

SMC WEDNESDAY READING GROUP - BOOKS IN READING ORDER

DATE BOOK TO BE DISCUSSED	Title	Author	Discussion to be lead by	No. Of Pages	Comments
7/5/2023	The Mosquito Bowl: A Game of Life and Death in World War II	Buzz Bissinger	Bob Maxfield	480	This is a true story of a football game played on Christmas Eve, 1944, in Guadalcanal between two regiments of marines. Many of the players+G42 had starred at US universities before they entered the service.
8/2/2023	The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt	T.J. Stiles	Jim Zyla	562	This book retells the larger-than-life story of the early days of commerce, banking, transportation and the stock market. Vanderbilt started with ferry boats in New York Harbor, reached around South America to San Francisco by ship, and then across much of the country by railroad.
9/6/2023	Code Name: Lise: The True Story of the Woman Who Became WWII's Most Highly Decorated Spy	Larry Loftis	Roger Timm	385	The year is 1942, and World War II is in full swing. Odette Sansom decides to become an SOE agent to aid Britain and her beloved homeland, France. Five failed attempts and one plane crash later, she finally lands in occupied France to begin her mission. It is here that she meets her commanding officer Captain Peter Churchill. As they successfully complete mission after mission, Peter and Odette fall in love. All the while, they are being hunted by the cunning German secret police sergeant, Hugo Bleicher, who finally succeeds in capturing them. They are sent to Paris's Fresnes prison, and from there to concentration camps in Germany where they are starved, beaten, and tortured. But in the face of despair, they never give up hope, their love for each other, or the whereabouts of their colleagues.

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10/4/2023	Dr. Benjamin Rush: The Founding Father Who Healed a Wounded Nation	Harlow Unger	Paul Lieberman	282	A gripping, often startling biography of the Founding Father of the America that other Founding Fathers forgot—the America of women, African Americans, Jews, Roman Catholics, Quakers, indentured workers, the poor, the mentally ill, and war veterans. When the Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776, ninety percent of Americans could not vote and did not enjoy rights to life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. Alone among those who signed the Declaration, Benjamin Rush heard the cries of those other, deprived Americans and stepped forth as the nation's first great humanitarian and social reformer. Rush led the Founding Fathers in calling for abolition of slavery, equal rights for women, improved medical care for injured troops, free health care for the poor, slum clearance, citywide sanitation, an end to child labor, free universal public education, humane treatment and therapy for the mentally ill, prison reform, and an end to capital punishment. This new biography restores Benjamin Rush to his rightful place in American history as the Founding Father of modern American medical care and psychiatry.
11/1/2023	Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past	Kevin Kruse & Julien Zeitzer	Roger Timm	476	The United States is in the grip of a crisis of bad history. Distortions of the past promoted in the media have led large numbers of Americans to believe in fictions over facts, making constructive dialogue impossible and imperiling our democracy. In <i>Myth America</i> , Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zeitzer have assembled an all-star team of fellow historians to push back against this misinformation. The contributors debunk narratives that portray the New Deal and Great Society as failures, immigrants as hostile invaders, and feminists as anti-family warriors—among numerous other partisan lies. Based on a firm foundation of historical scholarship, their findings revitalize our understanding of American history. Replacing myths with research and reality, <i>Myth America</i> is essential reading amid today's heated debates about our nation's past.

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12/6/2023	The Nazi Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill	Brad Meltzer & Josh Mensch	Bill Price	386	In 1943, as the war against Nazi Germany raged abroad, President Franklin Roosevelt had a critical goal: a face-to-face sit-down with his allies Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill. This first-ever meeting of the Big Three in Tehran, Iran, would decide some of the most crucial strategic details of the war. Yet when the Nazis found out about the meeting, their own secret plan took shape—an assassination plot that would have changed history. A true story filled with daring rescues, body doubles, and political intrigue, <i>The Nazi Conspiracy</i> details FDR's pivotal meeting in Tehran and the deadly Nazi plot against the heads of state of the three major Allied powers who attended it. <i>The Nazi Conspiracy</i> explores the great political minds of the twentieth century, investigating the pivotal years of the war in gripping detail. This meeting of the Big Three changed the course of World War II. Here is the inside story of how it almost led to a world-shattering disaster.
1/3/2024	The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad	Stephen Ambrose	Gordon Allardyce	382	Learn about the brave men, famous and unheralded ordinary men doing the extraordinary, who accomplished the spectacular feat that made the continent into a nation.

