

6/22/2025

Here is an opinionated and non-inclusive list of history/non-fiction books worth reading. I emphasize recent (post-1850) American history. **Start with a subject that interests you. I would buy these books used at Amazon.** Always read the book's Introduction or Forward first (the one that gives the author's opinion). It is okay to read Chp. 1 first, then the last chapter second, and then the rest of the chapters. The books are **roughly presented in order** of which ones should be read first, **but choose by subject matter first (what interests you)** rather than by my judgment.

## American History

*Volume 1: to 1877 American History: A Survey* by Alan Brinkley. This is a general survey textbook on American History. Volume 2 is 1877 to the present. I believe Brinkley wrote volume 2 with Richard Nelson. **Whether by Brinkley or someone else you will need this kind of book.** There are plenty of decent versions of this kind of two volume survey.

**Any two volume, general survey of US History by Eric Foner.** It does not have to be the most recent version.

Any general survey of US History by James Roark, et al. It does not have to be the most recent version. I like the one volume, value version with no color images entitled *American Promise* published by Bedford St. Martins.

***The Devil We Knew*** by H.W. Brands. A general introduction to recent American history with a liberal or left-wing perspective.

***The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*** by Marilyn Young. One of many excellent works done on the Vietnam War.

*America's Longest War* by George Herring. This is the Conservative's version of the war.

***The Power Elite*** by C. Wright Mills. Old, but a classic. There is a new version with commentary by Alan Wolfe.

*The World Split Wide Open* by Ruth Rosen. History of feminism since World War II. It shows a lot of mistakes the feminists made in my opinion. Ms. Rosen is a journalist not a historian and this book is a compilation of her articles.

## World War II

*At Dawn We Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* by Gordon Prange. This book proves Roosevelt DID NOT KNOW in advance of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

*The Pacific Campaign* by Dan van der Vat. Not a light read but thorough, accurate, and good historical research concerning the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during WWII and the fighting on the islands.

*Enemy at the Gates: The Battle for Stalingrad* by William Craig. Excellent history of one of history's most important battles. The movie of the same name is excellent as well.

*Enigma: The Battle for the Code* by Hugh Sebag-Montefiore concerns the greatest secret of World War II -how we broke the German codes. This recent book puts together all the pieces that only finally have come to light as a result of historical research. **Before this book there was *The Ultra Secret* by Frederick William Winterbotham; one of my personal favorites. This book in 1977 revealed the greatest secret of WWII (kept hidden for decades).** When I first got this book in the early 1980s it was tough to come by and was a real discovery. The Sebag-Montefiore book surpasses the Winterbotham book but the SM book does not address the Germany army's use of the Enigma device, particularly at the Battle of the Bulge. The SM book does not address the inclusion of the uncoded word "Coventry" in an Ultra transmission regarding a bombing raid on England. I wonder if the code breaking was connected to Operation Barbarossa.

*The American Heritage Picture History of World War II* by C.L. Sulzberger. Actually much more text than pictures in this book. Printed in 1966 a more updated type of book is easily available. Still if you want a comprehensive history of the WWII with great pictures, this is it.

*Germans Into Nazis* by Peter Fritzsche. I have not read this book but it comes highly recommended.

## European History

*The Russian Revolution* by Sheila Fitzpatrick. Superb, short summary of the revolution.

*A Short History of the French Revolution* by Jeremy Popkin. The title says it all. A superb, short, accurate, and comprehensive history of the revolution.

*On Christianity* by Edward Gibbon. This superb book represents two books (the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>) which are part of Gibbon's masterpiece, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. That book is 3,000 pages long, often published in six volumes, set a new standard for historical research, and could be read as well. These two chapters stood Church history on its head and exemplified quality writing. For those of us

without two months to read one book (*The Decline and Fall*), *On Christianity* represents everything about superb historical research and writing.

*The Portable Enlightenment Reader* by Isaac Kramnick. The Enlightenment was an 18<sup>th</sup> century intellectual movement of historical importance. Don't read it all, just pick and choose. I suggest: Read the Introduction. Read Parts Two and Three. In Part Four *do not* read "Education and Childhood." In Part Five *only read* "Progress and History" and "Politics and the State."

