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AP U.S. HISTORY SUMMER ASSIGNMENT 2019

DUE ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Advanced Placement U.S. History is a survey of what has happened during the history of the United States. It is also an introduction to the way college students and professional historians read, write, and debate "the story of America."

In preparation for the year ahead, spend part of your summer actively reading the introduction and Chapters 1-2 from *The Story of America: Essays on Origins* (2012) by Harvard historian Jill Lepore. Each chapter will teach you something about American history; in "Here He Lyes," for instance, you'll learn about Jamestown and John Smith. However, what's important about each essay is not what Lepore tells you about the past, but rather what each she reveals about the process of thinking like an historian.

Lepore's book is challenging, so use the active reading objectives (AROs) found on the back of this handout to guide your reading. Don't be discouraged if you get stuck! Expect to face obstacles—you'll certainly encounter them over the next year—and start learning from difficult experiences. I don't expect you to have mastered the skills needed to get an "A" on the first day of class, and you shouldn't either! I do expect you to have an open mind and a desire to learn.

I will assess the quality of your active reading using the rubric below:

	Exemplary ✓+	Proficient ✓	Developing ✓-
Vocabulary & Key Terms	I regularly identify key terms and/or unfamiliar vocabulary. I can define or clarify these words using original paraphrase.	I sometimes identify essential key terms and/or unfamiliar vocabulary. I attempt to define or clarify these words using original paraphrase, but sometimes use definitions taken from the dictionary.	I rarely identify key terms and/or unfamiliar vocabulary. I rarely attempt to define or clarify these words (if at all).
Main Ideas	I can identify the main ideas that the author wants to get across, and I can write summaries in the margins that are accurate, clear, and concise.	I can identify some of the main ideas that the author wants to get across (I might miss some), and I can write summaries in the margins that are usually accurate and clear.	I rarely identify the main ideas that the author wants to get across. When I write summaries of the main ideas, they are usually vague, unclear, or not in my own words.
Response and Analysis	I can write sophisticated and thought-provoking analyses, evaluations, and/or responses to the text. I engage with the text using a variety of reader-response strategies: making connections; asking probing questions; corroborating, challenging, or modifying claims; etc.	I can write clear, relevant, and original analyses, evaluations, and/or responses to the text. I consistently connect my own outside/prior knowledge to ideas presented in the text.	I write comments in the margins that do not draw on outside ideas or prior knowledge, or which may be irrelevant, vague, or superficial. I rely too heavily on one or two types of reader-response strategies (e.g., only asking questions).

So, what are you waiting for? Start reading!

The Story of America: Essays on Origins
Active Reading Objectives

Introduction

Vocabulary/Key Terms: to abide (5), vantage (5), fraught (5), inevitable (6), suffrage (8), bumptiousness (9), treatise (10), "Turner's frontier thesis" (11), to stipulate (12), "originalism" (13), provincial (14), ideology (14),

Main Ideas:

- Similarities and differences between history and political rhetoric?
- How ***and*** why the story of American democracy changed over time?

Response/Analysis: *I leave these up to you!*

Chapter 1: "Here He Lyes"

Vocabulary/Key Terms: brackish (20), indolent (20), booster (21), anachronistic (22), Jamestown Fort (23), Roanoke (24), to kvetch (24), ethnographer (28), to aggrandize (28), knight-errant (28)

Main Ideas:

- How Morgan, Kelso, and Kupperman assess the success or failure of Jamestown, and the evidence they use to support their claims?
- How ***and*** why historians changed their minds about John Smith?
- Lepore's own conclusions about John Smith and Jamestown?

Response/Analysis: *I leave these up to you!*

Chapter 2: "A Pilgrim Passed I"

Vocabulary/Key Terms: Victorians (32), prudes (32), laudable (32), William Bradford (33), Metacom/"King Philip" (34), Benjamin Church (38), allegory (42), ambivalence (43)

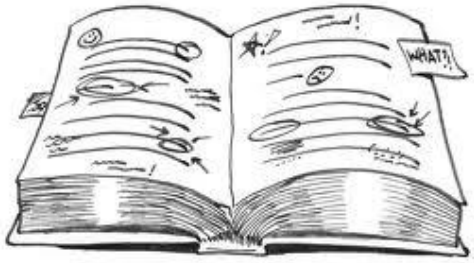
Main Ideas:

- Reasons why Lepore dislikes Nathanial Philbrick's history of the Pilgrims?
- Similarities ***and*** differences between Philbrick and Harvard historian Samuel Morison?
- Reasons why Lepore thinks Morison was a better historian than Philbrick?

Response/Analysis: *I leave these up to you!*

Active Reading

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."
~Joseph Addison



Many people believe that by moving one's eyes over a piece of text slowly and carefully—in other words, by reading it—that they will automatically comprehend, learn, and remember the content of what they read. But, this could not be more incorrect. To be an effective reader who fully grasps what one reads, who thinks critically about it, and who is able to apply it their own life, you need to do more than sit passively with the book in your hand.

To be an effective reader, you need to be *actively* engaged and involved with the text in front of you. This is no different from the rest of your life. Consider this: do you most effectively learn a musical instrument or a sport by watching someone else play, or by actively working at it and practicing yourself?

Similarly, effective reading is a mental process that requires you to *actively* interact with the text by ***identifying, clarifying, making connections, synthesizing, evaluating,*** and ***creating new ideas.*** This kind of reading is a skill, and becoming a successful active reader will require both an understanding of the purpose of this process and a commitment to incorporating into one's daily life.

- ***Identifying*****,** as we are using it here, means to pick out the main ideas in the text you are reading, as well as any unfamiliar vocabulary terms.
- ***Clarifying*** means to define new terms and comprehends the meaning of the main ideas.
- ***Making Connections*** means to show you understand how different main ideas in the text relate to one another, and also to link these ideas to other reading you have done, to other Core classes, to personal experiences, etc.
- ***Synthesizing*** means to take all the information you have read and critically examined and put it together as a meaningful whole.
- ***Evaluating*** means to think critically about what you are reading and reason out what to accept or reject from the author's claims.
- ***Creating*** means to compose a personalized argument that supports a new meaning of the material.

To help train yourself to be an active reader, there are several things you will be asked to do. To start, you'll need 3 colored pens:

Red Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Key Terms

As you are reading, use red pen to circle or underline vocabulary terms. These can include both words that are unfamiliar to you, and essential key words that a reader needs to know in order to understand the text.

- Once you have identified unfamiliar and key vocabulary terms, define them in the margins. Make sure it's clear which definition goes with which word (an arrow can work well for this).
- If you've looked up a word but you're still unclear about what the author means in that particular sentence or passage, try *defining the word in* context. In other words, try rewriting the sentence in your own words using the definition (or synonyms) you found.
- It is always important to "double check" that you understand the meaning of the words in a passage. Even if you think you understand all of the vocabulary in a text, identifying and defining the words that are most essential to the author's main ideas will help you think more clearly and deeply about what the author is trying to communicate.

Blue Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Main Ideas

Blue pen should be used to identify the main ideas in a section of the reading.

- Underline key words or phrases that you think are the main and most important ideas the author wants to get across. The purpose is not to underline everything! You should be focused on identifying only what is most essential.
- When you underline, you must paraphrase *in your own words* what the author is saying in the margins. This is the step that will help clarify your understanding; underlining alone accomplishes nothing. Remember that this is a summary, meaning that it should be brief (just a few words or a phrase). You are *not* rewriting the whole passage here!
- Identifying the main ideas in a reading does not necessarily mean you need to summarize each paragraph. You should identify the main ideas when:
    - ✓ You don't understand what the author is saying. (Often the process of paraphrasing helps clarify, especially when paired with the vocabulary work of your red pen!)
    - ✓ You come across a passage that is essential to understanding the whole text.
    - ✓ The author presents a new idea.

Black Pen: Responding/Analyzing Main Ideas

Black pen is for analyzing and responding to the text. Underline the part of the text you want to respond to, and then use the space in the margin to make your notes. These kinds of annotations can include:

- *Clarifying Questions* (i.e. a question that can be supported with a factual answer). A good active reader might pause and research the answer, and come back and annotate the text once they've found it.
- *Analytical Questions* (i.e. a question that can help you to gain further insight into a text). A good active reader not only asks analytical questions, but also tries to answer them.
- Your *evaluation/opinion* of a particular passage or idea
- *Examples to support* the author's point
- *Examples or counter-arguments to refute* the author's point
- *Inferences or predictions* about what might happen next (in fiction) or what the author might say next (in a non-fiction text)
- *Connections* to other classes, texts, or personal experiences (Use your outside/prior knowledge to interact directly with ideas stated in the text!)

