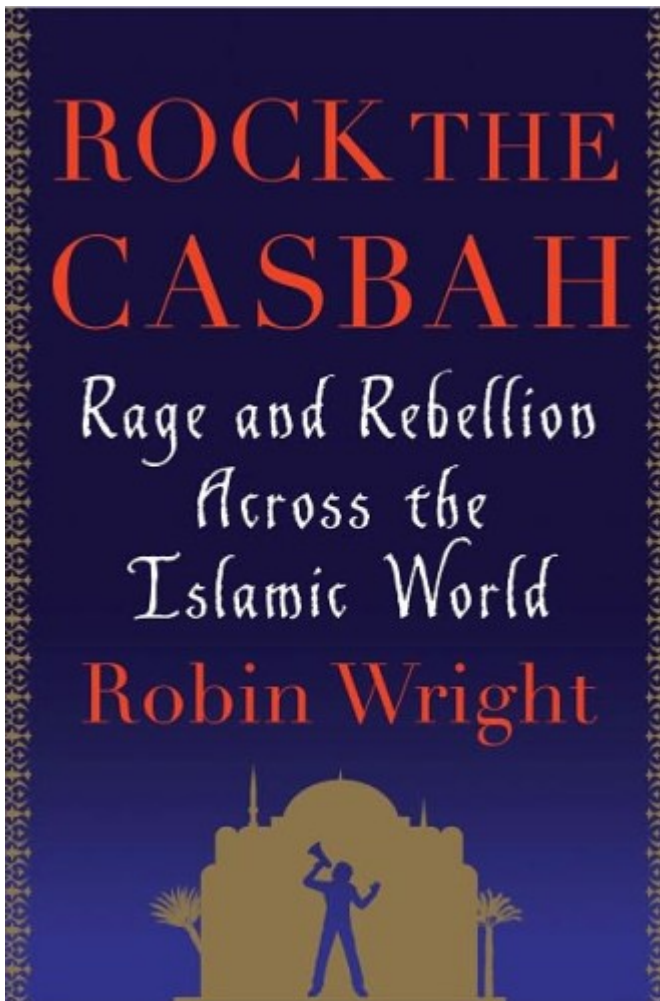


CC recommends: History & current events

selected by [Richard A. Kauffman](#) and [David Heim](#)

This review appears in the [December 13, 2011](#) issue.

