Books Recommended for HIS 108 Book Review

(These are not the only books that you can use for this assignment.)

1. *Island at the Center of the World*—Russell Shorto

When the British wrested New Amsterdam from the Dutch in 1664, the truth about its thriving, polyglot society began to disappear into myths about an island purchased for 24 dollars and a cartoonish peg-legged governor. But the story of the Dutch colony of New Netherland was merely lost, not destroyed: 12,000 pages of its records—recently declared a national treasure—are now being translated. Drawing on this remarkable archive, Russell Shorto has created a gripping narrative—a story of global sweep centered on a wilderness called Manhattan—that transforms our understanding of early America.

The Dutch colony pre-dated the “original” thirteen colonies, yet it seems strikingly familiar. Its capital was cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic, and its citizens valued free trade, individual rights, and religious freedom. Their champion was a progressive, young lawyer named Adriaen van der Donck, who emerges in these pages as a forgotten American patriot and whose political vision brought him into conflict with Peter Stuyvesant, the autocratic director of the Dutch colony. The struggle between these two strong-willed men laid the foundation for New York City and helped shape American culture. *The Island at the Center of the World* uncovers a lost world and offers a surprising new perspective on our own.


Boston in 1775 is an island city occupied by British troops after a series of incendiary incidents by patriots who range from sober citizens to thuggish vigilantes. After the Boston Tea Party, British and American soldiers and Massachusetts residents have warily maneuvered around each other until April 19, when violence finally erupts at Lexington and Concord. In June, however, with the city cut off from supplies by a British blockade and Patriot militia poised in siege, skirmishes give way to outright war in the Battle of Bunker Hill. It would be the bloodiest battle of the Revolution to come, and the point of no return for the rebellious colonists.

Philbrick brings a fresh perspective to every aspect of the story. He finds new characters, and new facets to familiar ones. The real work of choreographing rebellion falls to a thirty-three year old physician named Joseph Warren who emerges as the on-the-ground leader of the Patriot cause and is fated to die at Bunker Hill. Others in the cast include Paul Revere, Warren’s fiancé the poet Mercy Scollay, a newly recruited George Washington, the reluctant British combatant General Thomas Gage and his more bellicose successor William Howe, who leads the three charges at Bunker Hill and presides over the claustrophobic cauldron of a city under siege as both sides play a nervy game of brinkmanship for control.
With passion and insight, Philbrick reconstructs the revolutionary landscape—geographic and ideological—in a mesmerizing narrative of the robust, messy, blisteringly real origins of America.

3. **Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln** – Doris Kearns Goodwin

Acclaimed historian Doris Kearns Goodwin illuminates Lincoln’s political genius in this highly original work, as the one-term congressman and prairie lawyer rises from obscurity to prevail over three gifted rivals of national reputation to become president.

On May 18, 1860, William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, and Abraham Lincoln waited in their hometowns for the results from the Republican National Convention in Chicago. When Lincoln emerged as the victor, his rivals were dismayed and angry.

Throughout the turbulent 1850s, each had energetically sought the presidency as the conflict over slavery was leading inexorably to secession and civil war. That Lincoln succeeded, Goodwin demonstrates, was the result of a character that had been forged by experiences that raised him above his more privileged and accomplished rivals. He won because he possessed an extraordinary ability to put himself in the place of other men, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires.

It was this capacity that enabled Lincoln as president to bring his disgruntled opponents together, create the most unusual cabinet in history, and marshal their talents to the task of preserving the Union and winning the war.

We view the long, horrifying struggle from the vantage of the White House as Lincoln copes with incompetent generals, hostile congressmen, and his raucous cabinet. He overcomes these obstacles by winning the respect of his former competitors, and in the case of Seward, finds a loyal and crucial friend to see him through.

This brilliant multiple biography is centered on Lincoln’s mastery of men and how it shaped the most significant presidency in the nation’s history.

4. **Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence** – Carol Berkin

The American Revolution was a home-front war that brought scarcity, bloodshed, and danger into the life of every American. In this groundbreaking history, Carol Berkin shows us how women played a vital role throughout the conflict.

The women of the Revolution were most active at home, organizing boycotts of British goods, raising funds for the fledgling nation, and managing the family business while struggling to
maintain a modicum of normalcy as husbands, brothers and fathers died. Yet Berkin also reveals that it was not just the men who fought on the front lines, as in the story of Margaret Corbin, who was crippled for life when she took her husband’s place beside a cannon at Fort Monmouth. This incisive and comprehensive history illuminates a fascinating and unknown side of the struggle for American independence.

5. **Facing East from Indian Country: A Narrative History of Early America** – Daniel K. Richter

In the beginning, North America was Indian country. But only in the beginning. After the opening act of the great national drama, Native Americans yielded to the westward rush of European settlers.

Or so the story usually goes. Yet, for three centuries after Columbus, Native people controlled most of eastern North America and profoundly shaped its destiny. In *Facing East from Indian Country*, Daniel K. Richter keeps Native people center-stage throughout the story of the origins of the United States.

Viewed from Indian country, the sixteenth century was an era in which Native people discovered Europeans and struggled to make sense of a new world. Well into the seventeenth century, the most profound challenges to Indian life came less from the arrival of a relative handful of European colonists than from the biological, economic, and environmental forces the newcomers unleashed. Drawing upon their own traditions, Indian communities reinvented themselves and carved out a place in a world dominated by transatlantic European empires. In 1776, however, when some of Britain’s colonists rebelled against that imperial world, they overturned the system that had made Euro-American and Native coexistence possible. Eastern North America only ceased to be an Indian country because the revolutionaries denied the continent’s first peoples a place in the nation they were creating.

In rediscovering early America as Indian country, Richter employs the historian’s craft to challenge cherished assumptions about times and places we thought we knew well, revealing Native American experiences at the core of the nation’s birth and identity.

6. **The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828** – Lynn Hudson Parsons

The 1828 presidential election, which pitted Major General Andrew Jackson against incumbent John Quincy Adams, has long been hailed as a watershed moment in American political history. It was the contest in which an unlettered, hot-tempered southwestern frontiersman, trumpeted by his supporters as a genuine man of the people, soundly defeated a New England "aristocrat" whose education and political resume were as impressive as any ever seen in
American public life. It was, many historians have argued, the country's first truly democratic presidential election. It was also the election that opened a Pandora's box of campaign tactics, including coordinated media, get-out-the-vote efforts, fund-raising, organized rallies, opinion polling, campaign paraphernalia, ethnic voting blocs, "opposition research," and smear tactics.

In The Birth of Modern Politics, Parsons shows that the Adams-Jackson contest also began a national debate that is eerily contemporary, pitting those whose cultural, social, and economic values were rooted in community action for the common good against those who believed the common good was best served by giving individuals as much freedom as possible to promote their own interests. The book offers fresh and illuminating portraits of both Adams and Jackson and reveals how, despite their vastly different backgrounds, they had started out with many of the same values, admired one another, and had often been allies in common causes. But by 1828, caught up in a shifting political landscape, they were plunged into a competition that separated them decisively from the Founding Fathers' era and ushered in a style of politics that is still with us today.


In this "artful, informative, and delightful" (William H. McNeill, New York Review of Books) book, Jared Diamond convincingly argues that geographical and environmental factors shaped the modern world. Societies that had had a head start in food production advanced beyond the hunter-gatherer stage, and then developed religion -- as well as nasty germs and potent weapons of war -- and adventured on sea and land to conquer and decimate preliterate cultures. A major advance in our understanding of human societies, Guns, Germs, and Steel chronicles the way that the modern world came to be and stunningly dismantles racially based theories of human history. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, the Phi Beta Kappa Award in Science, the Rhone-Poulenc Prize, and the Commonwealth club of California's Gold Medal.

8. **George Washington’s Secret Six: The Spy Ring That Saved the American Revolution** – Brian Kilmeade & Don Yaeger

When General George Washington beat a hasty retreat from New York City in August 1776, many thought the American Revolution might soon be over. Instead, Washington rallied—thanks in large part to a little-known, top-secret group called the Culper Spy Ring.

Washington realized that he couldn’t beat the British with military might, so he recruited a sophisticated and deeply secretive intelligence network to infiltrate New York. So carefully guarded were the members’ identities that one spy’s name was not uncovered until the twentieth century, and one remains unknown today. But by now, historians have discovered enough information about the ring’s activities to piece together evidence that these six individuals turned the tide of the war.
Drawing on extensive research, Brian Kilmeade and Don Yaeger have painted compelling portraits of George Washington’s secret six: Robert Townsend, the reserved Quaker merchant and reporter who headed the Culper Ring, keeping his identity secret even from Washington; Austin Roe, the tavern keeper who risked his employment and his life in order to protect the mission; Caleb Brewster, the brash young longshoreman who loved baiting the British and agreed to ferry messages between Connecticut and New York; Abraham Woodhull, the curmudgeonly (and surprisingly nervous) Long Island bachelor with business and family excuses for traveling to Manhattan; James Rivington, the owner of a posh coffeehouse and print shop where high-ranking British officers gossiped about secret operations; Agent 355, a woman whose identity remains unknown but who seems to have used her wit and charm to coax officers to share vital secrets.

In *George Washington’s Secret Six*, Townsend and his fellow spies finally receive their due, taking their place among the pantheon of heroes of the American Revolution.

**9. My Thoughts Be Bloody: The Bitter Rivalry Between Edwin and John Wilkes Booth that Led to an American Tragedy – Nora Titone**

The scene of John Wilkes Booth shooting Abraham Lincoln in Ford’s Theatre is among the most vivid and indelible images in American history. The literal story of what happened on April 14, 1865, is familiar: Lincoln was killed by John Wilkes Booth, a lunatic enraged by the Union victory and the prospect of black citizenship. Yet who Booth really was—besides a killer—is less well known. The magnitude of his crime has obscured for generations a startling personal story that was integral to his motivation.

*My Thoughts Be Bloody*, a sweeping family saga, revives an extraordinary figure whose name has been missing, until now, from the story of President Lincoln’s death. Edwin Booth, John Wilkes’s older brother by four years, was in his day the biggest star of the American stage. He won his celebrity at the precocious age of nineteen, before the Civil War began, when John Wilkes was a schoolboy. Without an account of Edwin Booth, author Nora Titone argues, the real story of Lincoln’s assassin has never been told. Using an array of private letters, diaries, and reminiscences of the Booth family, Titone has uncovered a hidden history that reveals the reasons why John Wilkes Booth became this country’s most notorious assassin.

These ambitious brothers, born to theatrical parents, enacted a tale of mutual jealousy and resentment worthy of a Shakespearean tragedy. From childhood, the stage-struck brothers were rivals for the approval of their father, legendary British actor Junius Brutus Booth. After his death, Edwin and John Wilkes were locked in a fierce contest to claim his legacy of fame. This strange family history and powerful sibling rivalry were the crucibles of John Wilkes’s character, exacerbating his political passions and driving him into a life of conspiracy.