*The Cheese and the Worms* by Carlo Ginzburg. A superb example of scholarly research, enjoyable reading, and several novel ideas; this microhistory tells the story of Menocchio (1532–1599). He was an Italian miller from the village of Montereale in Northeastern Italy who met many people who came to his mill. They also brought ideas and books. He became well informed and started to think for himself, and he thought up a novel philosophy about the world. For his thoughts he was branded as a heretic during the Inquisition and he was eventually burned at the stake in 1599 on the orders of the pope.

*Nicholas and Alexandra* by Robert K. Massie. This is a perennial favorite of people and comes highly recommended. It is about the Russian Revolution, the Czar, the Czarina, their son, and Rasputin.

*Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond. I have not read this but it comes highly recommended. I have read *Rats, Lice and History* by Zinsser which is okay.

*Let History Judge* by Roy Medvedev. One of my personal favorites, though my Russian history professor criticized it for being dissident literature and not meeting the standard of professional history. It describes the horrors of Stalin's years.

*When the King Took Flight* by Timothy Tackett. This is a historical novel; fiction, meticulously based on the facts. An enjoyable read regarding the French Revolution.

My wife recommends *The Six Wives of Henry the Eighth* by Alison Weir and *Dreadnought* by Robert K. Massey. I have not read these books. *Dreadnought* is famous. Barbara Tuchman has written plenty of good books.

*Napoleon* by Felix Markham. Published in 1966 this might be out of date, but is still a fine history of Napoleon and his times. The book is more in the "great man" school of history rather than the large historical forces school that produce great men.

*Napoleon Bonaparte and the Legacy of the French Revolution* by Martyn Lyons. This is less "great man" history, and more large, historical forces. Lyons writes about the impact of the Napoleonic era on France and Europe, the social forces supporting Napoleonic power, and the Napoleonic era within the context of the French revolution.

\*\*\*\*\* **More advanced history below.**

*The Making of the English Working Class* by E.P. Thompson. This is “advanced” history and needs a little explanation before reading.

*The Hundred Years War* by Desmond Seward. The back flap says, “Desmond Seward is blessed with a talent for presenting historical facts in an accessible narrative...An ideal author for recounting this complex period.” I agree. This is a college level text.

*Dissolution* by Charles S. Maier. Excellent history of the end of East Germany.

## **World History**

*Ten Discoveries That Rewrote History* by Patrick Hunt, Jr. This superb book is accurately titled. It serves as a wonderful introduction to history for the amateur, the student, and the traveler. You need only read chapters 1,2, 4,5,6,7,9 & 10.

*The Ways of the World* by Robert Strayer. General survey of world history. I have both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> edition, two volume set, which are wonderful. I believe they are up to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. The older, cheaper editions, or used editions should be fine.

*The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama. This is “advanced” history. I disagree with most of what this man believes. [Read this last.](#) Fukuyama is a disciple of Leo Strauss (not Claude Levy Strauss) of Chicago who is a right-wing ideologue.

## **Literature**

Plenty of literature has been written which clearly reflects history. For example: *Run Silent Run Deep*, *Das Boot*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Wine Dark Sea*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The list goes on forever.

## **History of Recent America**

*Suburban Warriors* by Lisa McGirr. A superb book on the origins of the New American Right. A case study of Orange Country California. Excellent history.

*White Nationalism: Black History* by Ronald W. Walters. Black history in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Excellent Scholarship.

*What's the Matter With Kansas?* by Thomas Frank. Not sure if he is a historian but this is a superb explanation of how the conservative revolution of 1980-2007+ succeeded. Very enjoyable to read, though it suffers from trendiness.

***October Surprise*** by Gary Sick. The 1980 presidential election. Extremely important. Out of print, buy it used at Amazon.com

*The Party is Over* by Mike Lofgren. Very good, though trendy. Mr. Lofgren is a staunch conservative/ Republican who served his party with dedication for thirty plus years in Washington as a congressional staffer. He rakes his own party over the coals for the mistakes they made and the trouble they caused in the past 33 years. He shows no mercy for the Democrats either.

*Predator Nation* by Charles Ferguson. Excellent. An accurate and succinct account of the nation's economy for the last thirty years fills up the first 75% of the book.

*The Looming Tower* by Lawrence Wright. Excellent recount of the events leading up to September 11<sup>th</sup>.

*Griftopia* by Matt Taibbi. As the NY Times Book Review says, a relentless, penetrating exploration of the root causes of the financial crises that ended economic security for millions of Americans brought on by Wall Street and mainly Republicans in Washington.