In Review



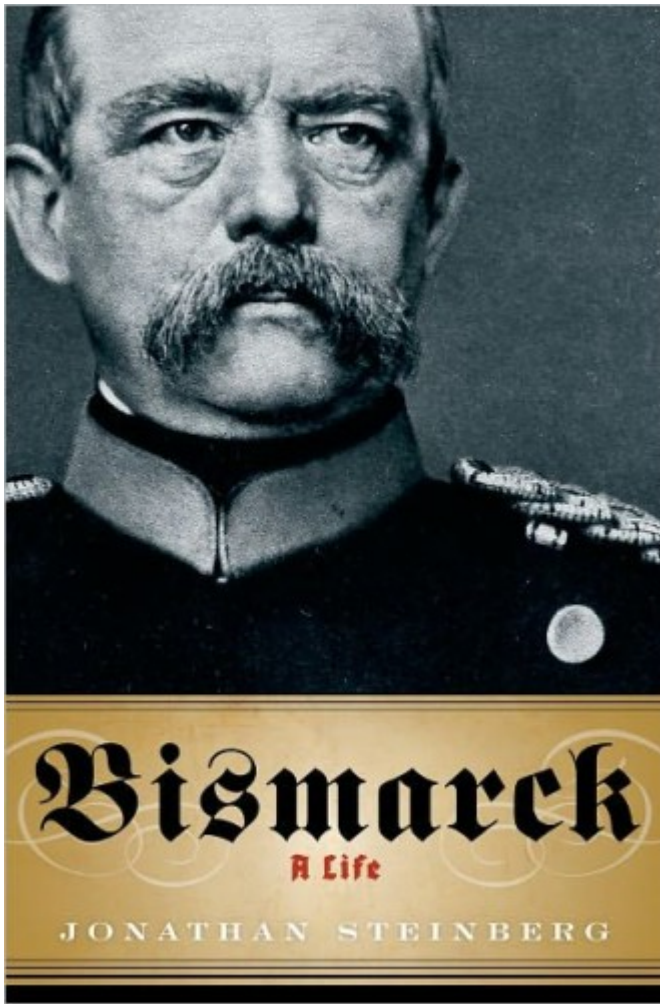
Rock the Casbah

By Robin Wright
Simon & Schuster



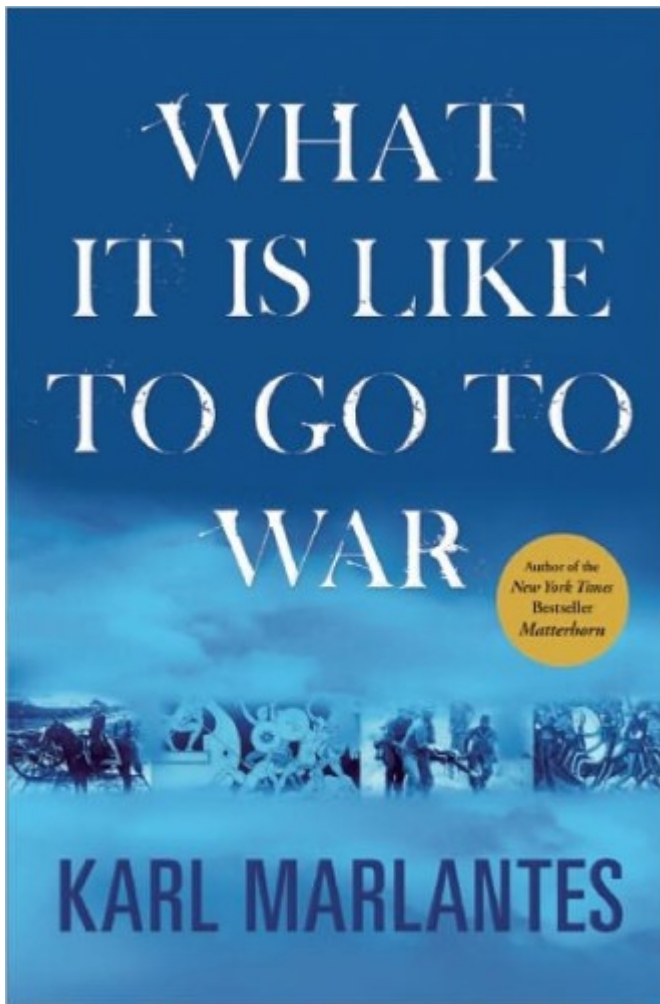
We Meant Well

By Peter Van Buren
Metropolitan Books



Bismarck

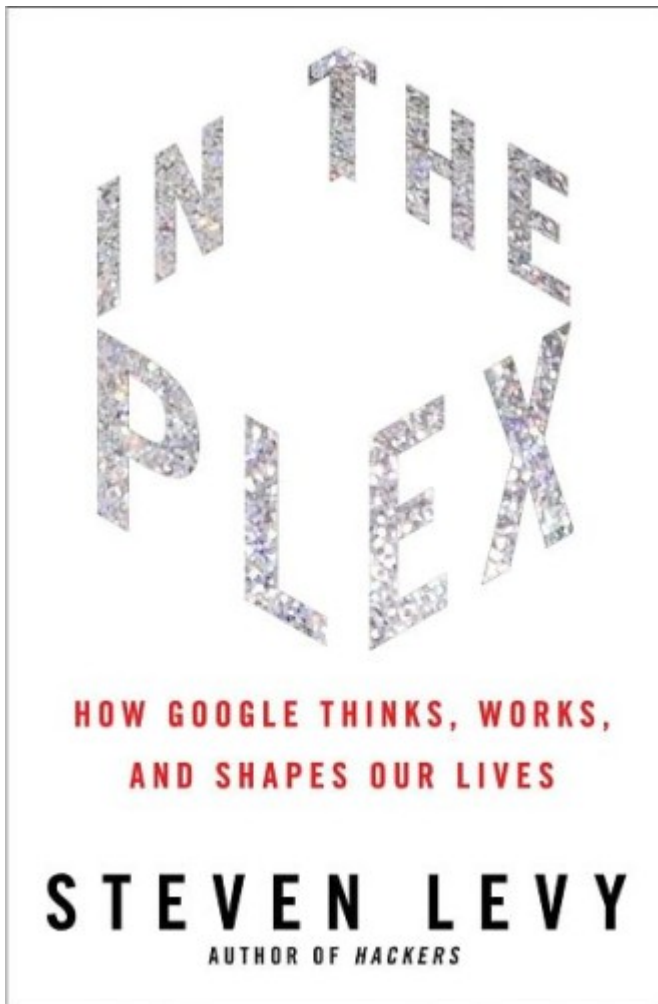
By Jonathan Steinberg
Oxford University Press