To re-create the lost world of Edwin and John Wilkes Booth, this book takes readers on a
panoramic tour of nineteenth-century America, from the streets of 1840s Baltimore to the gold fields of California, from the jungles of the Isthmus of Panama to the glittering mansions of Gilded Age New York. Edwin, ruthlessly competitive and gifted, did everything he could to lock his younger brother out of the theatrical game. As he came of age, John Wilkes found his plans for stardom thwarted by his older sibling’s meteoric rise. Their divergent paths—Edwin’s an upward race to riches and social prominence, and John’s a downward spiral into failure and obscurity—kept pace with the hardening of their opposite political views and their mutual dislike.

The details of the conspiracy to kill Lincoln have been well documented elsewhere. My Thoughts Be Bloody tells a new story, one that explains for the first time why Lincoln’s assassin decided to conspire against the president in the first place, and sets that decision in the context of a bitterly divided family—and nation. By the end of this riveting journey, readers will see Abraham Lincoln’s death less as the result of the war between the North and South and more as the climax of a dark struggle between two brothers who never wore the uniform of soldiers, except on stage.

10. The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family – Annette Gordon Reed

This epic work—named a best book of the year by the Washington Post, Time, the Los Angeles Times, Amazon, the San Francisco Chronicle, and a notable book by the New York Times—tells the story of the Hemingses, whose close blood ties to our third president had been systematically expunged from American history until very recently. Now, historian and legal scholar Annette Gordon-Reed traces the Hemings family from its origins in Virginia in the 1700s to the family’s dispersal after Jefferson’s death in 1826.


“I have found it.” These words, uttered by the man who first discovered gold on the American River in 1848, triggered the most astonishing mass movement of peoples since the Crusades. California’s gold drew fortune-seekers from the ends of the earth. It accelerated America’s imperial expansion and exacerbated the tensions that exploded in the Civil War. And, as H. W. Brands makes clear in this spellbinding book, the Gold Rush inspired a new American dream—the “dream of instant wealth, won by audacity and good luck.”

Brands tells his epic story from multiple perspectives: of adventurers John and Jessie Fremont, entrepreneur Leland Stanford, and the wry observer Samuel Clemens—side by side with prospectors, soldiers, and scoundrels. He imparts a visceral sense of the distances they traveled, the suffering they endured, and the fortunes they made and lost. Impressive in its scholarship and overflowing with life, The Age of Gold is history in the grand traditions of Stephen Ambrose and David McCullough.
12. *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* – DeAnne Blanton & Lauren Cook Wilke

From Publishers Weekly

At least 250 women served-disguised as men-in the ranks of both North and South during the Civil War. Although works about female Civil War soldiers have appeared over the past several years, this volume, by National Archives archivist Blanton and Cook, a Fayetteville State University employee in North Carolina, makes a nice summation. After covering the major combat actions in which women served (and in which several were killed), the authors reconstruct the reasons why women entered the armed forces: many were simply patriotic, while others followed their husbands or lovers and yet others yearned to break free from the constraints that Victorian society had laid on them as women. Blanton and Cook detail women soldiers in combat, on the march, in camp and in the hospital, where many were discovered after getting sick. Some even wound up in grim prisons kept by both sides, while a few hid pregnancies and were only discovered after giving birth. Many times the rank and file hid them from officers, who were duty-bound to discharge women if they were found out. Some remained in disguise for years after the war; Albert D.J. Cashier (nee Jennie Hodgers) of the 95th Illinois Infantry was only unmasked in 1911, when she suffered a fractured leg in an automobile accident. The authors make a strong case that the controversial Loreta Janeta Velazquez (alias Lt. Harry T. Buford, C.S.A.) actually did perform most of the deeds she wrote about in her 1876 memoir, which has previously been discounted as fiction by most Civil War historians. Solid research by the authors, including a look at the careers of a few women soldiers after the war, makes this a compelling book that belongs in every Civil War library.

13. *When America First Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money in the Age of Sail* – Eric Jay Dolin

Ancient China collides with newfangled America in this epic tale of opium smugglers, sea pirates, and dueling clipper ships.

Brilliantly illuminating one of the least-understood areas of American history, best-selling author Eric Jay Dolin now traces our fraught relationship with China back to its roots: the unforgiving nineteenth-century seas that separated a brash, rising naval power from a battered ancient empire. It is a prescient fable for our time, one that surprisingly continues to shed light on our modern relationship with China. Indeed, the furious trade in furs, opium, and bêche-de-mer—a rare sea cucumber delicacy—might have catalyzed America’s emerging economy, but it also sparked an ecological and human rights catastrophe of such epic proportions that the reverberations can still be felt today. Peopled with fascinating characters—from the "Financier of the Revolution" Robert Morris to the Chinese emperor Qianlong, who considered foreigners inferior beings—this page-turning saga of pirates and politicians, coolies and concubines becomes a must-read for any fan of Nathaniel

In August 1862, after decades of broken treaties, increasing hardship, and relentless encroachment on their lands, a group of Dakota warriors convened a council at the tepee of their leader, Little Crow. Knowing the strength and resilience of the young American nation, Little Crow counseled caution, but anger won the day. Forced to either lead his warriors in a war he knew they could not win or leave them to their fates, he declared, “[Little Crow] is not a coward: he will die with you.”

So began six weeks of intense conflict along the Minnesota frontier as the Dakotas clashed with settlers and federal troops, all the while searching for allies in their struggle. Once the uprising was smashed and the Dakotas captured, a military commission was convened, which quickly found more than three hundred Indians guilty of murder. President Lincoln, embroiled in the most devastating period of the Civil War, personally intervened in order to spare the lives of 265 of the condemned men, but the toll on the Dakota nation was still staggering: a way of life destroyed, a tribe forcibly relocated to barren and unfamiliar territory, and 38 Dakota warriors hanged—the largest government-sanctioned execution in American history.

Scott W. Berg recounts the conflict through the stories of several remarkable characters, including Little Crow, who foresaw how ruinous the conflict would be for his tribe; Sarah Wakefield, who had been captured by the Dakotas, then vilified as an “Indian lover” when she defended them; Minnesota bishop Henry Benjamin Whipple, who was a tireless advocate for the Indians’ cause; and Lincoln, who transcended his own family history to pursue justice.

Written with uncommon immediacy and insight, 38 Nooses details these events within the larger context of the Civil War, the history of the Dakota people, and the subsequent United States–Indian wars. It is a revelation of an overlooked but seminal moment in American history.

15. The Bitter Waters of Medicine Creek: A Tragic Clash Between White and Native America – Richard Kluger

The riveting story of a dramatic confrontation between Native Americans and white settlers, a compelling conflict that unfolded in the newly created Washington Territory from 1853 to 1857.

When appointed Washington’s first governor, Isaac Ingalls Stevens, an ambitious military man turned politician, had one goal: to persuade (peacefully if possible) the Indians of the Puget Sound region to turn over their ancestral lands to the federal government. In return, they were
to be consigned to reservations unsuitable for hunting, fishing, or grazing, their traditional means of sustaining life. The result was an outbreak of violence and rebellion, a tragic episode of frontier oppression and injustice.

With his trademark empathy and scholarly acuity, Pulitzer Prize–winner Richard Kluger recounts the impact of Stevens’s program on the Nisqually tribe, whose chief, Leschi, sparked the native resistance movement. Stevens was determined to succeed at any cost: his hasty treaty negotiations with the Indians, marked by deceit, threat, and misrepresentation, inflamed his opponents. Leschi, resolved to save more than a few patches of his people’s lush homelands, unwittingly turned his tribe—and himself most of all—into victims of the governor’s relentless wrath. The conflict between these two complicated and driven men—and their supporters—explosively and enormously at odds with each other, was to have echoes far into the future.


In this original and illuminating book, Denise A. Spellberg reveals a little-known but crucial dimension of the story of American religious freedom—a drama in which Islam played a surprising role. In 1765, eleven years before composing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson bought a Qur’an. This marked only the beginning of his lifelong interest in Islam, and he would go on to acquire numerous books on Middle Eastern languages, history, and travel, taking extensive notes on Islam as it relates to English common law. Jefferson sought to understand Islam notwithstanding his personal disdain for the faith, a sentiment prevalent among his Protestant contemporaries in England and America. But unlike most of them, by 1776 Jefferson could imagine Muslims as future citizens of his new country.

Based on groundbreaking research, Spellberg compellingly recounts how a handful of the Founders, Jefferson foremost among them, drew upon Enlightenment ideas about the toleration of Muslims (then deemed the ultimate outsiders in Western society) to fashion out of what had been a purely speculative debate a practical foundation for governance in America. In this way, Muslims, who were not even known to exist in the colonies, became the imaginary outer limit for an unprecedented, uniquely American religious pluralism that would also encompass the actual despised minorities of Jews and Catholics. The rancorous public dispute concerning the inclusion of Muslims, for which principle Jefferson’s political foes would vilify him to the end of his life, thus became decisive in the Founders’ ultimate judgment not to establish a Protestant nation, as they might well have done.

As popular suspicions about Islam persist and the numbers of American Muslim citizenry grow into the millions, Spellberg’s revelatory understanding of this radical notion of the Founders is more urgent than ever. Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an is a timely look at the ideals that existed at our country’s creation, and their fundamental implications for our present and future.
17. **Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin** – Jill Lepore

From one of our most accomplished and widely admired historians, a revelatory portrait of Benjamin Franklin’s youngest sister and a history of history itself. Like her brother, Jane Franklin was a passionate reader, a gifted writer, and an astonishingly shrewd political commentator. Unlike him, she was a mother of twelve.

Benjamin Franklin, who wrote more letters to his sister than he wrote to anyone else, was the original American self-made man; his sister spent her life caring for her children. They left very different traces behind. Making use of an amazing cache of little-studied material, including documents, objects, and portraits only just discovered, Jill Lepore brings Jane Franklin to life in a way that illuminates not only this one woman but an entire world—a world usually lost to history. Lepore’s life of Jane Franklin, with its strikingly original vantage on her remarkable brother, is at once a wholly different account of the founding of the United States and one of the great untold stories of American history and letters: a life unknown.

18. **American Jezebel** – Eve LaPlante

In 1637, Anne Hutchinson, a forty-six-year-old midwife who was pregnant with her sixteenth child, stood before forty male judges of the Massachusetts General Court, charged with heresy and sedition. In a time when women could not vote, hold public office, or teach outside the home, the charismatic Hutchinson wielded remarkable political power. Her unconventional ideas had attracted a following of prominent citizens eager for social reform. Hutchinson defended herself brilliantly, but the judges, faced with a perceived threat to public order, banished her for behaving in a manner "not comely for [her] sex."