Taibbi began as a freelance reporter in the former Soviet Union, including a period in Uzbekistan, which he was deported from for criticizing President Islam Karimov. Taibbi later worked as a sports journalist for the English-language newspaper *The Moscow Times*. He also played professional baseball in Uzbekistan and Russia as well as professional basketball in Mongolia. Taibbi also worked for a short time as an investigator at a Boston-based private detective agency. In 1997, he moved back to Russia to edit the tabloid *Living Here*, then returned eventually to the U.S. His sports writing style governs his writing style in *Griftopia*.

### **Misc.**

***The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*** by Samuel Huntington. In this seminal book Mr. Huntington writes that conflicts between civilizations will not be based on ideology or economics, but culture. He names three major cultures that vie for power in the world: Christian, Islamic, and Sinic.

***No One's World: The West, The Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn*** by Charles Kupchan. This superb book describes a multi-polar world order, and one in which different nations and areas are taking different paths to modernity and prosperity. The Western confidence in democracy and capitalism will have to be moderated.

***The Positive Power of Negative Thinking*** by Julie Norem. This superb book flips what Dr. Martin Seligman proposed in his ground breaking theory of learned helplessness. Just as people can learn to be helpless, they can learn to do their best a world filled

with problems and powerful forces. She calls this theory Defensive Pessimism. Excellent science and a very useful book.

### **African-American History**

*In Hope of Liberty* by J.O. Horton and L.E. Horton. This is my top choice for African-American history because of the professional research coupled with the easy to read writing style. The two authors focus on Northern free blacks before the Civil War. The following is a quote from Google Books: "In a seamless narrative weaving together all these stories and more, the Hortons describe the complex networks, both formal and informal, that made up free black society, from the black churches, which provided a sense of community and served as a training ground for black leaders and political action, to the countless newspapers which spoke eloquently of their aspirations for blacks and played an active role in the antislavery movement, to the informal networks which allowed far-flung families to maintain contact, and which provided support and aid to needy members of the free black community and to fugitives from the South. Finally, they describe the vital role of the black family, the cornerstone of this variegated and tightly knit community. *In Hope of Liberty* brilliantly illuminates the free black communities of the antebellum North as they struggled to reconcile conflicting cultural identities and to work for social change in an atmosphere of racial injustice. As the black community today still struggles with many of the same problems, this insightful history reminds us how far we have come, and how far we have yet to go."

*Trouble in Mind* by Leon Litwack. Black history in the 1900-1950 time frame. Full of gruesome lynchings, etc.

### **Economics**

*The Intelligent Investor* by Benjamin Graham, updated by Jason Zweig. ISBN 978-0-06-055566-5 This superb investing classic has been updated with commentary by Mr. Zweig. Each chapter in the original book is followed by a chapter of commentary by Mr. Zweig which brings this classic up to date and makes it invaluable. I absolutely recommend it.

### **Philosophy**

*The Republic* by Plato. Hard to understand Western civilization and history without referencing Plato. *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle. His group of virtues, excesses, deficiencies, and means is an essential part of Western culture. *The Classics of Western Philosophy: A Reader's Guide*, edited by Gracia, et al. Contains most works of Western philosophy in a compact guide.

### **Politics**

Other than the political books previously mentioned....The Republic,

*Self-Reliance* by Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Religion

*The Bible*. The *Bible* is one of the ten most important books in the world and I am a Christian, however I have not read most of it. Therefore, I would suggest a more succinct version, The *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer*, combined with a list of crucial quotes/sections from the *Bible*.

## Asian History

*Modern East Asia* by Ebrey and Walthall. A succinct and quality survey of Asian history since 1600.

*People's China: A Brief History* by Craig Dietrich. A succinct and quality survey of China from 1890 to 1990 including: pre-Communist revolutionary China, the revolution, and post-revolutionary China (from 1955 to 1990). It describes the good, the bad, and the horrible. In my opinion, authors of books on Communist revolutions, in an afterward, need to acknowledge why these terrible post-revolution events occur, and why dissent (criticism, alternatives) are not allowed in the Communist system.

I have not read this book but it is probably good *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* by Odd Arne Westad (2003)

I have not read this book but it is probably good *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (2012) p 291 by Odd Arne Westad

I have not read this book but it is probably good *Zhou Enlai: A Political Life* by Barbara Barnouin and Changgen Yu.