What It Is Like to Go to War

By Karl Marlantes

Atlantic Monthly Press



In the Plex

By Steve Levy

Simon & Schuster

ALL THE DEVILS ARE HERE

THE HIDDEN HISTORY
OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS



BETHANY McLEAN
BESTSELLING COAUTHOR OF
THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM
AND JOE NOCERA

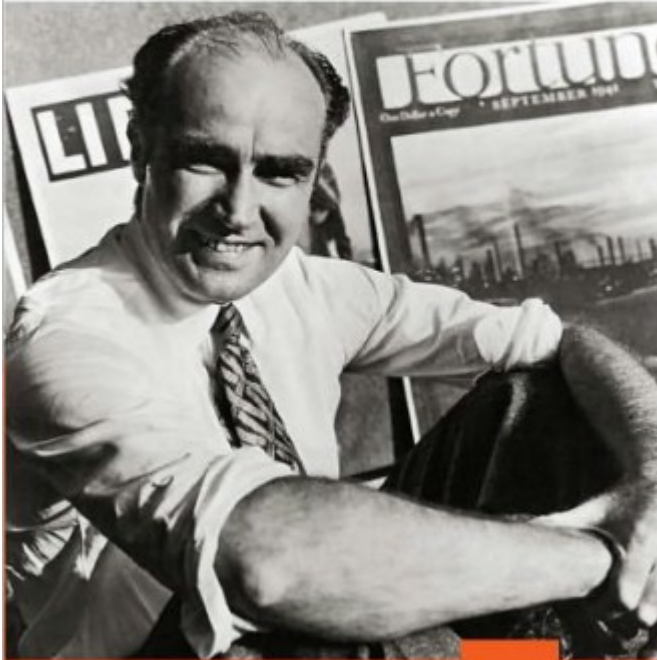
All the Devils are Here

By Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera
Portfolio/Penguin

"Brinkley's wonderfully insightful and judicious biography is more than the story of a life; it's a political history of modernity." —*The New Yorker*