Written by one of Hutchinson's direct descendants, *American Jezebel* brings both balance and perspective to Hutchinson's story. It captures this American heroine's life in all its complexity, presenting her not as a religious fanatic, a cardboard feminist, or a raging crank—as some have portrayed her—but as a flesh-and-blood wife, mother, theologian, and political leader. The book narrates her dramatic expulsion from Massachusetts, after which her judges, still threatened by her challenges, promptly built Harvard College to enforce religious and social orthodoxies—making her the mid-wife to the nation's first college. In exile, she settled Rhode Island, becoming the only woman ever to co-found an American colony.

The seeds of the American struggle for women's and human rights can be found in the story of this one woman's courageous life. *American Jezebel* illuminates the origins of our modern
concepts of religious freedom, equal rights, and free speech, and showcases an extraordinary woman whose achievements are astonishing by the standards of any era.

19. White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain’s White Slaves in America—Don Jordan & Michael Walsh

White Cargo is the forgotten story of the thousands of Britons who lived and died in bondage in Britain's American colonies.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more than 300,000 white people were shipped to America as slaves. Urchins were swept up from London's streets to labor in the tobacco fields, where life expectancy was no more than two years. Brothels were raided to provide "breeders" for Virginia. Hopeful migrants were duped into signing as indentured servants, unaware they would become personal property who could be bought, sold, and even gambled away. Transported convicts were paraded for sale like livestock.

Drawing on letters crying for help, diaries, and court and government archives, Don Jordan and Michael Walsh demonstrate that the brutalities usually associated with black slavery alone were perpetrated on whites throughout British rule. The trade ended with American independence, but the British still tried to sell convicts in their former colonies, which prompted one of the most audacious plots in Anglo-American history.

This is a saga of exploration and cruelty spanning 170 years that has been submerged under the overwhelming memory of black slavery. White Cargo brings the brutal, uncomfortable story to the surface.


Our One Common Country explores one of the most interesting encounters of the Civil War. Famous in its day, the Hampton Roads Peace Conference of 1865 has never before been the subject of a book. In this highly readable, carefully documented book, James B. Conroy describes in fascinating detail what happened when President Lincoln, his Secretary of State, and three Confederate leaders came together to try to end the hostilities. Based on meticulous research, Conroy tells the story of the doomed peace negotiations through the characters who lived it. With a fresh and immediate perspective, Our One Common Country offers a thrilling and eye-opening look into the inability of our nation’s leaders to find a peaceful solution. The failure of the Hampton Roads Conference shaped the course of American history, and its lessons still resonate today.
21. *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* – Amanda Foreman

In this brilliant narrative, Amanda Foreman tells the fascinating story of the American Civil War—and the major role played by Britain and its citizens in that epic struggle. Between 1861 and 1865, thousands of British citizens volunteered for service on both sides of the Civil War. From the first cannon blasts on Fort Sumter to Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, they served as officers and infantrymen, sailors and nurses, blockade runners and spies. Through personal letters, diaries, and journals, Foreman introduces characters both humble and grand, while crafting a panoramic yet intimate view of the war on the front lines, in the prison camps, and in the great cities of both the Union and the Confederacy. In the drawing rooms of London and the offices of Washington, on muddy fields and aboard packed ships, Foreman reveals the decisions made, the beliefs held and contested, and the personal triumphs and sacrifices that ultimately led to the reunification of America.

22. *1776* – David McCullough

America’s beloved and distinguished historian presents, in a book of breathtaking excitement, drama, and narrative force, the stirring story of the year of our nation’s birth, 1776, interweaving, on both sides of the Atlantic, the actions and decisions that led Great Britain to undertake a war against her rebellious colonial subjects and that placed America’s survival in the hands of George Washington.

In this masterful book, David McCullough tells the intensely human story of those who marched with General George Washington in the year of the Declaration of Independence—when the whole American cause was riding on their success, without which all hope for independence would have been dashed and the noble ideals of the Declaration would have amounted to little more than words on paper.

Based on extensive research in both American and British archives, *1776* is a powerful drama written with extraordinary narrative vitality. It is the story of Americans in the ranks, men of every shape, size, and color, farmers, schoolteachers, shoemakers, no-accounts, and mere boys turned soldiers. And it is the story of the King’s men, the British commander, William Howe, and his highly disciplined redcoats who looked on their rebel foes with contempt and fought with a valor too little known.

Written as a companion work to his celebrated biography of John Adams, David McCullough’s *1776* is another landmark in the literature of American history.

23. *John Adams* – David McCullough
The Pulitzer Prize–winning, bestselling biography of America’s founding father and second president that was the basis for the acclaimed HBO series, brilliantly told by master historian David McCullough.

In this powerful, epic biography, David McCullough unfolds the adventurous life journey of John Adams, the brilliant, fiercely independent, often irascible, always honest Yankee patriot who spared nothing in his zeal for the American Revolution; who rose to become the second president of the United States and saved the country from blundering into an unnecessary war; who was learned beyond all but a few and regarded by some as “out of his senses”; and whose marriage to the wise and valiant Abigail Adams is one of the moving love stories in American history.

This is history on a grand scale—a book about politics and war and social issues, but also about human nature, love, religious faith, virtue, ambition, friendship, and betrayal, and the far-reaching consequences of noble ideas. Above all, John Adams is an enthralling, often surprising story of one of the most important and fascinating Americans who ever lived.

24. 1858: Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant and the War They Failed to See—Bruce Chadwick

As 1858 dawned, the men who would become the iconic figures of the Civil War had no idea it was about to occur: Jefferson Davis was dying, Robert E. Lee was on the verge of resigning from the military, and William Tecumseh Sherman had been reduced to running a roadside food stand. By the end of 1858, the lives of these men would be forever changed, and the North and South were set on a collision course that would end with the deaths of 630,000 young men.

This is the story of seven men on the brink of a war that would transform them into American legends, and the events of the year that set our union on fire.

25. Jefferson and Hamilton: The Rivalry that Forged a Nation – John Ferling

A spellbinding history of the epic rivalry that shaped our republic: Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and their competing visions for America.

From the award-winning author of Almost a Miracle and The Ascent of George Washington, this is the rare work of scholarship that offers us irresistible human drama even as it enriches our understanding of deep themes in our nation’s history.

The decade of the 1790s has been called the “age of passion.” Fervor ran high as rival factions battled over the course of the new republic—each side convinced that the other’s goals would betray the legacy of the Revolution so recently fought and so dearly won. All understood as well that what was at stake was not a moment’s political advantage, but the future course of the
American experiment in democracy. In this epochal debate, no two figures loomed larger than Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton.

Both men were visionaries, but their visions of what the United States should be were diametrically opposed. Jefferson, a true revolutionary, believed passionately in individual liberty and a more egalitarian society, with a weak central government and greater powers for the states. Hamilton, a brilliant organizer and tactician, feared chaos and social disorder. He sought to build a powerful national government that could ensure the young nation’s security and drive it toward economic greatness.

Jefferson and Hamilton is the story of the fierce struggle—both public and, ultimately, bitterly personal—between these two titans. It ended only with the death of Hamilton in a pistol duel, felled by Aaron Burr, Jefferson’s vice president. Their competing legacies, like the twin strands of DNA, continue to shape our country to this day. Their personalities, their passions, and their bold dreams for America leap from the page in this epic new work from one of our finest historians.


When Abraham Lincoln sought to define the significance of the United States, he naturally looked back to the American Revolution. He knew that the Revolution not only had legally created the United States, but also had produced all of the great hopes and values of the American people. Our noblest ideals and aspirations—our commitments to freedom, constitutionalism, the well-being of ordinary people, and equality—came out of the Revolutionary era. Lincoln saw as well that the Revolution had convinced Americans that they were a special people with a special destiny to lead the world toward liberty. The Revolution, in short, gave birth to whatever sense of nationhood and national purpose Americans have had.

No doubt the story is a dramatic one: Thirteen insignificant colonies three thousand miles from the centers of Western civilization fought off British rule to become, in fewer than three decades, a huge, sprawling, rambunctious republic of nearly four million citizens. But the history of the American Revolution, like the history of the nation as a whole, ought not to be viewed simply as a story of right and wrong from which moral lessons are to be drawn. It is a complicated and at times ironic story that needs to be explained and understood, not blindly celebrated or condemned. How did this great revolution come about? What was its character? What were its consequences? These are the questions this short history seeks to answer. That it succeeds in such a profound and enthralling way is a tribute to Gordon Wood’s mastery of his subject, and of the historian’s craft.

27. 1775: A Good Year for Revolution – Kevin Phillips

In this major new work, iconoclastic historian and political chronicler Kevin Phillips upends the conventional reading of the American Revolution by debunking the myth that 1776 was the
struggle’s watershed year. Focusing on the great battles and events of 1775, Phillips surveys the political climate, economic structures, and military preparations of the crucial year that was the harbinger of revolution, tackling the eighteenth century with the same skill and perception he has shown in analyzing contemporary politics and economics. The result is a dramatic account brimming with original insights about the country we eventually became.

28. *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House*—Jon Meacham

Andrew Jackson, his intimate circle of friends, and his tumultuous times are at the heart of this remarkable book about the man who rose from nothing to create the modern presidency. Beloved and hated, venerated and reviled, Andrew Jackson was an orphan who fought his way to the pinnacle of power, bending the nation to his will in the cause of democracy. Jackson’s election in 1828 ushered in a new and lasting era in which the people, not distant elites, were the guiding force in American politics. Democracy made its stand in the Jackson years, and he gave voice to the hopes and the fears of a restless, changing nation facing challenging times at home and threats abroad. To tell the saga of Jackson’s presidency, acclaimed author Jon Meacham goes inside the Jackson White House. Drawing on newly discovered family letters and papers, he details the human drama—the family, the women, and the inner circle of advisers—that shaped Jackson’s private world through years of storm and victory.

One of our most significant yet dimly recalled presidents, Jackson was a battle-hardened warrior, the founder of the Democratic Party, and the architect of the presidency as we know it. His story is one of violence, sex, courage, and tragedy. With his powerful persona, his evident bravery, and his mystical connection to the people, Jackson moved the White House from the periphery of government to the center of national action, articulating a vision of change that challenged entrenched interests to heed the popular will—or face his formidable wrath. The greatest of the presidents who have followed Jackson in the White House—from Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt to FDR to Truman—have found inspiration in his example, and virtue in his vision.

Jackson was the most contradictory of men. The architect of the removal of Indians from their native lands, he was warmly sentimental and risked everything to give more power to ordinary citizens. He was, in short, a lot like his country: alternately kind and vicious, brilliant and blind; and a man who fought a lifelong war to keep the republic safe—no matter what it took.

