reference.

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