*Life and Death in Shanghai* by Nien Cheng. "Nien Cheng was educated in London, the widow of an official of Chiang Kai-Shek's regime, and an employee of Shell Oil. She enjoyed comforts that few of her compatriots could afford. In August, 1966 the Red Guards falsely accused her of various crimes as part of the Cultural Revolution. When she refused to confess that any of this made her an enemy of the state, she was placed in solitary confinement, where she would remain for more than six years. This is the story of Cheng's imprisonment, of the deprivation she endured, of her heroic resistance, and of her quest for justice when she was released. This is a personal account of a terrifying chapter in twentieth-century history, and a portrait of one person's courage." The book could have been edited to 50% less in length.



*Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory* by Peter Hessler. I have not read this book but it is probably good.

"From the bestselling author of *Oracle Bones* and *River Town* comes the final book in his award-winning trilogy, on the human side of the economic revolution in China. In the summer of 2001, Peter Hessler, the longtime Beijing correspondent for *The New Yorker*, acquired his Chinese driver's license. For the next seven years, he traveled the country, tracking how the automobile and improved roads were transforming China. Hessler writes movingly of the average people farmers, migrant workers, entrepreneurs who have reshaped the nation during one of the most critical periods in its modern history."

"*Country Driving* begins with Hessler's 7,000-mile trip across northern China, following the Great Wall, from the East China Sea to the Tibetan plateau. He investigates a historically important rural region being abandoned, as young people migrate to jobs in the southeast. Next Hessler spends six years in Sancha, a small farming village in the mountains north of Beijing, which changes dramatically after the local road is paved and the capital's auto boom brings new tourism. Finally, he turns his attention to urban China, researching development over a period of more than two years in Lishui, a small southeastern city where officials hope that a new government-built expressway will transform a farm region into a major industrial center. Hessler, whom *The Wall Street Journal* calls "one of the Western world's most thoughtful writers on modern China," deftly illuminates the vast, shifting landscape of a traditionally rural nation that, having once built walls against foreigners, is now building roads and factory towns that look to the outside world."

**History Less Important.** These books below might be at the top of this list, in the American section, but I tried to structure the list to make it easier to read.

*The Best of Life.* A collection of photos that appeared in *Life* magazine. One of the reasons I became a history buff. Can be bought for a low cost, used, at Amazon.

*The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* by Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle. This is more sophisticated American history (focused essays). Highly recommended for American history buffs. Read the Introduction. Read Chapters 3, 4, 7, & 9.

*Liberalism and Its Discontents* by Alan Brinkley. More sophisticated history and highly recommended. Read Chapters 2, 3, 4 & 15. Almost the entire book is good. I skipped Chapter 1.

*God & Man at Yale* by William Buckley, Jr. One of the causes of the conservative revolution it should be read as a source book not as a detached text on the subject. What is wrong with the book is, Yale is not filled with socialists or atheists (quite the opposite), and Yale is not controlled by its alumni (only partially).



*Conscience of a Conservative* by Barry Goldwater. Another original document, not a history text. Actually written by Brent Mozell. Another one of the causes of the conservative revolution; one can also see how we got stuck in Vietnam because of this book.

## Education

*Educational Psychology* by Anita Woolfolk (13th Edition)

This classic book is a must for any teacher. Though the latest version sells for \$175 in hardcover, you can get the 11<sup>th</sup> edition (which is what I have) used for \$8. I completely recommend a used 11<sup>th</sup> edition. This book is comprehensive, easy to read, and up-to-date.

*The Teaching for Understanding Guide* by Tina Blythe and Associates.

This superb, thin, book on educational theory is written in an easy to read manner which also makes it easy to implement. One of my two favorite books on education.

In the book is a theory of understanding and a framework that lays out the essential ideas involved in teaching for understanding. The book helps students understand what is important about studying history. It will help them remember what they are learning in this unit long after you have moved on to others. It will help make class more important to students other than just another grade on a report card.

Ms. Blythe writes "...the commitment on the part of many teachers to engage students more thoughtfully in the subject matter they are learning by helping students to draw connections between their lives and the subject matter, between principles and practice, past and present, and present and future."

*Foundations of Educational Psychology* by J. Michael Spector. This book is superb because it teaches educational technology, but 50% of the book is not specifically about technology. That information is educational theory, often recent, and much of it is "traditional" that is unrelated to technology. Highly recommended.

The Adolescent Brain by