29. *Founding Mothers*—Cokie Roberts

Cokie Roberts’s number one *New York Times* bestseller, *We Are Our Mothers’ Daughters*, examined the nature of women’s roles throughout history and led *USA Today* to praise her as a "custodian of time-honored values." Her second bestseller, *From This Day Forward*, written with her husband, Steve Roberts, described American marriages throughout history, including the romance of John and Abigail Adams. Now Roberts returns with *Founding Mothers*, an intimate and illuminating look at the fervently patriotic and passionate women whose tireless
pursuits on behalf of their families -- and their country -- proved just as crucial to the forging of a new nation as the rebellion that established it.

While much has been written about the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, battled the British, and framed the Constitution, the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters they left behind have been little noticed by history. Roberts brings us the women who fought the Revolution as valiantly as the men, often defending their very doorsteps. While the men went off to war or to Congress, the women managed their businesses, raised their children, provided them with political advice, and made it possible for the men to do what they did. The behind-the-scenes influence of these women -- and their sometimes very public activities -- was intelligent and pervasive.

Drawing upon personal correspondence, private journals, and even favored recipes, Roberts reveals the often surprising stories of these fascinating women, bringing to life the everyday trials and extraordinary triumphs of individuals like Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Deborah Read Franklin, Eliza Pinckney, Catherine Littlefield Green, Esther DeBerdt Reed, and Martha Washington -- proving that without our exemplary women, the new country might never have survived.

Social history at its best, *Founding Mothers* unveils the drive, determination, creative insight, and passion of the other patriots, the women who raised our nation. Roberts proves beyond a doubt that like every generation of American women that has followed, the founding mothers used the unique gifts of their gender -- courage, pluck, sadness, joy, energy, grace, sensitivity, and humor -- to do what women do best, put one foot in front of the other in remarkable circumstances and carry on.


Nathaniel Philbrick became an internationally renowned author with his National Book Award winning *In the Heart of the Sea*, hailed as spellbinding by *Time* magazine. In *Mayflower*, Philbrick casts his spell once again, giving us a fresh and extraordinarily vivid account of our most sacred national myth: the voyage of the *Mayflower* and the settlement of Plymouth Colony. From the *Mayflower*'s arduous Atlantic crossing to the eruption of King Philip’s War between colonists and natives decades later, Philbrick reveals in this electrifying history of the Pilgrims a fifty-five-year epic, at once tragic and heroic, that still resonates with us today.

31. *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* by Eric Foner

A deeply entrenched institution, slavery lived on legally and commercially even in the northern states that had abolished it after the American Revolution. Slaves could be found in the streets of New York well after abolition, traveling with owners doing business with the city’s major banks, merchants, and manufacturers. New York was also home to the North’s largest free black community, making it a magnet for fugitive slaves seeking
refuge. Slave catchers and gangs of kidnappers roamed the city, seizing free blacks, often children, and sending them south to slavery.

To protect fugitives and fight kidnappings, the city's free blacks worked with white abolitionists to organize the New York Vigilance Committee in 1835. In the 1840s vigilance committees proliferated throughout the North and began collaborating to dispatch fugitive slaves from the upper South, Washington, and Baltimore, through Philadelphia and New York, to Albany, Syracuse, and Canada. These networks of antislavery resistance, centered on New York City, became known as the underground railroad. Forced to operate in secrecy by hostile laws, courts, and politicians, the city’s underground-railroad agents helped more than 3,000 fugitive slaves reach freedom between 1830 and 1860. Until now, their stories have remained largely unknown, their significance little understood.

Building on fresh evidence—including a detailed record of slave escapes secretly kept by Sydney Howard Gay, one of the key organizers in New York—Foner elevates the underground railroad from folklore to sweeping history. The story is inspiring—full of memorable characters making their first appearance on the historical stage—and significant—the controversy over fugitive slaves inflamed the sectional crisis of the 1850s. It eventually took a civil war to destroy American slavery, but here at last is the story of the courageous effort to fight slavery by "practical abolition," person by person, family by family.

32. Astoria: John Jacob Astor and Thomas Jefferson’s Lost Pacific Empire: A Story of Wealth, Ambition, and Survival by Peter Stark

In the tradition of The Lost City of Z and Skeleton in the Zahara, Astoria is the thrilling, true-adventure tale of the 1810 Astor Expedition, an epic, now forgotten, three-year journey to forge an American empire on the Pacific Coast. Peter Stark offers a harrowing saga in which a band of explorers battled nature, starvation, and madness to establish the first American settlement in the Pacific Northwest and opened up what would become the Oregon trail, permanently altering the nation's landscape and its global standing.

Six years after Lewis and Clark's began their journey to the Pacific Northwest, two of the Eastern establishment's leading figures, John Jacob Astor and Thomas Jefferson, turned their sights to founding a colony akin to Jamestown on the West Coast and transforming the nation into a Pacific trading power. Author and correspondent for Outside magazine Peter Stark recreates this pivotal moment in American history for the first time for modern readers, drawing on original source material to tell the amazing true story of the Astor Expedition.

Unfolding over the course of three years, from 1810 to 1813, Astoria is a tale of high adventure and incredible hardship in the wilderness and at sea. Of the more than one hundred-forty members of the two advance parties that reached the West Coast—one crossing the Rockies, the other rounding Cape Horn—nearly half perished by violence. Others went mad. Within one year, the expedition successfully established Fort Astoria, a trading post on the Columbia River. Though the colony would be short-lived, it opened
provincial American eyes to the potential of the Western coast and its founders helped blaze the Oregon Trail.

33. **Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase to Catch Lincoln's Killer** by James L. Swanson

The murder of Abraham Lincoln set off the greatest manhunt in American history. From April 14 to April 26, 1865, the assassin, John Wilkes Booth, led Union cavalry and detectives on a wild twelve-day chase through the streets of Washington, D.C., across the swamps of Maryland, and into the forests of Virginia, while the nation, still reeling from the just-ended Civil War, watched in horror and sadness.

James L. Swanson's *Manhunt* is a fascinating tale of murder, intrigue, and betrayal. A gripping hour-by-hour account told through the eyes of the hunted and the hunters, this is history as you've never read it before.

34. **Blood and Thunder: The Epic Story of Kit Carson and the Conquest of the American West** by Hampton Sides

In the summer of 1846, the Army of the West marched through Santa Fe, en route to invade and occupy the Western territories claimed by Mexico. Fueled by the new ideology of “Manifest Destiny,” this land grab would lead to a decades-long battle between the United States and the Navajos, the fiercely resistant rulers of a huge swath of mountainous desert wilderness. In *Blood and Thunder*, Hampton Sides gives us a magnificent history of the American conquest of the West. At the center of this sweeping tale is Kit Carson, the trapper, scout, and soldier whose adventures made him a legend. Sides shows us how this illiterate mountain man understood and respected the Western tribes better than any other American, yet willingly followed orders that would ultimately devastate the Navajo nation. Rich in detail and spanning more than three decades, this is an essential addition to our understanding of how the West was really won.

35. **Chancellorsville** by Stephen W. Sears

Sears describes the series of controversial events that define this crucial battle, including General Robert E. Lee’s radical decision to divide his small army—a violation of basic military rules—sending Stonewall Jackson on his famous march around the Union army flank. Jackson's death—accidentally shot by one of his own soldiers—is one of the many fascinating stories included in this definitive account of the battle of Chancellorsville.

36. **Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion, and Redemption of Stonewall Jackson** by S. C. Gwynne

Stonewall Jackson has long been a figure of legend and romance. As much as any person in the Confederate pantheon, even Robert E. Lee, he embodies the romantic Southern notion of the virtuous lost cause. Jackson is also considered, without argument, one of our country’s greatest military figures. His brilliance at the art of war tied Abraham Lincoln and the Union high command in knots and threatened the ultimate success of the Union armies. Jackson’s strategic innovations shattered the conventional wisdom of how war was waged; he was so far ahead of his time that his techniques would be studied generations into the future.

In April 1862 Jackson was merely another Confederate general in an army fighting what seemed to be a losing cause. By June he had engineered perhaps the greatest military campaign in
American history and was one of the most famous men in the Western world. He had, moreover, given the Confederate cause what it had recently lacked—hope—and struck fear into the hearts of the Union.

*Rebel Yell* is written with the swiftly vivid narrative that is Gwynne’s hallmark and is rich with battle lore, biographical detail, and intense conflict between historical figures. Gwynne delves deep into Jackson’s private life, including the loss of his young beloved first wife and his regimented personal habits. It traces Jackson’s brilliant twenty-four-month career in the Civil War, the period that encompasses his rise from obscurity to fame and legend; his stunning effect on the course of the war itself; and his tragic death, which caused both North and South to grieve the loss of a remarkable American hero.

**37. Lincoln’s Greatest Case: The River, the Bridge, and the Making of America** by Brian McGinty

The untold story of how one sensational trial propelled a self-taught lawyer and a future president into the national spotlight.

In the early hours of May 6, 1856, the steamboat *Effie Afton* barreled into a pillar of the Rock Island Bridge—the first railroad bridge ever to span the Mississippi River. Soon after, the newly constructed vessel, crowded with passengers and livestock, erupted into flames and sank in the river below, taking much of the bridge with it.

As lawyer and Lincoln scholar Brian McGinty dramatically reveals in *Lincoln’s Greatest Case*, no one was killed, but the question of who was at fault cried out for an answer. Backed by powerful steamboat interests in St. Louis, the owners of the *Effie Afton* quickly pressed suit, hoping that a victory would not only prevent the construction of any future bridges from crossing the Mississippi but also thwart the burgeoning spread of railroads from Chicago. The fate of the long-dreamed-of transcontinental railroad lurked ominously in the background, for if rails could not cross the Mississippi by bridge, how could they span the continent all the way to the Pacific?

The official title of the case was *Hurd et al. v. The Railroad Bridge Company*, but it could have been *St. Louis v. Chicago*, for the transportation future of the whole nation was at stake. Indeed, was it to be dominated by steamboats or by railroads? Conducted at almost the same time as the notorious *Dred Scott* case, this new trial riveted the nation’s attention. Meanwhile, Abraham Lincoln, already well known as one of the best trial lawyers in Illinois, was summoned to Chicago to join a handful of crack legal practitioners in the defense of the bridge. While there, he successfully helped unite the disparate regions of the country with a truly transcontinental rail system and, in the process, added to the stellar reputation that vaulted him into the White House less than four years later.