The Story of America

ESSAYS ON ORIGINS

Jill Lepore

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON AND OXFORD

INTRODUCTION

In 1938, if you had a dollar and seventy-two cents, you could buy a copy of *The Rise of American Democracy*, a seven-hundred-page hardcover about the size of a biggish Bible or a Boy Scout Handbook. While a Bible's worth is hard to measure, the scout guide, at fifty cents, was an awfully good bargain and an excellent book to have on hand if you were shipwrecked on a desert island, not least because it included a chapter on How to Make Fire without Matches. But *The Rise of American Democracy* promised, invaluably, "to make clear how Americans have come to live and to believe as they do." It is also a very good read. "A Simple Book," its ad copy boasted. "Paragraphs average three to a page. Sentences are short." Better yet: "A Democracy Theme runs through the whole text."

The Rise of American Democracy was written by Mabel B. Casner, a Connecticut schoolteacher, and Ralph Henry Gabriel, a Yale professor of intellectual history, in 1937. In those dark days, with Fascism, not democracy, on the rise, Casner and Gabriel offered a wise and sober historian's creed: "We live today in perilous times; so did many of our forefathers. They sometimes made mistakes; let us strive to learn not to repeat these errors. The generations which lived before us left us a heritage of noble ideals; let us hold fast to these." Above all, they wanted students to understand the idea of democracy. But the book is also full of practical teaching tips and "Real life activities"—tested by Casner in her classroom in West

Haven, Connecticut—which, while "not to be followed slavishly," were supplied at the end of every chapter, and included instructions for an end-of-year finale, a class play, "The Rise of American Democracy: A Dramatization in Four Scenes," to be performed some cool June afternoon. It opens with a closed curtain:

> *Enter* COLUMBIA *from one side and* BOY *from Europe from the opposite side.*
>
> **Boy.** I am looking for Columbia. Do you know where I could find her?
>
> **Columbia.** I am she.
>
> **Boy** *(bowing).* I am happy and honored to make your acquaintance. I come from Europe. I have heard much of your democracy. I have come to you to find out what it is like. . . .
>
> **Columbia.** I shall be glad to show you. Perhaps the best way is to go on a journey through American history. (*Exit both together*)

The curtain rises on the Constitutional Convention, where Columbia and the earnest young European watch the delegates conclude their deliberations. Next, Columbia takes her awestruck European student of democracy to "the Western plains in the 1840's" to witness a shambles of bedraggled pioneers scuffle across the stage in the play's pitched climax, which combines singing, cowboy costumes, and even parts for pets, as per the sociable stage direction: "*dogs may be added.*"

"I understand that they are settling your great continent," the boy says, "but I do not understand what they have to do with democracy."

"They have only a few belongings and simple tools," Columbia points out, but "They are building a democratic nation. Men do not have to have possessions to do great things."[1]

No matter if the scenery toppled, if the pioneers tripped in their boots, if the dogs barked and bayed; everyone in the audience was treated to a concise restatement of the then-dominant interpretation of the rise of American democracy: that it was fueled by the settling of the frontier and that it chiefly involved the hardscrabble striving of the poor.

What accounts for the rise of American democracy? Casner and Gabriel tried to answer that question by staging a play, by telling a story. That was a good idea. The United States got its start as a story. It begins: "When in the course of human events . . . ." It has a moral: "All men are created equal." It even has a villain, George III, on whose machinations the plot turns: "The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States."

To say that the United States is a story is not to say that it is fiction; it is, instead, to suggest that it follows certain narrative conventions. All nations are places, but they are also acts of imagination. Who has a part in a nation's story, like who can become a citizen and who has a right to vote, isn't foreordained, or even stable. The story's plot, like the nation's borders and the nature of its electorate, is always shifting. Laws are passed and wars are fought to keep some people in and others out. Who tells the story, like who writes the laws and who wages the wars, is always part of that struggle.

Consider the Declaration of Independence. In March 1776, two months before John Adams was appointed to serve with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston, and Roger Sherman, on a committee charged with drafting a declaration of independence, Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her husband. "I long to hear that you have declared an independency," she began.

> And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember

> the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.[2]

Adams wrote back in April. "As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh," he began. "We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bonds of government everywhere; that children and apprentices were disobedient; that schools and colleges were grown turbulent; that Indians slighted their guardians, and negroes grew insolent to their masters. But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented." He refused to take her story—about the rule of men over women—seriously. "Depend upon it," he resolved, "we know better than to repeal our masculine systems."[3]

The story of America isn't carved in stone, or even inked on parchment; it is, instead, told, and fought over, again and again. It could have gone a thousand other ways. Even the Declaration of Independence could have gone a thousand other ways. In June and into the first days of July, it went through draft after draft. In his original draft, Jefferson, a slave owner, included a breathless paragraph in which he blamed the king for slavery ("He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery"), for his thwarting of colonial efforts to abolish the slave trade ("determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce"), and for support

for proclamations promising freedom to slaves who joined the British army ("he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he had deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another").[4]

Jefferson's fellow delegates could not abide it. To some, it went too far; to others, it didn't go half far enough. It was struck out almost entirely.

If Adams had listened to his wife, if Jefferson had prevailed, if a thousand other things had gone a thousand other ways, the Declaration of Independence would have come out differently. Instead, the story told in the Declaration of Independence established the equality of all men (but not of women), decried tyranny (but not slavery), and chronicled the king's "long train of abuses and usurpations" to justify what was otherwise treason as necessary to the colonists' "future security." It used the past to make an argument about the future.

The Declaration of Independence is exceptionally beautiful as a piece of writing and as a statement of political philosophy, but using the past to make an argument about the future is far from exceptional; it is, instead, a feature of political rhetoric, always and everywhere. Politics involves elections and votes and money and power, but the heart of politics is describing how things came to be the way they are in such a way as to convince people that you know how to make things the way they ought to be.

This is curious, and worth pondering, because it reveals how much politics has in common with history. Politics is a story about the relationship between the past and the future; history is a story about the relationship between the past and the present. It's what history and politics share—a vantage on the past—that makes writing the history of politics fraught. And it's what

they don't share that makes the study of history vital. Politics is accountable to opinion; history is accountable to evidence.

Consider the history of American democracy. Democracy in America was not established with the stroke of a pen, in 1776, when members of the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. Nor was it established in 1787, when delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution. The rise of American democracy was neither inevitable nor swift. It countered prevailing political philosophy. If democracy is rule by the people and if the people are, as Federalists like John Adams believed, "the common Herd of Mankind"—the phrase was a commonplace—then democracy is the government of the worst, the tyranny of the idle, the ignorant, and the ill informed. Alexander Hamilton reasoned that there are but two types of men: "The first are rich and well-born, the other the mass of the people." The rich are wise, the masses fickle. "Give, therefore, to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government," Hamilton recommended. "They will check the unsteadiness of the second."[5] These are the principles that informed the framers of the Constitution.

In the 1790s, Federalists kept on telling that same story, the story told in the Constitution, about well-born and well-educated men regulating the passions of the common herd; in that story, democracy was bad. Followers of Thomas Jefferson told a different story, much like that told in the Declaration of Independence, about the people rising up against tyranny: "He that is not a Democrat is an aristocrat," they said.[6] The election of 1800, the "revolution of 1800," was a battle between these two stories.

The "contest of opinion," as Jefferson called it, was waged in the pages of the nation's newspapers. (There were, at the time, no presidential debates and very few speeches. Americans considered politicians putting themselves so far forward to be unforgivably tacky. When Adams took a roundabout route, wending his way from Massachusetts to the nation's

brand-new capital city through Pennsylvania and Maryland, a journey that looked suspiciously like campaigning, a Jeffersonian newspaper editor asked, "Why must the President go fifty miles out of his way to make a trip to Washington?")[7] In newspapers, Adams was generally caricatured as a monarch and Jefferson as an atheist. The Philadelphia *Aurora*, an organ of Jefferson's party, suggested that electing Adams, the incumbent, would mean keeping "Things As They Are":

> The principles and patriots of the *Revolution* condemned.
> The *Nation* in arms without a foe, and divided without a cause.
> The reign of terror created by false alarms, to promote domestic feud and foreign war.
> A Sedition Law.
> An established church, a religious test, and an order of Priesthood.