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2/7/2024	On Desperate Ground: The Marines at The Reservoir, the Korean War's Greatest Battle	Hampton Sides	Roger Timm	371	On October 15, 1950, General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of UN troops in Korea, convinced President Harry Truman that the Communist forces of Kim Il-sung would be utterly defeated by Thanksgiving. The Chinese, he said with near certainty, would not intervene in the war. As he was speaking, 300,000 Red Chinese soldiers began secretly crossing the Manchurian border. Led by some 20,000 men of the First Marine Division, the Americans moved deep into the snowy mountains of North Korea, toward the trap Mao had set for the vainglorious MacArthur along the frozen shores of the Chosin Reservoir. What followed was one of the most heroic--and harrowing--operations in American military history, and one of the classic battles of all time. Faced with probable annihilation and temperatures plunging to 20 degrees below zero, the surrounded and hugely outnumbered Marines fought through the enemy forces with ferocity, ingenuity, and nearly unimaginable courage as they marched their way to the sea. While expertly detailing the follies of the American leaders, On Desperate Ground is an immediate, grunt's-eye view of history, enthralling in its narrative pace and powerful in its portrayal of what ordinary men are capable of in the most extreme circumstances.
3/6/2024	The Ambassador: Joseph P. Kennedy at the Court of St. James's 1938-1940	Susan Ronald	Fred Freeman	447	On February 18, 1938, Joseph P. Kennedy was sworn in as US Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Initially welcomed by the British, in less than two short years Kennedy was loathed by the White House, the State Department and the British Government. Believing firmly that Fascism was the inevitable wave of the future, he consistently misrepresented official US foreign policy. Ronald confirms in impressive detail what has long been believed by many: that Kennedy was a Fascist sympathizer and an anti-Semite whose only loyalty was to his family's advancement. She also reveals the ambitions of the Kennedy dynasty during this period abroad, as they sought to enter the world of high society London and establish themselves as America's first family. Thorough and utterly readable, <i>The Ambassador</i> explores a darker side of the Kennedy patriarch.
4/3/2024	All the Broken Places	John Boyle	Bob Maxfield	400	A ninety year old wealthy woman living in London struggles to forget and hide her past in Nazi Germany

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5/1/2024	City of Fortune: How Venice Ruled the Seas	Roger Crowley	Paul Lieberman	473	The rise and fall of Venice’s empire is an irresistible story. City of Fortune charts Venice’s astounding five-hundred-year voyage to the pinnacle of power in an epic story that stands unrivaled for drama, intrigue, and sheer opulent majesty. It traces the full arc of the Venetian imperial saga, from the ill-fated Fourth Crusade, which culminates in the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, to the Ottoman-Venetian War of 1499–1503, which sees the Ottoman Turks supplant the Venetians as the preeminent naval power in the Mediterranean. In between are three centuries of Venetian maritime dominance, during which a tiny city of “lagoon dwellers” grows into the richest place on earth. Crowley paints a vivid picture of this avaricious, enterprising people and the bountiful lands that came under their dominion. From the opening of the spice routes to the clash between Christianity and Islam, Venice played a leading role in the defining conflicts of its time—the reverberations of which are still being felt today.
6/5/2024	The 1619 Project: A New Origins Story	Nikole Hanna-Jones	Ashok Gupka	480	This book is intended to reframe our understanding of American History by placing slavery at the center of our national story. It includes essays and poetry from a wide variety of authors.
7/10/2024	And There was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle	John Meacham	Bob Maxfield	720	This 2022 best seller sheds new light on Lincoln's commitment to honoring the moral purpose of America. This book tells the story of Lincoln from his birth on the Kentucky frontier in 1809, to his leadership during the Civil War and his tragic assassination in 1865: his rise, his self-education, his loves, his bouts of depression, his political failures, his deepening faith, and his persistent conviction that slavery must end. In a nation shaped by the courage of the enslaved of the era and by the brave witness of Black Americans, Lincoln’s story illustrates the ways and means of politics in a democracy, the roots and durability of racism, and the capacity of conscience to shape events.