Re-creating the *Effie Afton* case from its unlikely inception to its controversial finale, McGinty brilliantly animates this legal cauldron of the late 1850s, which turned out to be the most consequential trial in Lincoln’s nearly quarter century as a lawyer. Along the way, the tall prairie lawyer’s consummate legal skills and instincts are also brought to vivid life, as is the history of steamboat traffic on the Mississippi, the progress of railroads
west of the Appalachians, and the epochal clashes of railroads and steamboats at the river’s edge.

38. The Pirates Laffite: The Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf by William C. Davis
At large during the most colorful period in New Orleans’ history, from just after the Louisiana Purchase through the War of 1812, privateers Jean and Pierre Laffite made life hell for Spanish merchants on the Gulf. Pirates to the U.S. Navy officers who chased them, heroes to the private citizens who shopped for contraband at their well-publicized auctions, the brothers became important members of a filibustering syndicate that included lawyers, bankers, merchants, and corrupt U.S. officials. But this allegiance didn’t stop the Laffites from becoming paid Spanish spies, disappearing into the fog of history after selling out their own associates.

39. Pocahontas, Powhatan, Opechancanough: Three Indian Lives Changed by Jamestown by Helen C. Rountree
Pocahontas may be the most famous Native American who ever lived, but during the settlement of Jamestown, and for two centuries afterward, the great chiefs Powhatan and Opechancanough were the subjects of considerably more interest and historical documentation than the young woman. It was Opechancanough who captured the foreign captain "Chawnzmit"—John Smith. Smith gave Opechancanough a compass, described to him a spherical earth that revolved around the sun, and wondered if his captor was a cannibal. Opechancanough, who was no cannibal and knew the world was flat, presented Smith to his elder brother, the paramount chief Powhatan. The chief, who took the name of his tribe as his throne name (his personal name was Wahunsenacawh), negotiated with Smith over a lavish feast and opened the town to him, leading Smith to meet, among others, Powhatan’s daughter Pocahontas. Thinking he had made an ally, the chief finally released Smith. Within a few decades, and against their will, his people would be subjects of the British Crown.

Despite their roles as senior politicians in these watershed events, no biography of either Powhatan or Opechancanough exists. And while there are other "biographies" of Pocahontas, they have for the most part elaborated on her legend more than they have addressed the known facts of her remarkable life. As the 400th anniversary of Jamestown’s founding approaches, nationally renowned scholar of Native Americans, Helen Rountree, provides in a single book the definitive biographies of these three important figures. In their lives we see the whole arc of Indian experience with the English settlers – from the wary initial encounters presided over by Powhatan, to the uneasy diplomacy characterized by the marriage of Pocahontas and John Rolfe, to the warfare and eventual loss of native sovereignty that came during Opechancanough’s reign.

Writing from an ethnohistorical perspective that looks as much to anthropology as the written records, Rountree draws a rich portrait of Powhatan life in which the land and the seasons governed life and the English were seen not as heroes but as Tassantassas (strangers), as invaders, even as squatters. The Powhatans were a nonliterate people, so we have had to rely until now on the white settlers for our conceptions of the Jamestown experiment. This important book at last reconstructs the other side of the story.
40. **The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870** by Hugh Thomas

After many years of research, award-winning historian Hugh Thomas portrays, in a balanced account, the complete history of the slave trade. Beginning with the first Portuguese slaving expeditions, he describes and analyzes the rise of one of the largest and most elaborate maritime and commercial ventures in all of history. Between 1492 and 1870, approximately eleven million black slaves were carried from Africa to the Americas to work on plantations, in mines, or as servants in houses. *The Slave Trade* is alive with villains and heroes and illuminated by eyewitness accounts. Hugh Thomas's achievement is not only to present a compelling history of the time but to answer as well such controversial questions as who the traders were, the extent of the profits, and why so many African rulers and peoples willingly collaborated. Thomas also movingly describes such accounts as are available from the slaves themselves.

41. **Rivers of Gold: The Rise of the Spanish Empire, from Columbus to Magellan** by Hugh Thomas

From one of the greatest historians of the Spanish world, here is a fresh and fascinating account of Spain’s early conquests in the Americas. Hugh Thomas’s magisterial narrative of Spain in the New World has all the characteristics of great historical literature: amazing discoveries, ambition, greed, religious fanaticism, court intrigue, and a battle for the soul of humankind.

Hugh Thomas shows Spain at the dawn of the sixteenth century as a world power on the brink of greatness. Her monarchs, Fernando and Isabel, had retaken Granada from Islam, thereby completing restoration of the entire Iberian peninsula to Catholic rule. Flush with success, they agreed to sponsor an obscure Genoese sailor’s plan to sail west to the Indies, where, legend purported, gold and spices flowed as if they were rivers. For Spain and for the world, this decision to send Christopher Columbus west was epochal—the dividing line between the medieval and the modern.

Spain’s colonial adventures began inauspiciously: Columbus’s meagerly funded expedition cost less than a Spanish princess’s recent wedding. In spite of its small scale, it was a mission of astounding scope: to claim for Spain all the wealth of the Indies. The gold alone, thought Columbus, would fund a grand Crusade to reunite Christendom with its holy city, Jerusalem.

The lofty aspirations of the first explorers died hard, as the pursuit of wealth and glory competed with the pursuit of pious impulses. The adventurers from Spain were also, of course, curious about geographical mysteries, and they had a remarkable loyalty to their country. But rather than bridging earth and heaven, Spain’s many conquests bore a bitter fruit. In their search for gold, Spaniards enslaved “Indians” from the Bahamas and the South American mainland. The eloquent protests of Bartolomé de las Casas, here much discussed, began almost immediately. Columbus and other Spanish explorers—Cortés, Ponce de León, and Magellan among them—created an empire for Spain of unsurpassed size and scope. But the door was soon open for other powers, enemies of Spain, to stake their claims.

Great men and women dominate these pages: cardinals and bishops, priors and sailors, landowners and warriors, princes and priests, noblemen and their determined wives
42. **Conquistador: Hernan Cortes, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs** by Buddy Levy

In an astonishing work of scholarship that reads like an adventure thriller, historian Buddy Levy records the last days of the Aztec empire and the two men at the center of an epic clash of cultures.

“I and my companions suffer from a disease of the heart which can be cured only with gold.” — Hernán Cortés

It was a moment unique in human history, the face-to-face meeting between two men from civilizations a world apart. Only one would survive the encounter. In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived on the shores of Mexico with a roughshod crew of adventurers and the intent to expand the Spanish empire. Along the way, this brash and roguish conquistador schemed to convert the native inhabitants to Catholicism and carry off a fortune in gold. That he saw nothing paradoxical in his intentions is one of the most remarkable—and tragic—aspects of this unforgettable story of conquest.

In Tenochtitlán, the famed City of Dreams, Cortés met his Aztec counterpart, Montezuma: king, divinity, ruler of fifteen million people, and commander of the most powerful military machine in the Americas. Yet in less than two years, Cortés defeated the entire Aztec nation in one of the most astonishing military campaigns ever waged. Sometimes outnumbered in battle thousands-to-one, Cortés repeatedly beat seemingly impossible odds. Buddy Levy meticulously researches the mix of cunning, courage, brutality, superstition, and finally disease that enabled Cortés and his men to survive.

**Conquistador** is the story of a lost kingdom—a complex and sophisticated civilization where floating gardens, immense wealth, and reverence for art stood side by side with bloodstained temples and gruesome rites of human sacrifice. It’s the story of Montezuma—proud, spiritual, enigmatic, and doomed to misunderstand the stranger he thought a god. Epic in scope, as entertaining as it is enlightening, **Conquistador** is history at its most riveting.

43. **Conquest: Cortes, Montezuma, and the Fall of Old Mexico** by Hugh Thomas

Drawing on newly discovered sources and writing with brilliance, drama, and profound historical insight, Hugh Thomas presents an engrossing narrative of one of the most significant events of Western history.

Ringing with the fury of two great empires locked in an epic battle, **Conquest** captures in extraordinary detail the Mexican and Spanish civilizations and offers unprecedented in-depth portraits of the legendary opponents, Montezuma and Cortés. **Conquest** is an essential work of history from one of our most gifted historians.

44. **Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee** by Michael Korda

In **Clouds of Glory: The Life and Legend of Robert E. Lee**, Michael Korda, the *New York Times* bestselling biographer of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ulysses S. Grant, and T. E. Lawrence, has written the first major biography of Lee in nearly twenty years, bringing to life America’s greatest and
most iconic hero. Korda paints a vivid and admiring portrait of Lee as a general and a devoted family man who, though he disliked slavery and was not in favor of secession, turned down command of the Union army in 1861 because he could not "draw his sword" against his own children, his neighbors, and his beloved Virginia. He was surely America's preeminent military leader, as calm, dignified, and commanding a presence in defeat as he was in victory. Lee's reputation has only grown in the 150 years since the Civil War, and Korda covers in groundbreaking detail all of Lee's battles and traces the making of a great man's undeniable reputation on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, positioning him finally as the symbolic martyr-hero of the Southern Cause.

45. Fierce Patriot: The Tangled Lives of William Tecumseh Sherman by Robert L. O'Connell
America's first "celebrity" general, William Tecumseh Sherman was a man of many faces. Some were exalted in the public eye, others known only to his intimates. In this bold, revisionist portrait, Robert L. O'Connell captures the man in full for the first time. From his early exploits in Florida, through his brilliant but tempestuous generalship during the Civil War, to his postwar career as a key player in the building of the transcontinental railroad, Sherman was, as O'Connell puts it, the "human embodiment of Manifest Destiny." Here is Sherman the military strategist, a master of logistics with an uncanny grasp of terrain and brilliant sense of timing. Then there is "Uncle Billy," Sherman's public persona, a charismatic hero to his troops and quotable catnip to the newspaper writers of his day. Here, too, is the private Sherman, whose appetite for women, parties, and the high life of the New York theater complicated his already turbulent marriage. Warrior, family man, American icon, William Tecumseh Sherman has finally found a biographer worthy of his protean gifts. A masterful character study whose myriad insights are leavened with its author's trademark wit, Fierce Patriot will stand as the essential book on Sherman for decades to come.

46. Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid That Sparked the Civil War by Tony Horwitz
Plotted in secret, launched in the dark, John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry was a pivotal moment in U.S. history. But few Americans know the true story of the men and women who launched a desperate strike at the slaveholding South. Now, Midnight Rising portrays Brown's uprising in vivid color, revealing a country on the brink of explosive conflict.

Brown, the descendant of New England Puritans, saw slavery as a sin against America's founding principles. Unlike most abolitionists, he was willing to take up arms, and in 1859 he prepared for battle at a hideout in Maryland, joined by his teenage daughter, three of his sons, and a guerrilla band that included former slaves and a dashing spy. On October 17, the raiders seized Harpers Ferry, stunning the nation and prompting a counterattack led by Robert E. Lee. After Brown's capture, his defiant eloquence galvanized the North and appalled the South, which considered Brown a terrorist. The raid also helped elect Abraham Lincoln, who later began to fulfill Brown's dream with the Emancipation Proclamation, a measure he called "a John Brown raid, on a gigantic scale."