But electing Jefferson would lead to a different future, described as "Things As They Will Be":

> The Principles of the *Revolution* restored.
> The *Nation* at peace with the world and united in itself.
> *Republicanism* allaying the fever of domestic feuds, and subduing the opposition by the force of reason and rectitude.
> The Liberty of the Press.
> Religious liberty, the rights of conscience, no priesthood, truth, and Jefferson.[8]

The next day, a Federalist paper called the *Gazette of the United States* ran, on its front page, this piece:

> THE GRAND QUESTION STATED
>
> At the present solemn and momentous epoch, the only question to be asked by every American, laying his hand on his heart is: "Shall I continue in allegiance to
>
> GOD—AND A RELIGIOUS PRESIDENT:

> Or impiously declare for
> JEFFERSON—AND NO GOD!!!!"[9]

Jeffersonians described the choice as between war and peace; Federalists pit Jefferson against God.

Jefferson won, and Jeffersonianism prevailed. But what the election really did was establish two-party politics. Then came Jacksonianism. In the 1820s and 1830s, "democracy" was, for the first time, no longer a slur. New states entering the union adopted new and more democratic constitutions—and then old states revised their constitutions—calling for more direct and frequent elections, and eliminating property requirements for voting. By defining voters as white men, they defined women and black men as outside the electorate. A new kind of politics emerged, tied to party (candidates even began to campaign), arrayed against certain kinds of moneyed privilege (like the national bank), in the thrall of other kinds (like state banks), and with the questions of slavery, Indian sovereignty, and immigration entirely—and brutally—unresolved.

In the lifetime of an American born in 1760 and dead in 1860, the proportion of white men who were eligible to vote grew from less than half to nearly all. This sweeping redefinition of suffrage was unheard of, an astonishing political novelty; it seemed to call for a wholly new understanding of history.[10] Even as it was happening, people wondered what was driving it, and where it would lead. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in 1831—*"I wish to find out for myself what your American democracy is like," says the European to Columbia*—he concluded that American democracy followed from American equality. "The more I advanced in the study of American society," he wrote, "the more I perceived that this equality of condition is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived." As Tocqueville saw it, a nation of men possessed of roughly equal estates and education must

necessarily become a nation of men possessed of roughly equal political rights. "To conceive of men remaining forever unequal upon a single point, yet equal on all others, is impossible; they must come in the end to be equal upon all."[11]

In 1842, Charles Dickens traveled to the United States to discover American democracy, too. Unlike Tocqueville, he left bitterly disillusioned. "This is not the Republic I came to see," he wrote home. "This is not the Republic of my imagination."[12] Dickens found slavery sinister, the American people coarse, and American politics grotesque. He thought the story of America was a lie. By what his friend Thomas Carlyle called "Yankeedoodledum"—American bumptiousness—Dickens was amused but, more, offended.[13] He was especially disgusted by the party system, which he described as nothing so much as "the intrusion of the most pitiful, mean, malicious, creeping, crawling, sneaking party spirit into all transactions of life."[14]

There were more kinds of critics, too, including abolitionists, suffragists, and peace activists: people who pointed out the limits of American democracy. "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" Frederick Douglass asked in 1852:

> I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sound of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants brass fronted impudence; your shout of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanks-givings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.[15]

In 1879, a newspaperman named Henry George published a book called *Progress and Poverty*; it went on to become the

most widely read American economic treatise of the nineteenth century. George saw himself as defending "the Republicanism of Jefferson and the Democracy of Jackson" and argued that both were under assault by speculative, industrial capitalism. The poor were getting poorer and the rich were getting richer. Agreeing with Tocqueville that equality of condition had made democracy possible, George argued that inequality of condition was making democracy impossible.[16]

The historian Frederick Jackson Turner thought that democracy was at risk, too, if for a different reason: the United States was running out of wilderness. In 1893, in an essay called "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner argued that the frontier had made democracy possible. From colonial days onward, Turner argued, demands for fuller political participation—for local governance, more frequent elections, and broader suffrage—had come from scrappy, bullheaded frontier settlers bridling, and thumbing their noses, at the authority of eastern elites. "A fool can sometimes put on his coat better than a wise man can do it for him," they told royal governors and, later, state legislators and, most of all, the federal government. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution may have been drafted on the shores of the Atlantic, Turner conceded, but they were tested in the foothills of the Alleghenies and beyond. "This, at least, is clear," Turner insisted, "American democracy is fundamentally the outcome of the experiences of the American people in dealing with the West."[17]

Turner's thesis influenced decades of American historical interpretation. Turner is why, in Gabriel and Casner's play, those Western settlers shuffle across the stage, dogs nipping at their heels. Turner saw American history as a battle between "savagery" and "civilization," and his thesis influenced, among other things, the founding of new university departments, as did the work of Charles Beard, whose best-selling 1927 book,

The Rise of American Civilization, written with his wife Mary Ritter Beard, located the origins of American politics in economic conflict.[18] In 1937, the year Casner and Gabriel finished writing *The Rise of American Democracy*, Harvard founded a graduate program called the "History of American Civilization." Brown University followed in 1945. That same year, in *The Age of Jackson*, Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., suggested that Turner's frontier thesis "is not perhaps so pat a case as some have thought." Following the Beards, Schlesinger believed that the rise of American democracy was the result of class struggle. For Schlesinger, this was a struggle of ideas, and even of stories.[19]

This debate went on and on. In 1948, Columbia historian Richard Hofstadter, then thirty-two, published twelve essays with the title *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*. Hofstadter thought Turner, the Beards, and Schlesinger were wrong. Telling the stories of American statesmen from Jefferson to FDR, Hofstadter argued that, for all their differences, these men shared a belief in the sanctity of private property, the value of economic opportunity, and the importance of competition.[20]

Hofstadter was groping to explain the origins of America. ("It is imperative in time of cultural crisis to gain fresh perspectives on the past," he insisted.)[21] So were very many other scholars. In 1946, Ralph Henry Gabriel founded a department at Yale called American Studies, whose purpose was "to achieve a broad understanding of American civilization—its origins, evolution and present world relationships." (Gabriel went on to found the American Studies Association.) A generation of historians attempted to define what made Americans American. Meanwhile, a generation of politicians tried to ferret out which Americans were un-American. Yale's American Studies program was utterly bound up with the politics of the Cold War. In 1950, the university accepted a $500,000 donation

stipulating that the American Studies department "provide for more general understanding of the fact of American history and the fundamental principles of American freedom in the field of politics, and of economics" in order to combat "the menace of foreign philosophies." Gabriel resigned in protest. The donor then demanded that the new chair be a professor "who firmly believes in the preservation of our System of Free Enterprise and is opposed to the system of State Socialism, Communism and Totalitarianism."[22]

At mid-century, even as the Civil Rights movement offered a searing critique of stories about the rise of American democracy, American historical writing was strikingly sweeping in its claims about American origins. In 1965, Bernard Bailyn, then forty-three, delivered three masterful lectures in which he argued for the importance of institutions and ideas—not land, or leaders—in shaping politics. The lectures were published with the title *The Origins of American Politics*.[23]

In the decades following the Second World War, graduate programs in American history, American civilization, and American studies thrived. But by the end of the 1960s, more and more students enrolling in these programs were interested in studying the experiences of the vast number of people left out of their advisers' work—women and children, slaves and free blacks, servants and immigrants. These younger scholars produced a great deal of invaluable scholarship, but, in it, they turned away from questions like "What are the origins of American politics?" believing that even to ask that sort of question was to participate in Cold War consensus-style intellectual conformity.

The study of neglected groups exploded. Black studies, women's studies, and ethnic studies programs were founded. By the 1970s, critics charged that scholars were writing more and more about less and less for fewer and fewer. "The great proliferation of historical writing has served not to illuminate

the central themes of Western history but to obscure them," Bailyn complained in 1981, in his presidential address to the American Historical Association. There followed similarly heartfelt laments by Eric Foner, Herbert Gutman, and Thomas Bender.[24] Schlesinger offered a jeremiad of his own in 1992 in *The Disuniting of America*, bemoaning "militant multiculturalism."[25] Meanwhile, during the very years that many historians within the academy were refusing to entertain questions about origins, a theory of constitutional interpretation called "originalism" gained sway among people outside of it; by the end of the twentieth century, originalism had come to dominate the jurisprudence of the U.S. Supreme Court, where it determined the outcome of landmark rulings on everything from the ownership of firearms to the funding of political campaigns.