THE PUBLISHER

Henry Luce and His American Century

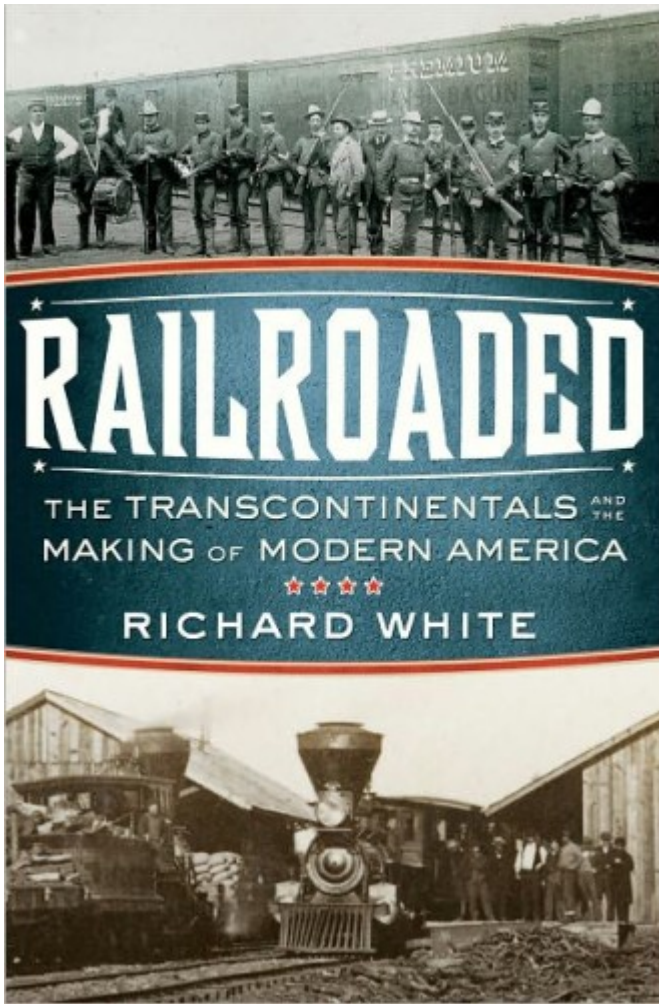


ALAN BRINKLEY

The Publisher

By Alan Brinkley

Vintage



Railroaded

By Richard White
Norton

Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World, by Robin Wright. The West's myopic preoccupation with the war on terror has kept it from seeing the ferment in the Middle East, says Wright. She gives an up-close account of three movements for change: the revolts against authoritarian regimes given expression in the so-called Arab Spring; the counter-jihad movement against al-Qaeda and the Taliban; and the rebellion against Islamic ideology typified by the Green Revolution in Iran. Whatever emerges from these movements will not necessarily be pro-Western and will most certainly have an Islamic identity. The Middle East's future will be complicated by lack of democratic experience, poverty, access to oil, Iran's nuclear ambition, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as sectarian divisions within Islam itself.

We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People, by Peter Van Buren. Van Buren is a foreign service officer who volunteered for a year of "nation building" in Iraq. He discovered gross mismanagement, a profligate waste of resources, a bureaucratic quagmire and a resistance to adjusting to realities on the ground. Programs were never tested with the Iraqis they were meant to serve. The disastrous outcomes would be funny if they weren't so tragic. This is the book the State Department doesn't want you to read, van Buren says, and it has gotten him in trouble with his superiors

Bismarck: A Life, by Jonathan Steinberg. Known as the brutal "Iron Chancellor," Bismarck, was one of the most influential leaders in 19th-century Europe. Steinberg's psychological portrait of the man who united Germany shows a very complex and contradictory human being: tyrannical and insecure, charming yet domineering. Bismarck's power grab in the early years was aided by Lutheran Pietists who shared his anti-Semitism and believed the only good Jew was a converted Jew. Other Bismarck biographies have been written, but what is unique about Steinberg's is his effort to give voice to Bismarck's contemporaries—how they perceived and experienced him.

What It Is Like to Go to War, by Karl Marlantes. Marlantes was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford in 1967 when, out of a sense of duty, he volunteered for combat service in Vietnam and ended up leading a platoon of marines. A year ago Marlantes published a highly regarded fictional work (*Matterhorn*) based on his Vietnam experience. This nonfiction work represents 40 years of reflecting on what combat did to him mentally and spiritually. While he was trained well to kill, he didn't receive training on how to deal with what the war would do to him.

In the Plex: How Google Thinks, Works, and Shapes our Lives, by Steven Levy. Of several books out this year about Google, Levy's is the most enthusiastic and uncritical, but it's still a good introduction to a company that has transformed how we gain access to information. Instead of going to the library we enter the mathematically engineered, advertisement-soaked, profit-driven online environment developed by Google. With its ability to anticipate what we're searching for, Google indeed has the power to shape our lives.

All the Devils Are Here: The Hidden History of the Financial Crisis, by Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera. Comprehending the financial crash of 2008, with its many complex moving parts, may be beyond human capacity, but this book comes close.

McLean and Nocera, two of the best business writers around, profile more than a dozen figures who were at the center of the debacle. All of them acted according to the logic of the institutions they served, refusing to believe that they—and so many other smart, successful people—could have gotten it all wrong. The "devils," the authors shows, were ordinary ones.

The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century, by Alan Brinkley. Luce founded (with Yale classmate Britt Hadden) *Time* magazine and went on to create *Life*, *Fortune* and a huge media empire. He was the son of Presbyterian missionaries to China who sought to extend Christian beliefs and the benefits of American life around the globe. In Luce, such evangelical ambition was transposed into a secular key. His passion was for America and the American brand of success. It was Luce who first called the 20th century "the American century." Brinkley, a master of modern U.S. history, makes plain Luce's limitations as well as his genius at articulating and shaping Americans' self-understanding.

Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America, by Richard White. The building of a transcontinental railroad and the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Summit in Utah constitute one of the mythic stories of the American West. White offers a withering account of the darker realities behind the story. As he tells it, the transcontinental project was fueled by greed, political bribery and massive government subsidies. Railroads of the late 19th century were ill conceived, "bloated, ill managed, heavily indebted, and corrupt"—which didn't stop their owners from amassing enormous personal fortunes.