Tony Horwitz's riveting book travels antebellum America to deliver both a taut historical drama and a telling portrait of a nation divided--a time that still resonates in ours.
47. The Sun and the Moon: The Remarkable True Account of Hoaxers, Showmen, Dueling Journalists, and Lunar Man-Bats in Nineteenth Century New York by Matthew Goodman

On August 26, 1835, a fledgling newspaper called the Sun brought to New York the first accounts of remarkable lunar discoveries. A series of six articles reported the existence of life on the moon—including unicorns, beavers that walked on their hind legs, and four-foot-tall flying man-bats. In a matter of weeks it was the most broadly circulated newspaper story of the era, and the Sun, a working-class upstart, became the most widely read paper in the world.

An exhilarating narrative history of a divided city on the cusp of greatness, and tale of a crew of writers, editors, and charlatans who stumbled on a new kind of journalism, The Sun and the Moon tells the surprisingly true story of the penny papers that made America a nation of newspaper readers.

48. The Treason Trial of Aaron Burr by R. Kent Newmyer

The Burr treason trial, one of the greatest criminal trials in American history, was significant for several reasons. The legal proceedings lasted seven months and featured some of the nation's best lawyers. It also pitted President Thomas Jefferson (who declared Burr guilty without the benefit of a trial and who masterminded the prosecution), Chief Justice John Marshall (who sat as a trial judge in the federal circuit court in Richmond) and former Vice President Aaron Burr (who was accused of planning to separate the western states from the Union) against each other. At issue, in addition to the life of Aaron Burr, were the rights of criminal defendants, the constitutional definition of treason and the meaning of separation of powers in the Constitution. Capturing the sheer drama of the long trial, Kent Newmyer's book sheds new light on the chaotic process by which lawyers, judges and politicians fashioned law for the new nation.

49. A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U. S. Invasion of Mexico by Amy S. Greenberg

Often forgotten and overlooked, the U.S.-Mexican War featured false starts, atrocities, and daring back-channel negotiations as it divided the nation, paved the way for the Civil War a generation later, and launched the career of Abraham Lincoln. Amy S. Greenberg’s skilled storytelling and rigorous scholarship bring this American war for empire to life with memorable characters, plotlines, and legacies.

When President James K. Polk compelled a divided Congress to support his war with Mexico, it was the first time that the young American nation would engage another republic in battle. Caught up in the conflict and the political furor surrounding it were Abraham Lincoln, then a new congressman; Polk, the dour president committed to territorial expansion at any cost; and Henry Clay, the aging statesman whose presidential hopes had been frustrated once again, but who still harbored influence and had one last great speech up his sleeve. Beyond these illustrious figures, A Wicked War follows several fascinating and long-neglected characters: Lincoln’s archrival John Hardin, whose death opened the door to Lincoln’s rise; Nicholas Trist, gentleman diplomat and secret negotiator, who broke with his president to negotiate a fair
peace; and Polk’s wife, Sarah, whose shrewd politicking was crucial in the Oval Office.

This definitive history of the 1846 conflict paints an intimate portrait of the major players and their world. It is a story of Indian fights, Manifest Destiny, secret military maneuvers, gunshot wounds, and political spin. Along the way it captures a young Lincoln mismatching his clothes, the lasting influence of the Founding Fathers, the birth of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and America’s first national antiwar movement. A key chapter in the creation of the United States, it is the story of a burgeoning nation and an unforgettable conflict that has shaped American history.

50. Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution by Kathleen Duval

Over the last decade, award-winning historian Kathleen DuVal has revitalized the study of early America’s marginalized voices. Now, in Independence Lost, she recounts an untold story as rich and significant as that of the Founding Fathers: the history of the Revolutionary Era as experienced by slaves, American Indians, women, and British loyalists living on Florida’s Gulf Coast.

While citizens of the thirteen rebelling colonies came to blows with the British Empire over tariffs and parliamentary representation, the situation on the rest of the continent was even more fraught. In the Gulf of Mexico, Spanish forces clashed with Britain’s strained army to carve up the Gulf Coast, as both sides competed for allegiances with the powerful Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Creek nations who inhabited the region. Meanwhile, African American slaves had little control over their own lives, but some individuals found opportunities to expand their freedoms during the war.

Independence Lost reveals that individual motives counted as much as the ideals of liberty and freedom the Founders espoused: Independence had a personal as well as national meaning, and the choices made by people living outside the colonies were of critical importance to the war’s outcome. DuVal introduces us to the Mobile slave Petit Jean, who organized militias to fight the British at sea; the Chickasaw diplomat Payamataha, who worked to keep his people out of war; New Orleans merchant Oliver Pollock and his wife, Margaret O’Brien Pollock, who risked their own wealth to organize funds and garner Spanish support for the American Revolution; the half-Scottish-Creek leader Alexander McGillivray, who fought to protect indigenous interests from European imperial encroachment; the Cajun refugee Amand Broussard, who spent a lifetime in conflict with the British; and Scottish loyalists James and Isabella Bruce, whose work on behalf of the British Empire placed them in grave danger. Their lives illuminate the fateful events that took place along the Gulf of Mexico and, in the process, changed the history of North America itself.

Adding new depth and moral complexity, Kathleen DuVal reinvigorates the story of the American Revolution. Independence Lost is a bold work that fully establishes the reputation of a historian who is already regarded as one of her generation’s best.

51. Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab by Steve Inskeep
**Washington Post:**

“Surely everyone knows, or should know, about the Cherokee Trail of Tears - an ordeal imposed upon thousands of Cherokees, who, after fighting and winning a judgment in the Supreme Court against their removal from the Eastern Seaboard, were nonetheless dispossessed of their tribal lands and marched to Indian Territory in the early 1830s. The scale of the removal was staggering. Not only the Cherokee but also the Muskogee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and many of their African-American slaves were removed in one of the largest and most brutal acts of aggression ever committed by the United States. But not till now, with the coming of NPR journalist Steve Inskeep’s magnificent book, focusing as it does on the two key players - President Andrew Jackson and Cherokee Principal Chief John Ross - has this episode in American history been rendered in such personal detail and human touch... The story of the Cherokee removal has been told many times, but never before has a single book given us such a sense of how it happened and what it meant, not only for Indians, but also for the future and soul of America.”

52. *The Printer and the Preacher: Ben Franklin, George Whitefield, and the Surprising Friendship that Invented America* by Randy Petersen

They were the most famous men in America. They came from separate countries, followed different philosophies, and led dissimilar lives. But they were fast friends. No two people did more to shape America in the mid-1700s.

Benjamin Franklin was the American prototype: hard-working, inventive, practical, funny, with humble manners and lofty dreams. George Whitefield was the most popular preacher in an era of great piety, whose outdoor preaching across the colonies was heard by thousands, all of whom were told, “You must be born again.” People became excited about God. They began reading the Bible and supporting charities. When Whitefield died in 1770, on a preaching tour in New Hampshire, he had built a spiritual foundation for a new nation—just as his surviving friend, Ben Franklin, had built its social foundation. Together these two men helped establish a new nation founded on liberty. This is the story of their amazing friendship.

53. *The Minutemen and Their World* by Robert A. Gross

On April 19, 1775, the American Revolution began at the Old North Bridge in Concord, Massachusetts. The "shot heard round the world" catapulted this sleepy New England town into the midst of revolutionary fervor, and Concord went on to become the intellectual capital of the new republic. The town--future home to Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne--soon came to symbolize devotion to liberty, intellectual freedom, and the stubborn integrity of rural life. In *The Minutemen and Their World*, Robert Gross has written a remarkably subtle and detailed reconstruction of the lives and community of this special place, and a compelling interpretation of the American Revolution as a social movement.

54. *American to the Backbone: The Life of James W. C. Pennington, the Fugitive Slave Who Became One of the First Black Abolitionists* by Christopher L. Webber

The incredible story of a forgotten hero of nineteenth century New York City—a former slave, Yale scholar, minister, and international leader of the Antebellum abolitionist movement.
At the age of 19, scared and illiterate, James Pennington escaped from slavery in 1827 and soon became one of the leading voices against slavery prior to the Civil War. Just ten years after his escape, Pennington was ordained as a priest after studying at Yale and was soon traveling all over the world as an anti-slavery advocate. He was so well respected by European audiences that the University of Heidelberg awarded him an honorary doctorate, making him the first person of African descent to receive such a degree. This treatment was far cry from his home across the Atlantic, where people like him, although no longer slaves, were still second-class citizens.

As he fought for equal rights in America, Pennington's voice was not limited to the preacher's pulpit. He wrote the first-ever "History of the Colored People" as well as a careful study of the moral basis for civil disobedience, which would be echoed decades later by Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. More than a century before Rosa Parks took her monumental bus ride, Pennington challenged segregated seating in New York City street cars. He was beaten and arrested, but eventually vindicated when the New York State Supreme Court ordered the cars to be integrated. Although the struggle for equality was far from over, Pennington retained a delightful sense of humor, intellectual vivacity, and inspiring faith through it all. American to the Backbone brings to life this fascinating, forgotten pioneer, who helped lay the foundation for the contemporary civil rights revolution and inspire generations of future leaders.

55. Beat the Last Drum: The Siege of Yorktown by Thomas Fleming
With the eye of a novelist and the rigor of a historian, New York Times bestselling author Thomas Fleming delivers a fascinating and vivid account of the Siege of Yorktown.

Along with French General Jean-Baptiste Rochambeau, George Washington made an astonishing march through New Jersey and trapped British General Charles Cornwallis and his forces in Yorktown, Virginia, where they unleashed a tremendous artillery assault, with the support of the French navy. But victory was never certain - both sides made a series of dramatic attacks and counterattacks.

Using the diaries and letters of participants in the siege, Fleming creates a moving and exciting depiction of the days in October 1781 that ended the American Revolution and changed the world.

56. Lee by Douglas Southall Freeman
Douglas Southall Freeman’s Pulitzer Prize–winning biography of Robert E. Lee was greeted with critical acclaim when it was first published in 1935. Stephen Vincent Benét said “There is a monument—and a fine one—to Robert E. Lee at Lexington. But this one, I think, will last as long.” This reissue of Richard Harwell’s abridgment fulfills Benét’s prophecy, chronicling all the major aspects and highlights of the general’s military career, from his stunning accomplishments in the Mexican War to the humbling surrender at Appomattox.
More than just a military leader, Lee embodied all the conflicts of his time. The son of a Revolutionary War hero and related by marriage to George Washington, he was the product of young America’s elite. When Abraham Lincoln offered him command of the United States Army, however, he choose to lead the confederate ranks, convinced that his first loyalty lay with his native Virginia. Although a member of the planter class, he felt that slavery was “a moral and political evil.” Aloof and somber, he nevertheless continually inspired his men by his deep concern for their personal welfare.