In 1994, when I was in graduate school at Yale, in the American Studies Program that Ralph Henry Gabriel had founded half a century before, the ugliest battle of what came to be called the "history wars" took place in the nation's capital: after a team of academic historians prepared a set of national history standards, the U.S. Senate rejected them, condemning the proposed curriculum as nothing more than politics masquerading as history.[26] In the wake of this crisis, a great many scholars reflected on the future of the teaching and writing of history in the United States. The American Historical Association and the American Studies Association held forums. Speeches were made; opinion essays were published. Many fine articles and books were written, including *The Story of American Freedom*, a book of rare scope and subtlety, in which Columbia University historian Eric Foner traced the fitful and often bloody struggle over the meaning of freedom during the course of American history.[27] Princeton historian Sean Wilentz's answer to the call for synthesis was *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln*. Wilentz rejected Turner's

thesis about the wind of democracy blowing from the West ("In fact," Wilentz argued, "the West borrowed heavily from eastern examples"), but, more, he hoped to reaffirm "the importance of political events, ideas, and leaders to democracy's rise—once an all-too-prevalent assumption, now in need of some repair and rescue."[28]

There had been a drift. In the years between Casner and Gabriel's *Rise of American Democracy* in 1938 and Wilentz's *Rise of American Democracy* in 2005, American history books had changed. Their explanations had become more qualified, and their answers to questions like "What accounts for the rise of American democracy?" had grown vague, doubtful, and conflicted. More often, those questions were no longer asked, at first, because they were too big, and, later, because they were too small. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, advocates of global history dismissed the study of the nation-state as a variety of intellectual provincialism, leaving elementary and secondary school teachers to teach local, state, and national history without the benefit of a rigorous scholarship. Within the academic world, the study of American origins became remarkably unfashionable. Haunted by the knowledge of all that any single study leaves out—all the people, the conflict, the messiness, the obeisance to all the other scholarship— intimidated by ideological attacks, eager to disavow origins stories, and profoundly suspicious, as a matter of critical intelligence, of the rhetorical power of the storyteller, the ambit of academic writing kept getting smaller. So did its readership.

I began writing the essays in this book in 2005, not long after I started teaching at Harvard. All but one of these essays first appeared in *The New Yorker*. I wrote them because I wanted to learn how to tell stories better. But mostly I wrote them

because I wanted to try to explain how history works, and how it's different from politics.

History is the art of making an argument about the past by telling a story accountable to evidence. In the writing of history, a story without an argument fades into antiquarianism; an argument without a story risks pedantry. Writing history requires empathy, inquiry, and debate. It requires forswearing condescension, cant, and nostalgia. The past isn't quaint. Much of it, in fact, is bleak. Also, what people will tell you about the past is very often malarkey. The essays in this book concern documents—things like travel narratives, the Constitution, ballots, the inaugural address, the presidential biography, the campaign biography, the I.O.U., and the dime novel. Historical inquiry relies on standards of evidence because documents aren't to be trusted. John Smith, the swashbuckling founder of Virginia, titled an account of his adventures *True Travels*, even though he made most of it up. One way to read this book, then, is as a study of the American tall tale. My advice is to keep one eyebrow cocked and watch out for shifty-looking characters with ink-stained hands and narrators who keep ducking into doorways, especially while reading about *The Life of Jackson*, the wildly fictitious campaign biography of Andrew Jackson; Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition," a pack of lies; and the hopelessly hyperbolic *Life and Adventures of Kit Carson . . . from Facts Narrated by Himself.*

I didn't write the essays in this book with an eye toward offering a novel interpretation of American history. Still, it strikes me that, taken together, they do make an argument, and it is this: the rise of American democracy is bound up with the history of reading and writing, which is one of the reasons the study of American history is inseparable from the study of American literature. In the early United States, literacy rates rose and the price of books and magazines and newspapers fell during the same decades that suffrage was being extended.

With everything from constitutions and ballots to almanacs and novels, Americans wrote and read their way into a political culture inked and stamped and pressed in print.

I've stitched all these essays together here, like the pieces of a quilt, and I've arranged them chronologically, from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first. They cover the length of American history; by no means do they cover its breadth. This book does not tell "the story of America." No one can write that story. This is, instead, a study of the story.

In *American Notes*, Charles Dickens's account of his travels in the United States, he explained that he regarded politics with a jaundiced eye: "I have seen elections for borough and county, and have never been impelled (no matter which party won) to damage my hat by throwing it up into the air in triumph, or to crack my voice by shouting forth any reference to our Glorious Constitution, to the noble purity of our independent voters, or, the unimpeachable integrity of our independent members." Perhaps, he admitted, he suffered "from some imperfect development of my organ of veneration."[29]

This defect is not uncommon. "I have no desire to add to a literature of hero worship and national self-congratulation which is already large," Richard Hofstadter explained in the introduction to *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*.[30] Neither do I. Instead, mindful of Casner and Gabriel's creed, I have tried to cherish ideas worth cherishing and to question ideas that need questioning. I have tried to do that, here, by studying stories, and by telling them.

1
HERE HE LYES

Buried somewhere under the marble floor of the largest church in London lie the remains of Captain John Smith, who died in 1631, at the age of fifty-one. On a brass plaque, his epitaph reads,

> Here lyes one conquered, that hath conquered Kings,
> Subdu'd large Territories, and done Things
> Which to the world impossible would seem
> But that the Truth is held in more esteem.

In other words: he wasn't a liar. Ah, but don't believe it. The year before he died, Smith published *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine John Smith, in Europe, Asia, Africke, and America*, in which a discerning reader will learn to expect that when the captain, wearing full armor, has his stallion shot out from under him, he'll mount a dead man's horse before his own has hit the ground, and reload his musket while he's at it. Even his mishaps prove his valor: who could have survived so many sea-fights, shipwrecks, mutinies, deserted islands, musket wounds, betrayals, prisons, and gashes gotten while jousting, except a man whose coat-of-arms depicted the severed, turbaned heads of three Turkish army officers he defeated in back-to-back duels in Transylvania and

whose motto—emblazoned on his shield—sounds like the title of a James Bond film set in Elizabethan England: *vincere est vivere*. To conquer is to live.[1]

In 1631, while Smith lay on his deathbed, a Welsh clergyman named David Lloyd published *The Legend of Captaine Jones*, a lampoon of Smith's *True Travels*. A later edition includes, by way of preface, a spoof of Smith's well-known epitaph:

> Tread softly (mortalls) ore the bones
> Of the worlds wonder Captaine Jones:
> Who told his glorious deeds to many,
> But never was believ'd of any:
> Posterity let this suffice,
> He swore all's true, yet here he lyes.[2]

That Captain John Smith, even before he died, was widely believed to be a liar is of more than passing interest, especially since he was also, arguably, America's first historian. In *True Travels*, Smith claimed to have defeated armies, outwitted heathens, escaped pirates, hunted treasure, and wooed princesses—and all this on four continents, no less, including a little island in North America that would one day be known as the birthplace of the United States: Jamestown, Virginia.

"I am no Compiler by hearsay, but have beene a reall Actor," John Smith wrote. He was an adventurer, and he was a historian. He recounted his adventures in Virginia not only in *True Travels*, but also, first, in a letter printed without his permission in 1608 as *A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia*; next, in an essay on the Virginia Indians published in 1612 as *A Map of Virginia* and bound with a longer account of the founding of Jamestown, *The Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia*; and, once more, in *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, printed in 1624.