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8/1/2024	The Luck of the Draw: My Story of the Air War in Europe	Frank Murphy	Bill Price	466	Beginning on August 17, 1942, American heavy bomber crews of the Eighth Air Force took off for combat in the hostile skies over occupied Europe. The final price was staggering. 4,300 B-17s and B-24s failed to return; nearly 21,000 men were taken prisoner or interned in a neutral country, and a further 17,650 made the ultimate sacrifice. <i>Luck of the Draw</i> is more than a war story. It's the incredible, inspiring story of Frank Murphy, one of the few survivors from the 100th Bombardment Group, who cheated death for months in a German POW camp after being shot out of his B-17 Flying Fortress.
9/4/2024	The Pentagon's Brain: An Uncensored History of DARPA, America's Top-Secret Military Research Agency	Annie Jacobsen	Roger Timm	577	Discover the definitive history of DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency. No one has ever written the history of the Defense Department's most secret, most powerful, and most controversial military science R&D agency. In the first-ever history about the organization, New York Times bestselling author Annie Jacobsen draws on inside sources, exclusive interviews, private documents, and declassified memos to paint a picture of DARPA, or "the Pentagon's brain," from its Cold War inception in 1958 to the present. This is the book on DARPA -- a compelling narrative about this clandestine intersection of science and the American military and the often frightening results.
10/2/2024	21 Lessons for the 21st Century	Yuval Noah Harari	Swarn Rajpal	400	We previously read Harari's book, Sapiens . In 21 Lessons for the 21st Century , Yuval Noah Harari probes into today's most urgent issues as we move into the uncharted territory of the future. As technology advances faster than our understanding of it, hacking becomes a tactic of war, and the world feels more polarized than ever, Harari addresses the challenge of navigating life in the face of constant and disorienting change and raises the important questions we need to ask ourselves in order to survive in a future that will be very different from the world we now live in: How can we retain freedom of choice when Big Data is watching us? What will the future workforce look like, and how should we ready ourselves for it? How should we deal with the threat of terrorism? Why is liberal democracy in crisis? Presenting complex contemporary challenges clearly and accessibly, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century is essential reading.

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11/6/2024	The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery	Eric Foner	Roger Timm	465	This landmark work gives us a definitive account of Lincoln's lifelong engagement with the nation's critical issue: American slavery. A master historian, Eric Foner draws Lincoln and the broader history of the period into perfect balance. We see Lincoln, a pragmatic politician grounded in principle, deftly navigating the dynamic politics of antislavery, secession, and civil war. Lincoln's greatness emerges from his capacity for moral and political growth.
12/4/2024	Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania	Eric Larson	Bill Price	480	On May 1, 1915, the <i>Lusitania</i> left New York, bound for Liverpool, carrying a record number of children and infants. The passengers were surprisingly at ease, even though Germany had declared the seas around Britain to be a war zone. For months, German U-boats had brought terror to the North Atlantic, but the <i>Lusitania</i> was one of the era's great transatlantic "Greyhounds"—the fastest liner then in service, and passenger ships had largely been free from U-Boat attack. Germany was determined expand the U-Boat war, and Walther Schwieger, the captain of <i>Unterseeboot</i> -20, was happy to oblige. The resultant meeting of the two ships is a story that many of us think we know but don't, and Erik Larson tells it thrillingly, switching between hunter and hunted. Dead Wake captures the sheer drama and emotional power of a disaster whose intimate details and true meaning have long been obscured by history.
1/8/2025	Better Times Than These: A novel	Winston Groom	Fred Freeman	411	A very good story about serving in Vietnam in the 1960's, with the perspectives of both officers and enlisted men.
2/5/2025	Classified: The Untold Story of Racial Classification in America	David Bernstein	Gordon Allardyce	186	Learn how the American system of racial classification has evolved via a combination of amateur anthropology and sociology, politics and happenstance.