Freeman’s achievement is the full portrait of a great American—a distinguished, scholarly, yet eminently readable classic that has linked Freeman to Lee as irrevocably as Boswell to Dr. Johnson. 

57. **In the Devil’s Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692** by Mary Beth Norton

In 1692 the people of Massachusetts were living in fear, and not solely of satanic afflictions. Horribly violent Indian attacks had all but emptied the northern frontier of settlers, and many traumatized refugees—including the main accusers of witches—had fled to communities like Salem. Meanwhile the colony’s leaders, defensive about their own failure to protect the frontier, pondered how God’s people could be suffering at the hands of savages. Struck by the similarities between what the refugees had witnessed and what the witchcraft “victims” described, many were quick to see a vast conspiracy of the Devil (in league with the French and the Indians) threatening New England on all sides. By providing this essential context to the famous events, and by casting her net well beyond the borders of Salem itself, Norton sheds new light on one of the most perplexing and fascinating periods in our history.

58. **The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England** by Carol F. Karlsen

Confessing to "Familiarity with the Devils," Mary Johnson, a servant, was executed by Connecticut officials in 1648. A wealthy Boston widow, Ann Hibbens, was hanged in 1656 for casting spells on her neighbors. In 1662, Ann Cole was “taken with very strange Fits” and fueled an outbreak of witchcraft accusations in Hartford a generation before the notorious events in Salem took place. More than three hundred years later the question still haunts us: Why were these and other women likely witches? Why were they vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft? In this work Carol Karlsen reveals the social construction of witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England and illuminates the larger contours of gender relations in that society.

59. **Dear Abigail: The Intimate Lives and Revolutionary Ideas of Abigail Adams and Her Two Remarkable Sisters** by Diane Jacobs

Much has been written about the enduring marriage of President John Adams and his wife, Abigail. But few know of the equally strong bond Abigail shared with her sisters, Mary Cranch and Elizabeth Shaw Peabody, accomplished women in their own right. Now acclaimed biographer Diane Jacobs reveals their moving story, which unfolds against the stunning backdrop of America in its transformative colonial years.

Abigail, Mary, and Elizabeth Smith grew up in Weymouth, Massachusetts, the close-knit daughters of a minister and his wife. When the sisters moved away from one another, they relied
on near-constant letters—from what John Adams called their “elegant pen”—to buoy them through pregnancies, illnesses, grief, political upheaval, and, for Abigail, life in the White House. Infusing her writing with rich historical perspective and detail, Jacobs offers fascinating insight into these progressive women’s lives: oldest sister Mary, who became de facto mayor of her small village; youngest sister Betsy, an aspiring writer who, along with her husband, founded the second coeducational school in the United States; and middle child Abigail, who years before becoming First Lady ran the family farm while her husband served in the Continental Congress, first in Philadelphia, and was then sent to France and England, where she joined him at last.

This engaging narrative traces the sisters’ lives from their childhood sibling rivalries to their eyewitness roles during the American Revolution and their adulthood as outspoken wives and mothers. They were women ahead of their time who believed in intellectual and educational equality between the sexes. Drawing from newly discovered correspondence, never-before-published diaries, and archival research, Dear Abigail is a fascinating front-row seat to history—and to the lives of three exceptional women who were influential during a time when our nation’s democracy was just taking hold.

60. West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776 by Claudio Saunt

In this unique history of 1776, Claudio Saunt looks beyond the familiar story of the thirteen colonies to explore the many other revolutions roiling the turbulent American continent. In that fateful year, the Spanish landed in San Francisco, the Russians pushed into Alaska to hunt valuable sea otters, and the Sioux discovered the Black Hills. Hailed by critics for challenging our conventional view of the birth of America, West of the Revolution “[coaxes] our vision away from the Atlantic seaboard” and “exposes a continent seething with peoples and purposes beyond Minutemen and Redcoats” (Wall Street Journal)

61. The Victory with No Name: The Native American Defeat of the First American Army by Colin G. Calloway

In 1791, General Arthur St. Clair led the United States army in a campaign to destroy a complex of Indian villages at the Miami River in northwestern Ohio. Almost within reach of their objective, St. Clair’s 1,400 men were attacked by about one thousand Indians. The U.S. force was decimated, suffering nearly one thousand casualties in killed and wounded, while Indian casualties numbered only a few dozen. But despite the lopsided result, it wouldn’t appear to carry much significance; it involved only a few thousand people, lasted less than three hours, and the outcome, which was never in doubt, was permanently reversed a mere three years later. Neither an epic struggle nor a clash that changed the course of history, the battle doesn’t even have a name.

Yet, as renowned Native American historian Colin Calloway demonstrates here, St. Clair’s Defeat—as it came to be known—was hugely important for its time. It was both the biggest victory the Native Americans ever won, and, proportionately, the biggest military disaster the United States had suffered. With the British in Canada waiting in the wings for the American experiment in republicanism to fail, and some regions of the West gravitating toward alliance with Spain, the defeat threatened the very existence of the infant United States. Generating a deluge of reports, correspondence, opinions, and debates in the press, it produced the first congressional investigation in American history, while ultimately changing not only the manner in which
Americans viewed, raised, organized, and paid for their armies, but the very ways in which they fought their wars.

Emphasizing the extent to which the battle has been overlooked in history, Calloway illustrates how this moment of great victory by American Indians became an aberration in the national story and a blank spot in the national memory. Calloway shows that St. Clair’s army proved no match for the highly motivated and well-led Native American force that shattered not only the American army but the ill-founded assumption that Indians stood no chance against European methods and models of warfare. An engaging and enlightening read for American history enthusiasts and scholars alike, The Victory with No Name brings this significant moment in American history back to light.

62. The Other Trail of Tears: The Removal of the Ohio Indians by Mary Stockwell

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was the culmination of the United States’ policy to force native populations to relocate west of the Mississippi River. The most well-known episode in the eviction of American Indians in the East was the notorious “Trail of Tears” along which Southeastern Indians were driven from their homes in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to reservations in present-day Oklahoma. But the struggle in the South was part of a wider story that reaches back in time to the closing months of the War of 1812, back through many states—most notably Ohio—and into the lives of so many tribes, including the Delaware, Seneca, Shawnee, Ottawa, and Wyandot (Huron). They, too, were forced to depart from their homes in the Ohio Country to Kansas and Oklahoma. The Other Trail of Tears: The Removal of the Ohio Indians by award-winning historian Mary Stockwell tells the story of this region’s historic tribes as they struggled following the death of Tecumseh and the unraveling of his tribal confederacy in 1813. At the peace negotiations in Ghent in 1814, Great Britain was unable to secure a permanent homeland for the tribes in Ohio setting the stage for further treaties with the United States and encroachment by settlers. Over the course of three decades the Ohio Indians were forced to move to the West, with the Wyandot people ceding their last remaining lands in Ohio to the U.S. Government in the early 1850s. The book chronicles the history of Ohio’s Indians and their interactions with settlers and U.S. agents in the years leading up to their official removal, and sheds light on the complexities of the process, with both individual tribes and the United States taking advantage of opportunities at different times. It is also the story of how the native tribes tried to come to terms with the fast pace of change on America’s western frontier and the inevitable loss of their traditional homelands. While the tribes often disagreed with one another, they attempted to move toward the best possible future for all their people against the relentless press of settlers and limited time.

63. The First Frontier: The Forgotten History of Struggle, Savagery, and Endurance in Early America by Scott Weidensaul

Frontier: the word carries the inevitable scent of the West. But before Custer or Lewis and Clark, before the first Conestoga wagons rumbled across the Plains, it was the East that marked the frontier—the boundary between complex Native cultures and the first colonizing Europeans.

Here is the older, wilder, darker history of a time when the land between the Atlantic and the Appalachians was contested ground—when radically different societies adopted and adapted the ways of the other, while struggling for control of what all considered to be their land.
The First Frontier traces two and a half centuries of history through poignant, mostly unheralded personal stories—like that of a Harvard-educated Indian caught up in seventeenth-century civil warfare, a mixed-blood interpreter trying to straddle his white and Native heritage, and a Puritan woman wielding a scalping knife whose bloody deeds still resonate uneasily today. It is the first book in years to paint a sweeping picture of the Eastern frontier, combining vivid storytelling with the latest research to bring to life modern America’s tumultuous, uncertain beginnings.

64. Spain in the Southwest: A Narrative History of Colonial New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California by John L. Kessell

John L. Kessell’s Spain in the Southwest presents a fast-paced, abundantly illustrated history of the Spanish colonies that became the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California. With an eye for human interest, Kessell tells the story of New Spain’s vast frontier—today’s American Southwest and Mexican North—which for two centuries served as a dynamic yet disjoined periphery of the Spanish empire.

Chronicling the period of Hispanic activity from the time of Columbus to Mexico’s independence from Spain in 1821, Kessell traces the three great swells of Hispanic exploration, encounter, and influence that rolled north from Mexico across the coasts and high deserts of the western borderlands. Throughout this sprawling historical landscape, Kessell treats grand themes through the lives of individuals. He explains the frequent cultural clashes and accommodations in remarkably balanced terms. Stereotypes, the author writes, are of no help. Indians could be arrogant and brutal, Spaniards caring, and vice versa. If we select the facts to fit preconceived notions, we can make the story come out the way we want, but if the peoples of the colonial Southwest are seen as they really were—more alike than diverse, sharing similar inconstant natures—then we need have no favorites.

65. Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled America’s Frontier by Shirley Christian

Shortly after Meriwether Lewis reached St. Louis in 1803 to plan for his voyage to the Pacific with William Clark, he prepared his first packet of flora and fauna from west of the Mississippi and dispatched it to President Jefferson. The cuttings, which were later planted in Philadelphia and Virginia, were supplied by Lewis’s new French friend, Pierre Chouteau, who took them from a tree growing in the garden of his mansion.

One of the best-known families in French America, the Chouteaus had guarded the gates to the West for generations and had built fortunes from fur trading, land speculation, finance, and railroads, and by supplying anything needed to survive in the region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Patrician in their origins, they nevertheless won the respect and allegiance of dozens of Indian tribes. From their St. Louis base, the Chouteaus conquered the more-than-two-thousand-mile length of the Missouri River, put down the first European roots at the future site of Kansas City and in present-day Oklahoma, and left their names and imprints on lands stretching to the Canadian border.
Before Lewis and Clark: The French Dynasty that Ruled America's Frontier is the extraordinary story of a wealthy, powerful, charming, and manipulative family, who dominated business and politics in the Louisiana Purchase territory before the famous Lewis and Clark expedition, and for decades afterward.