John Smith was born in Alford, Lincolnshire, in 1580. He left England at the age of sixteen "to learne the life of a

Souldier." He fought the Spanish in France and in the Netherlands, sailed to Scotland, and returned to England to live like a hermit in the woods, reading books and practicing to be a knight: "His studie was Machiavills Art of warre, and Marcus Aurelius; his exercise a good horse, with his lance and Ring."[3] In 1600, he crossed the Channel again. After adventures in France, including a duel near Mont-St.-Michel, he tried to sail from Marseilles to Italy but was thrown overboard. Rescued by pirates, he sailed the Mediterranean and learned to fight at sea. In 1601, he joined the Austrian army to fight the Turks in Hungary, mainly because he regretted having "seene so many Christians slaughter one another." He was promoted to captain. Wounded in a battle near Bucharest, in which thirty thousand men died, Smith and a handful of survivors were captured and "sold for slaves, like beasts in a market place." He was sent to Istanbul, to serve his owner's mistress. But she fell in love with him. Eventually, he escaped. After making his way through Russia and Poland, and fighting in Morocco, Smith returned to England in the winter of 1604–5.[4] In December 1606, when he was twenty-six, he sailed to Virginia, with a fleet of three ships, the *Godspeed*, the *Susan Constant*, and the *Discovery*.

Smith had three Turks' heads on his shield, but he wasn't the only Jamestown adventurer to have traveled through the Ottoman Empire.[5] William Strachey, who became secretary of the colony in 1609, had been in Istanbul in 1607. George Sandys, the colony's treasurer, had traveled, by camel, to Jerusalem and had written, at length, about the "Mahometan Religion." To these men, the New World beckoned as but another battlefield for the Old World's religious wars; they went, mainly, to hunt for gold to fund wars to defeat Muslims in Europe.[6]

For much of the voyage to Virginia, Smith was confined below decks, in chains, accused of plotting a mutiny to "make

himselfe king." In May 1607, Smith and 104 other colonists settled on the banks of a river they named the James, in honor of their king, on land named after his predecessor, Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. On board ship they had carried a box containing a list of men appointed by the Virginia Company to govern the colony, "not to be opened, nor the governours knowne until they arrived in Virginia."[7] When at last the box was opened, it was revealed that Smith, still a prisoner, was on that list. On June 10, 1607, he was sworn as a member of the governing council.[8] In September 1608, he was elected its president, effectively, Virginia's governor. By his telling, he was also its only hope.

Far from being the first Europeans to settle on land that would one day become the United States, the English were Johnny-come-latelies. The Spanish settled at San Augustine, Florida, in 1565; by 1607, they were building Santa Fe. In 1975, Yale historian Edmund Morgan famously dubbed Jamestown a "fiasco": "Measured by any of the objectives announced for it," Morgan reckoned, "the colony failed." The English landed, and "for the next ten years they seem to have made nearly every possible mistake and some that seem almost impossible." They chose a poor site: on the banks of a brackish river. They had a lousy plan: build a fort, and look for gold. They brought the wrong kind of settlers: idle and indolent English gentlemen, who spent their time bowling in the streets. (Smith counted one carpenter, two blacksmiths, and a flock of footmen; the rest of the settlers he wrote off as "Gentlemen, Tradesmen, Servingmen, libertines, and such like, ten times more fit to spoyle a Commonwealth, than either begin one, or but helpe to maintaine one.") They made enemies easily: especially the Powhatan Indians, even though they relied on them for food, having harvested little of their own. Mostly, they died. Except for the year Smith was in charge, from the fall of 1608 to the

fall of 1609, when he told its half-dead men, "he who does not worke, shall not eat," they starved.[9] It wasn't the land that was the problem. "Had we beene in Paradice it selfe (with those governours)," Smith complained, "it would not have beene much better."[10] After October 1609, when Smith returned to England (ostensibly, to recover from an injury but, really, he was more or less kicked out), Jamestown went to hell. In the winter of 1609–10 alone, five hundred colonists were reduced to sixty. A hair-raising account of those months, written by the colony's lieutenant governor, George Percy, the eighth son of the earl of Northumberland, paints this scene: "many, through extreme hunger, have run out of their naked beds being so lean that they looked like anatomies, crying out, we are starved, we are starved." In the end, they ate each other. Percy writes, "one of our Colline murdered his wife Ripped the Childe outt of her woambe and threwe it into the River and after Chopped the Mother in pieces and salted her for his food." Telling the story of the husband showering his wife with salt, another settler wondered: "Now whether shee was better roasted, boyled or carbonado'd, I know not, but of such a dish as powdered wife I never heard of."[11]

"An American dream was born on the banks of the James River," insisted Jamestown archaeologist, William M. Kelso, in *Jamestown: The Buried Truth*.[12] Kelso's book was published in 2007, Jamestown's four hundredth anniversary: America's birthday. Elizabeth the second turned up at Jamestown for the festivities—concerts, reenactments, exhibits, and more—and bookshops stocked up on confetti-laced books, including a Library of America edition of Smith's writings, wrapped in its signature red-white-and-blue ribbon.

Kelso was writing within a tradition of Jamestown boosters who triumph in the colony's eventual success. By the 1620s, in

spite of a mortality rate that remained as high as 75 or 80 percent, the Virginia economy was booming. Hence, the American dream: arrive empty-handed, work hard, and get rich.

Just as cock-eyed, anachronistic, and overblown is a debunking tradition that damns Jamestown as the birthplace of the American nightmare: with corporate funding from wealthy investors (the Virginia Company), steal somebody else's land (the Powhatans') and reap huge profits by planting and harvesting an addictive drug (tobacco, whose sales were responsible for the boom), while exploiting your labor force (indigent Britons and, after 1619, enslaved Africans).

American dream or American nightmare, the bare facts about Jamestown can be dressed up and pressed into the service of either of these narratives. And they have been. One abolitionist, writing in 1857—Jamestown's 250th anniversary—argued that Americans ought to ignore 1607 and instead pay attention to the divided nation's twin, Cain-and-Abel, founding moments: the Pilgrims' 1620 landing in Plymouth and the arrival of the first Africans to Jamestown in 1619. "Here are the two ideas, Liberty and Slavery—planted at about the same time, in the virgin soil of the new continent; the one in the North, the other in the South. They are deadly foes. Which shall conquer?" To antebellum Northerners, Jamestown set in motion forces that would lead to Civil War. To organizers of Jamestown four hundredth anniversary, what started in their town was America itself.

For a very long time, the question that animated every history of Jamestown was the very one that most troubled John Smith: "howe it came to passe there was no better successe."[13] In other words, why did things go so badly? The debate over that question, in the 1970s and 1980s, in the shadow of Vietnam, was one of the most vigorous in all of early American

historical scholarship, at least as vigorous as, and more important than, the earlier and continuing argument over the causes of the witchcraft outbreak in Salem in 1692, a debate that has never really crawled out from under the shadow of McCarthyism. The too-many-gentlemen theory is pretty compelling—in Smith's shorthand, "miserable is that Land, where more are idle then well imployed"—but for years historians marshaled evidence in support of a range of provocative explanations, from salt poisoning and contaminated wells to the Little Ice Age and an epidemic of apathy and, finally, to the colonists' sheer, stubborn preference for planting tobacco, to sell, instead of corn, to eat.[14] But during Jamestown's four hundredth anniversary, historians turned this unanswered question upside down, asking, not why Jamestown at first failed but why, in the end, did it succeed? Thus did the Jamestown quadricentennial snatch victory from the jaws of a man who ate his wife.

"To call Jamestown a failure, let alone a disaster," Kelso wrote, "is to oversimplify."[15] Kelso's evidence for his claim was what he'd found: Jamestown Fort. Before Kelso came along, archaeologists had concluded that the remains of the fort the settlers built in the spring of 1607 had long since been washed away by the James River. Kelso was sure its foundation lay under ground, and not under water. Beginning in 1994, when he was hired as the head archaeologist of the Jamestown Recovery Project, Kelso oversaw the painstaking rediscovery of the fort's footprint, one of the most exciting finds, ever, in American historical archaeology. Within and around the fort's footprint, Kelso's team dug up not only human remains, palisade lines, and building foundations, but also a treasure of artifacts: beads, armor, pottery, and tools, each with a story to tell. The jawbone of a dog, with lead shot in it; a butchered turtle; thimbles; a suit of armor, thrown down a well, piece by piece; even a fancy silver "ear picker," a kind of combination Q-Tip and toothpick. What story these artifacts tell is less

clear (wouldn't it have been better to pack a few more hoes for the voyage, and not so many ear pickers?). Kelso argued that the archaeological record tilts toward proving that Jamestown's first settlers weren't nearly as hapless as John Smith made them out to be; after all, they built a very good fort, very quickly: "There is evidence that some of the immigrants worked hard."[16]

"The truly remarkable thing about Jamestown is that it somehow survived," the historian Karen Kupperman argued in 2007, in *The Jamestown Project*. Kupperman mainly measured the colony against both earlier and later English settlement efforts in North America, including Roanoke, England's first attempt to establish a foothold in the New World, on the outer shoals of what is now North Carolina. Settled in 1584, Roanoke was deserted three years later, and it's anyone's guess what happened to the ninety men, seventeen women, and eleven children who were left behind when the governor, John White, sailed to England for help; when he returned, in 1590, they were gone. Compared to Roanoke, Kupperman pointed out, Jamestown is a stunner.

Kupperman's argument, that Jamestown wasn't really that bad, required her to explain why it *looks* so bad. Resolutely, she blamed the sources, "which consist largely of complaints, special pleading, and excuses sent by colonists back to their patrons in England."[17] They made everything sound worse than it was. And the devil of it is, some of these kvetchers were actually colorful writers, which, Kupperman warned, has led historians to make a fatal error: reading their accounts "to mine them for pithy quotes."[18] Again with the wife-eating man!

John Smith liked to blame whiners, too. "Ingenious verbalists," he called those who came to Virginia, while he was in charge, only to find themselves shocked by what they saw,

"because they found not English Cities, nor such faire houses, nor at their owne wishes any of their accustomed dainties, with feather beds, and downe pillows, Tavernes and alehouses." Such men, he said, were those who would call Virginia, under his inspired leadership, "a misery, a ruine, a death, a hell."[19] But that was what Smith said about Virginia *before* he left. Only after he returned to England did he begin to see that what was going on in Jamestown was impossible to discover from so far away, investors having need of twisting the story this way and that, like so many corporate executives, in a world without a Securities and Exchange Commission (although by 1624 a royal commission had begun investigating the Virginia Company for mismanagement). No matter how many men ate their wives, Smith wearily concluded, reports in England would make "the Company here thinke all the world was Oatmeale there."[20]

The question of whether John Smith was a liar is inseparable from the question of whether Jamestown was a failure. They don't map onto one another exactly, but it usually works like this: if Smith told the truth, Jamestown was a disaster, except when he was in charge. It's possible to both believe Smith and see Jamestown as a success, but that requires quite a bit of squinting. Generally, if, like the Virginia Company, you'd like to think that everything in Jamestown was oatmeal, it helps if you are willing to say that Smith was either ill informed or stretching the truth, although, most often, those who discredit Smith aren't as gracious as that. Their assessments have a more of a liar-liar-pantaloons-on-fire quality. (As it happens, and for the record, they were: the injury that sent Smith back to England was a severe burn he sustained to his thighs and groin when his gunpowder bag, laying in his lap, caught the spark of a tobacco pipe and exploded.)[21]

This liar-disaster situation was a bind, and Smith knew it. He wrote, in 1616, that he fully expected to "live or die the slave of scorne and infamy."[22] And he did. As David Lloyd's *Legend of Captaine Jones* would have it, Smith made up most of what he wrote, or at least exaggerated, brazenly. Nevertheless, in the colonies, and especially in the early United States, *The Legend of Captaine Jones* was entirely forgotten and, despite lingering doubts about his credibility, Smith, no longer lampooned, became a romantic hero of the nineteenth-century American South, his exploits celebrated—and lavishly embroidered—in songs and on stage, in antebellum productions that implausibly but invariably paired him, romantically, with Pocahontas, who, only fourteen when Smith left Virginia, in 1609, had actually married a colonist named John Rolfe, in 1614.

This distortion of historical fact Henry Adams could not abide. Appalled by the myth of Smith's romance with Pocahontas, Adams earned his reputation as a historian by destroying the captain's. In an 1867 essay in the *North American Review*, Adams's very first piece of historical criticism (in 1870, he would be named professor of history at Harvard), he pointed out the discrepancies in Smith's different accounts of his rescue by Pocahontas, a story he told differently every time he told it and one that, after all, sounded not a little suspicious the first time. Worse, Smith didn't even mention the rescue until after Pocahontas's visit to London, in 1616, when she was received as a foreign dignitary. Only in 1617 did Smith boast that Pocahontas had once "hazarded the beating out of her owne braines to save mine," after her father, Powhatan, had ordered his men to kill him.[23] In his 1624 *Generall Historie*, Smith added still more detail: "being ready with their clubs, to beate out his braines, Pocahontas the Kings dearest daughter, when no intreaty could prevaile, got his head in her armes, and laid her owne upon his to save him from death." Smith's work,

he concluded, contained "falsehoods of an effrontery seldom equaled in modern times."[24]

In offering this exposé, Adams claimed to have been motivated solely by his zeal to establish the "bald historical truth," but, privately, he confessed that he considered his essay "a rear attack on the Virginia aristocracy."[25] Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, Adams, who despised the South, delighted in defeating a founding father of the Old Dominion. Equally pleased was John Gorham Palfrey, a Harvard professor and New England booster who had persuaded Adams to write the essay in the first place, allegedly telling him that "a stone thrown at Smith would be as likely to break as much glass as a missile heaved in any other direction." He was right. Smith's reputation as a man of his word and, especially, as a historian, was shattered (and Palfrey's project, to promote New England as the birthplace of America, and 1620 as its birthday, greatly advanced). Smith had his defenders, to be sure, including Edward Arber, who edited an eleven-hundred-page compilation of his writings in 1884 and who argued, "wherever we *can* check Smith, we find him both modest and accurate." But far more common was the kind of dismissal offered by J. Franklin Jameson, in his 1891 *History of Historical Writing in America*, in which he concluded, after reading Smith, that "what was historical was not Smith's and what was his was not historical."[26] In effect, Adams and Jameson relegated John Smith's works to the (lowly) rank of literature and demoted Smith himself from historian to mere writer. After that, about the nicest thing any American historian was willing to say about John Smith was an aside offered by Samuel Eliot Morison, in 1930, who called him "a liar, if you will; but a thoroughly cheerful and generally harmless liar."[27]

After that, three things happened: it was discovered that much of what Smith wrote was actually true; historians began

to care more about the art of lying, anyway; and Smith was rehabilitated as an astute, if biased, ethnographer.

In 1953, the historian Bradford Smith published a biography whose aim was to check John Smith's word against that of his contemporaries and, working both with newly discovered sources in England and, more importantly, with a Hungarian scholar named Laura Polanyi Striker, B. Smith concluded that J. Smith was a man of his word. A quixotic, self-aggrandizing Elizabethan gallant and knight-errant? Yes. But a fraud? No. Inspired by Bradford Smith's biography, Philip Barbour, a linguist and former intelligence officer, scoured archives across Eastern Europe, where he was able to corroborate an astonishing number of details in Smith's *True Travels*. All kinds of additional research—including a successful re-creation, by the Boy Scouts of Graz, Austria, of a mountaintop torch-message system that Smith had described but which had never before been tested—only further supported the captain's credibility.[28]

Meanwhile, many historians came to the generous assessment that Smith was, at heart, a man of letters, engaged in what the literary critic Stephen Greenblatt once labeled "self-fashioning." Then, too, scholars of a more anthropological cast of mind, and an interest in the Powhatans, claimed Smith as one of early America's best ethnographers. After all, compared to his contemporaries, Smith was a keen observer, although it's worth remembering that most of what he saw, in Transylvania as much as in Jamestown, was altogether new to him, stranger than strange, and he wasn't always able to make sense of it. Two historians, James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, once tried to imagine how Smith might have reported what he could see from the pressroom at Yankee Stadium, some summer afternoon:

> Being assembled about a great field of open grass, a score of their greatest men ran out upon the field, adorned each in brightly hued jackets and breeches, with letters cunningly woven upon their Chestes, and wearinge hats upon their heades, of a sort I know not what. One of their chiefs stood in the midst and would at his pleasure hurl a white ball at another chief, whose attire was of a different colour, and whether by chance or artifice I know not the ball flew exceeding close to the man yet never injured him, but sometimes he would strike att it with a wooden club and so giving it a hard blow would throw down his club and run away.[29]

In other words, you can count on Smith for abundant detail, and admirable accuracy, but he's fairly likely to leave out what you most want to know: "Yankees 10, Red Sox 3."