66. An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

Today in the United States, there are more than five hundred federally recognized Indigenous nations comprising nearly three million people, descendants of the fifteen million Native people who once inhabited this land. The centuries-long genocidal program of the US settler-colonial regimen has largely been omitted from history. Now, for the first time, acclaimed historian and activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz offers a history of the United States told from the perspective of Indigenous peoples and reveals how Native Americans, for centuries, actively resisted expansion of the US empire.

In An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States, Dunbar-Ortiz adroitly challenges the founding myth of the United States and shows how policy against the Indigenous peoples was colonialist and designed to seize the territories of the original inhabitants, displacing or eliminating them. And as Dunbar-Ortiz reveals, this policy was praised in popular culture, through writers like James Fenimore Cooper and Walt Whitman, and in the highest offices of government and the military. Shockingly, as the genocidal policy reached its zenith under President Andrew Jackson, its ruthlessness was best articulated by US Army general Thomas S. Jesup, who, in 1836, wrote of the Seminoles: “The country can be rid of them only by exterminating them.”

Spanning more than four hundred years, this classic bottom-up peoples’ history radically reframes US history and explodes the silences that have haunted our national narrative.

67. Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities by Craig Steven Wilder

A 2006 report commissioned by Brown University revealed that institution’s complex and contested involvement in slavery—setting off a controversy that leapt from the ivory tower to make headlines across the country. But Brown’s troubling past was far from unique. In Ebony and Ivy, Craig Steven Wilder, a rising star in the profession of history, lays bare uncomfortable truths about race, slavery, and the American academy.

Many of America’s revered colleges and universities—from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to Rutgers, Williams College, and UNC—were soaked in the sweat, the tears, and sometimes the blood of people of color. The earliest academies proclaimed their mission to Christianize the savages of North America, and played a key role in white conquest. Later, the slave economy and higher education grew up together, each nurturing the other. Slavery funded colleges, built campuses, and paid the wages of professors. Enslaved Americans waited on faculty and students; academic leaders aggressively courted the support of slave owners and slave traders.

Significantly, as Wilder shows, our leading universities, dependent on human bondage, became breeding grounds for the racist ideas that sustained them.

68. Boone: A Biography by Robert Morgan
The story of Daniel Boone is the story of America—its ideals, its promise, its romance, and its destiny. Bestselling, critically acclaimed author Robert Morgan reveals the complex character of a frontiersman whose heroic life was far stranger and more fascinating than the myths that surround him.

This rich, authoritative biography offers a wholly new perspective on a man who has been an American icon for more than two hundred years—a hero as important to American history as his more political contemporaries George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. Extensive endnotes, cultural and historical background material, and maps and illustrations underscore the scope of this distinguished and immensely entertaining work.

69. David Crockett: The Lion of the West by Michael Wallis

Popular culture transformed his memory into “Davy Crockett,” and Hollywood gave him a raccoon hat he hardly ever wore. In this surprising New York Times bestseller, historian Michael Wallis has cast a fresh look at the flesh-and-blood man behind one of the most celebrated figures in American history. More than a riveting story, Wallis’s David Crockett is a revelatory, authoritative biography that separates fact from fiction and provides us with an extraordinary evocation of not only a true American hero but also the rough-and-tumble times in which he lived.

70. Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War by David Herbert Donald

In this brilliant biography—a Pulitzer Prize—winning national bestseller—David Herbert Donald, Harvard professor emeritus, traces Sumner's life as the nation careens toward civil war. In a period when senators often exercised more influence than presidents, Senator Charles Sumner was one of the most powerful forces in the American government and remains one of the most controversial figures in American history. His uncompromising moral standards made him a lightning rod in an era fraught with conflict.

Sumner's fight to end slavery made him a hero in the North and stirred outrage in the South. In what has been called the first blow of the Civil War, he was physically attacked by a colleague on the Senate floor. Unwavering and arrogant, Sumner refused to abandon the moral high ground, even if doing so meant the onslaught of the nation's most destructive war. He used his office and influence to transform the United States during the most contentious and violent period in the nation's history.

Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War presents a remarkably different view of our bloodiest war through an insightful reevaluation of the man who stood at its center.

71. The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey by Rinker Buck

An epic account of traveling the length of the Oregon Trail the old-fashioned way—in a covered wagon with a team of mules, an audacious journey that hasn't been attempted in a century—which also chronicles the rich history of the trail, the people who made the migration, and its significance to the country.

Spanning two thousand miles and traversing six states from Missouri to the Pacific coast, the Oregon Trail is the route that made America. In the fifteen years before the Civil War, when 400,000 pioneers used the trail to emigrate West—scholars still regard this as the largest land
migration in history—it united the coasts, doubled the size of the country, and laid the groundwork for the railroads. Today, amazingly, the trail is all but forgotten.

Rinker Buck is no stranger to grand adventures. His first travel narrative, Flight of Passage, was hailed by The New Yorker as “a funny, cocky gem of a book,” and with The Oregon Trail he brings the most important route in American history back to glorious and vibrant life.

Traveling from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Baker City, Oregon, over the course of four months, Buck is accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and an “incurably filthy” Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl. Along the way, they dodge thunderstorms in Nebraska, chase runaway mules across the Wyoming plains, scout more than five hundred miles of nearly vanished trail on foot, cross the Rockies, and make desperate fifty-mile forced marches for water. The Buck brothers repair so many broken wheels and axels that they nearly reinvent the art of wagon travel itself. They also must reckon with the ghost of their father, an eccentric yet loveable dreamer whose memory inspired their journey across the plains and whose premature death, many years earlier, has haunted them both ever since.

But The Oregon Trail is much more than an epic adventure. It is also a lively and essential work of history that shatters the comforting myths about the trail years passed down by generations of Americans. Buck introduces readers to the largely forgotten roles played by trailblazing evangelists, friendly Indian tribes, female pioneers, bumbling U.S. Army cavalrymen, and the scam artists who flocked to the frontier to fleece the overland emigrants. Generous portions of the book are devoted to the history of old and appealing things like the mule and the wagon. We also learn how the trail accelerated American economic development. Most arresting, perhaps, are the stories of the pioneers themselves—ordinary families whose extraordinary courage and sacrifice made this country what it became.

At once a majestic journey across the West, a significant work of history, and a moving personal saga, The Oregon Trail draws readers into the journey of a lifetime. It is a wildly ambitious work of nonfiction from a true American original. It is a book with a heart as big as the country it crosses.

72. Henry Clay: The Essential American by David S. Heidler
He was the Great Compromiser, a canny and colorful legislator whose life mirrors the story of America from its founding until the eve of the Civil War. Speaker of the House, senator, secretary of state, five-time presidential candidate, and idol to the young Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay is captured in full at last in this rich and sweeping biography.

David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler present Clay in his early years as a precocious, witty, and optimistic Virginia farm boy who at the age of twenty transformed himself into an attorney. The authors reveal Clay’s tumultuous career in Washington, including his participation in the deadlocked election of 1824 that haunted him for the rest of his career, and shine new light on Clay’s marriage to plain, wealthy Lucretia Hart, a union that lasted fifty-three years and produced eleven children.
Featuring an inimitable supporting cast including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Abraham Lincoln, *Henry Clay* is beautifully written and replete with fresh anecdotes and insights. Horse trader and risk taker, arm twister and joke teller, Henry Clay was the consummate politician who gave ground, made deals, and changed the lives of millions.

73. **Betsy Ross and the Making of America** by Marla R. Miller

*Betsy Ross and the Making of America* is the first comprehensively researched and elegantly written biography of one of America's most captivating figures of the Revolutionary War. Drawing on new sources and bringing a fresh, keen eye to the fabled creation of "the first flag," Marla R. Miller thoroughly reconstructs the life behind the legend. This authoritative work provides a close look at the famous seamstress while shedding new light on the lives of the artisan families who peopled the young nation and crafted its tools, ships, and homes.

Betsy Ross occupies a sacred place in the American consciousness, and Miller's winning narrative finally does her justice. This history of the ordinary craftspeople of the Revolutionary War and their most famous representative will be the definitive volume for years to come.

74. **Treacherous Beauty: Peggy Shippen, the Woman Behind Benedict Arnold’s Plot to Betray America** by Stephen Case

Histories of the Revolutionary War have long honored heroines such as Betsy Ross, Abigail Adams, and Molly Pitcher. Now, more than two centuries later, comes the first biography of one of the war’s most remarkable women, a beautiful Philadelphia society girl named Peggy Shippen. While war was raging between England and its rebellious colonists, Peggy befriended a suave British officer and then married a crippled revolutionary general twice her age. She brought the two men together in a treasonous plot that nearly turned George Washington into a prisoner and changed the course of the war. Peggy Shippen was Mrs. Benedict Arnold.

After the conspiracy was exposed, Peggy managed to convince powerful men like Washington and Alexander Hamilton of her innocence. The Founding Fathers were handicapped by the common view that women lacked the sophistication for politics or warfare, much less treason. And Peggy took full advantage.

Peggy was to the American Revolution what the fictional Scarlett O’Hara was to the Civil War: a woman whose survival skills trumped all other values. Had she been a man, she might have been arrested, tried, and executed. And she might have become famous. Instead, her role was minimized and she was allowed to recede into the background—-with a generous British pension in hand.

In *Treacherous Beauty*, Mark Jacob and Stephen H. Case tell the true story of Peggy Shippen, a driving force in a conspiracy that came within an eyelash of dooming the American democracy.

A gripping and sensational tale of violence, alcohol, and taxes, The Whiskey Rebellion uncovers the radical eighteenth-century people’s movement, long ignored by historians, that contributed decisively to the establishment of federal authority.

In 1791, on the frontier of western Pennsylvania, local gangs of insurgents with blackened faces began to attack federal officials, beating and torturing the tax collectors who attempted to collect the first federal tax ever laid on an American product—whiskey. To the hard-bitten people of the depressed and violent West, the whiskey tax paralyzed their rural economies, putting money in the coffers of already wealthy creditors and industrialists. To Alexander Hamilton, the tax was the key to industrial growth. To President Washington, it was the catalyst for the first-ever deployment of a federal army, a military action that would suppress an insurgency against the American government.

With an unsparing look at both Hamilton and Washington, journalist and historian William Hogeland offers a provocative, in-depth analysis of this forgotten revolution and suppression. Focusing on the battle between government and the early-American evangelical movement that advocated western secession, The Whiskey Rebellion is an intense and insightful examination of the roots of federal power and the most fundamental conflicts that ignited—and continue to smolder—in the United States.