At the age of twenty-nine, John Smith returned to England. He spent most of the rest of his life, another twenty-two years, writing. "Envie hath taxed me to have writ too much, and done too little," he complained.[30] He never took up another profession. He never married, or had children (facts perhaps best explained by his pantaloons having once been set on fire; his wound has a decidedly Toby Shandy quality to it). He was restless. He wanted, urgently, to participate in more northern settlements—he gave "New England" its name—but the Puritans didn't want him along. Instead, he had to settle for giving them armchair advice, a role he hated: "it were more proper for mee, To be doing what I say, then writing what I knowe."[31] His last work, published posthumously, is an impassioned essay with a desperate title: *Advertisements for the unexperienced Planters of New-England, or any where*. Smith's advice—bring your women (just don't eat them), and don't forget to plant corn—was taken, and may well have saved New England from Jamestown's early misery, but Smith himself died poor and scorned. As Adams put it, using the very language so often

used to describe early Virginia, Smith's career "turned out a failure, and his ventures ended disastrously."[32]

And Jamestown? Was it, too, a failure and a disaster? Or was it, instead, the birthplace of the American dream? This question outlived its usefulness a very long time ago. By considering the world that Jamestown made, and ignoring the world that made Jamestown, it hides more than it reveals. John Smith was more medieval than modern, closer to a Crusader than to a Founding Father. Neither he nor Jamestown can bear the burden of the national need for a tidy past. (Neither can Plymouth.) What happened in Jamestown is a story of vaunting ambition and staggering success in the face of surpassing cruelty and rank catastrophe. It is a story of some lessons painfully learned, and others not learned at all. Here are two. The world isn't made of oatmeal. And to conquer isn't the only way to live.

2
A PILGRIM PASSED I

Samuel Eliot Morison, the last Harvard historian to ride his horse to work, liked to canter to Cambridge on his gray gelding, tie it to a tree in the Yard, stuff his saddlebags with papers to grade, and trot back home to his four-story brick house at the foot of Beacon Hill. "Ours was the horsey end of town," he once wrote, of the place where he was born, in 1887, and died, in 1976.[1] Morison has been called the greatest American historian of the twentieth century. With that, as these things go, not everyone agrees. He spent nearly all his career at Harvard; he entered as a freshman in 1904 and retired, an endowed professor, in 1955. Summers he spent sailing: he loved nothing so much as the ocean. "My feeling for the sea," Morison said, "is such that writing about it is about as embarrassing as making a confession of religious faith."[2]

Morison wrote more than fifty books and won two Pulitzer Prizes, but he is probably best remembered for his biography of Christopher Columbus, whose voyages he retraced, in 1939 and 1940, by yacht. When the resulting book was published in 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was so impressed that he agreed to allow Morison to join the navy as a sailor-historian: for the remainder of the war, Lieutenant Commander Morison fought the battles about which he would later spend

twenty years writing, in fifteen dense, salt-sprayed volumes, as the *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II.* He left the navy, in 1951, a rear admiral.

Besides the sea, Morison wrote about two things especially well: colonial New England and historical writing. In a 1931 essay called "Those Misunderstood Puritans," he fought hard against the notion that "the fathers of New England" were "somber kill-joys." For this myth, Morison blamed the Victorians, who cast the Puritans as prudes in order that they might feel, by comparison, broad-minded. As Morison pointed out, with characteristic clarity, relying on the nineteenth century to understand the seventeenth is a rather grave chronological error. Time moves forward, not backward. "The right approach to the Puritan founders of New England is historical, by way of the Middle Ages," he explained. "They were, broadly speaking, the Englishmen who had accepted the Reformation without the Renaissance."[3]

Reading Morison, you can almost hear yourself agree with him, even when you don't. That was Morison's gift. Except that it wasn't a gift. Morison cared about writing, but he had to work hard at it, and he railed against members of his profession unwilling to exert the same effort. In a twenty-five-cent pamphlet printed in 1946 as *History as a Literary Art: An Appeal to Young Historians*, Morison complained: "American historians, in their eagerness to present facts and their laudable concern to tell the truth, have neglected the literary aspects of their craft. They have forgotten that there is an art of writing history."[4]

They had forgotten, that is, an American literary tradition begun by "the earliest colonial historians," and, above all, by William Bradford, the governor and first chronicler of Plymouth plantation.[5] In 1620, Bradford crossed what he called "the vast and furious ocean" on board the *Mayflower*, a 180-ton, three-masted, square-rigged merchant vessel, its cramped

berths filled with forty other religious dissenters who, like Bradford, wanted to separate from the Church of England, and some sixty rather less pious passengers who were in search of nothing so much as adventure. Bradford called these "profane" passengers "Strangers," but to modern sensibilities they can feel more familiar than, say, William Brewster, who brought along a son named "Wrestling," short for "wrestling with God."[6]

The colony William Bradford helped plant on the windswept western shore of Cape Cod bay was tiny, and it shrank before it grew; by 1650, its population had not yet reached a thousand. Plymouth colony was Bradford's colony. Between 1627 and 1656, he was elected governor every year.[7] Passionate, self-taught, and bold beyond measure, it was Bradford who called his people "pilgrims." He was also a poet, if not a very good one:

> From my years young in days of youth,
> God did make known to me his truth,
> And call'd me from my native place
> For to enjoy the means of grace.
> In wilderness he did me guide,
> and in strange lands for me provide.
> In fears and wants, through weal and woe,
> A Pilgrim passed I to and fro.[8]

Bradford wrote his history, he said, "in a plain style, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things."[9] He might as well have been describing how he lived his life. But Bradford was more than plain and simple: he was contemplative. Cotton Mather once wrote of him, "He was a person for study as well as action," something that might equally be said of Samuel Eliot Morison who once, interrupted at his desk by the incessant barking of a neighbor's dog, went outside and shot it.[10]

Bradford began writing his history in 1630, the year the Englishman John Winthrop founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony, just to the north of Plymouth. Winthrop's colonists are more commonly called "Puritans," because they wanted to purify the Church of England, but the Pilgrims were Puritans, too—and "nobody more so," as Morison once put it.[11] The distinction between Pilgrims and Puritans is a nineteenth-century invention; in truth, their doctrinal differences were slight. Still, the rivalry between the two colonies was intense, and to Plymouth's disadvantage. By 1641, over twenty thousand colonists had settled in Massachusetts, entirely dwarfing the "Old Colony." (In 1691, Plymouth became part of Massachusetts.)

Governor Bradford, in other words, had more than barking dogs to distract him: not just Winthrop's colonists to the north, but Indians everywhere, pigs run amok, and Quakers in Rhode Island mocking ministers in the pulpit. Try as he might, Bradford just couldn't find the time to catch his past up with his present. He died in 1657, at the age of sixty-seven, his history unfinished.[12] Maybe because Bradford's history ends abruptly, in 1647, most Americans' sense of what happened to the Pilgrims vaguely trails off, too, sometime after the Wampanoag Indian Massasoit taught them to plant corn and joined them for the first Thanksgiving, but long before Plymouth and those same Indians went to war. Go to war they did. In 1675, Massasoit's son Metacom, known to the English as "King Philip," launched a war against Plymouth and, eventually, against Massachusetts and Rhode Island and Connecticut, too. The bloody carnage known as "King Philip's War" nearly put an end to the Puritan experiment.

In *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (2006), a best-selling popular history, Nathaniel Philbrick called William Bradford's history "the greatest book written in seventeenth-century America."[13] (With that, as these things go, not everyone agrees.) Despite its title, Philbrick's book wasn't really about the Mayflower. The voyage is nearly over by the end of chapter 1, although not over soon enough for Bradford's distressed wife Dorothy, who had left her three-year-old son behind in Holland and who, in sight of land, fell—or more likely threw herself—over the gunwales, and drowned. And, unfortunately, by the time the Pilgrims go ashore, readers have learned more about things like the *Mayflower*'s sounding leads ("the deep-sea or 'dipsy' lead, which weighed between forty and one hundred pounds and was equipped with 600 feet of line, and the smaller 'hand-lead,' just seven to fourteen pounds with 120 feet of line") than about its passengers' religious convictions ("A Puritan believed that everything happened for a reason").[14] It's not that the ship doesn't matter. It does. But with every sway and pitch of its decks, readers are lulled into believing that the people on board, swaying and pitching in winds we can feel, clutching at ropes we can touch, were just like us. They were not.

Philbrick, a former all-American sailor and Sunfish-racing champion from Nantucket, seemed, at first glance, to be following in Morison's wake. Waves sloshed through all his earlier books, whose titles sound like the names of sea shanties: *The Sea of Glory*, *Away off Shore*, *Second Wind*, *In the Heart of the Sea*. Like Morison, Philbrick, who was trained as a journalist, found most history books written by professors a chore to read. Of his decision not to use footnotes or to refer to works of scholarship in his text he explained, "I wanted to remove the scholarly apparatus that so often gets in the way of the plot in academic history."[15]

Sam Morison never met a footnote he didn't like. Still, his relationship to academic history was a complicated one. At Harvard, he was neither a natural nor a beloved teacher. He never held office hours; he made his students come to class in coat and tie; he refused to teach Radcliffe girls (he considered

them frivolous by which he meant, presumably, that they were not men). He liked to lecture, in his youth, in riding breeches and, in later years, in his navy uniform.[16] "Even before he became an admiral you felt as though he were one, and you were a midshipman," recalled his former student, Edmund Morgan.[17]

But Morison believed, ardently, that there was something about the hurly-burly of university life that made people more honest, and more accountable, and less likely to get things wrong. In a 1948 review in the *Atlantic Monthly* of a book by the historian Charles Beard, who had left Columbia thirty years before to live on a dairy farm, Morison suggested (terribly cruelly, since Beard was on his death bed at the time) that Beard's work had suffered from his isolation: "You get more back talk even from freshmen than from milch cows."[18]

Maybe if Nathaniel Philbrick had had to answer to freshmen, he would have learned to be a little bit more skeptical of his sources. The first half of Philbrick's book stars William Bradford and relies, appropriately, on Bradford's history or, rather, on Samuel Eliot Morison's invaluable edition of Bradford's history. So much did Morison admire Bradford, so much did he despise the myth of the Puritans, so much did he want Americans to read better history, that he spent five years meticulously preparing an edition of Bradford's history "that the ordinary reader might peruse with pleasure as well as profit."[19] Working closely with his lifelong secretary, Antha Card, to whom he read Bradford's every word aloud, Morison altered the original's antiquated spelling and cleared the text of notes and scribbles made by everyone from Bradford's biographers to his descendents, material that had been injudiciously included, and mistakenly attributed to Bradford himself, in earlier printed editions. To every trace of ink on the manuscript's pages, Morison applied his magnifying glass. Where earlier copyists had Bradford concluding, "the light here kindled hath shone to many," Morison pointed out that the light actually

shone "unto" many; a splotch that looked as though Bradford had crossed out the "un" turned out to be, on closer inspection, "merely an inadvertent blot from the Governor's quill pen."[20] Published in 1952 as *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Morison's definitive edition of Bradford went through dozens of printings.

Not long after Bradford's death, Massasoit died, too; so ended an era of uneasy peace. Inheriting his father's position in 1662, Philip tried to halt English encroachment. When that failed, he began preparing for war. In January 1675, a Christian Indian named John Sassamon warned Plymouth's governor, Josiah Winslow, of Philip's plans. Sassamon was soon found dead. In June, Plymouth executed three of Philip's men for Sassamon's murder. Within days, Wampanoags began attacking English towns.

In proportion to population, King Philip's War was one of the most fatal wars in American history. Over half of all English settlements in New England were destroyed or abandoned. One in ten colonists was killed. Thousands of Indians died; those who survived, including Philip's nine-year-old son, were shipped out of the colonies and sold into slavery. Because it was, for both sides, a holy war, King Philip's War was waged with staggering brutality. New England's Indians fought to take their land back from Christians, mocking their praying victims: "Where is Your O God?" One, having killed a colonist, stuffed a Bible into his victim's gutted belly. Puritans read such acts as a sign of God's wrath, as punishment for their descent into sinfulness; not only had they become, over the years, less pious than the first generation of settlers, but they had also failed to convert the Indians to Christianity. Asked the Boston minister Increase Mather, "Why should we suppose that God is not offended with us, when his displeasure is written, in such visible and bloody Characters?"[21]

Reading those scarlet letters, Puritans concluded that God was commanding them to defeat their "heathen" enemies by

any means necessary; for the English, all restraint in war, all notions of "just conduct" applied only to secular warfare; in a holy war, anything goes. Ministers urged their congregations to "take, kill, burn, sink, destroy all sin and Corruption, &C which are professed enemies to Christ Jesus, and not to pity or spare any of them."[22] Such a policy, as ever, breeds nothing if not merciless retaliation. As a Boston merchant reported to London, the Indians, in town after town, tortured and mutilated their victims, "either cutting off the Head, ripping open the Belly, or skulping the Head of Skin and Hair, and hanging them up as Trophies; wearing Mens [*sic*] Fingers as Bracelets about their Necks, and Stripes of their Skins which they dresse for Belts."[23]

In his recounting of the war, Philbrick placed at center stage a militia captain named Benjamin Church. Born in Plymouth in 1639, Church fought in many of King Philip's War's bloodiest engagements, including the "Great Swamp Fight" in December 1675, in which English forces killed thousands of Narragansett women, children, and old men hiding in a makeshift fort in the middle of a Rhode Island swamp. Most died after the English set the fort on fire. (Wrote one Boston poet: "Here might be heard an hideous Indian cry, / Of wounded ones who in the wigwams fry.")[24] In August 1676, after Philip was shot, it was Church who ordered the body drawn, quartered, and decapitated and had the head placed on a spike that Church marched to Plymouth, after which the colony declared a special day of Thanksgiving to give thanks to God for this signal victory. On top of a stake in the middle of town, Philip's head remained, rotting, for decades.[25]

Philbrick explained his choice of William Bradford and Benjamin Church as his two main characters this way: "Bradford and Church could not have been more different—one was pious and stalwart, the other was audacious and proud—but both wrote revealingly about their lives in the New World. Together, they tell a fifty-six-year intergenerational saga of discovery, accommodation, community, and war."[26]

The problem is that Benjamin Church did not write revealingly about his life in the New World. In fact, he didn't write about it at all. In 1716, a Boston printer published a book called *Entertaining Passages relating to Philip's War . . . with some account of the Divine Providence towards Benjamin Church*. Its title page lists its author as Church's forty-two-year-old son, Thomas, who was just a baby at the time of the war. In the text, too, Thomas is named as the author, although a brief preface allows that, in drafting the manuscript, Thomas consulted his father's notes and that the elder Church "had the perusal of" his son's manuscript and found "nothing a-miss."[27] And why would he? *Entertaining Passages* paints Church not only as the hero of every battle he ever fought but as the Puritans' voice of reason and restraint, as the man of conscience who attempts, in vain, to halt every atrocity: when Mohegan Indians allied with his forces want to torment a captured Nipmuck with fire and knives, Church "interceded and prevailed for his escaping torture"; at the Great Swamp Fight, Church, badly injured, valiantly hobbles to his commanding officer and begs him to stop the attack, only to be rebuffed.[28]

This as-told-to, after-the-fact memoir is, hands down, the single most unreliable account of King Philip's War, one of the best-documented military conflicts of the colonial period. Over four hundred letters written by eyewitnesses in 1675 and 1676 survive in New England archives, along with at least twenty-one different printed accounts, written as the war was happening, or very shortly thereafter. There is, in other words, no shortage of better evidence.

Even though *Entertaining Passages* was compiled forty years after the war had ended and may well have been entirely written by Church's son (who, at the very least, edited his father's "notes" considerably), Philbrick used it without

reservation or caution. Like footnotes, these facts apparently got in the way of Philbrick's plot. That Church is a "persona," Philbrick reluctantly conceded, on the second-to-last page of his book, where he insists: "that Church according to Church is too brave, too cunning, and too good to be true is beside the point."[29] This is about as reasonable, and as indefensible, as writing a history of the Vietnam War relying extensively and uncritically on an "autobiography" of John Kerry written in decades after the war's end by Kerry's daughter Vanessa. As Samuel Eliot Morison liked to say about such things, "Very suspicious!"[30]

If Morison cared about professional standards, he nonetheless held himself well above the academic fray. He was uninterested in historical debates; he hated academic fashions: "Somewhere along the assembly-line of their education, students have had inserted in them a bolt called 'points of view,' secured with a nut called 'trends,' and they imagine that the historian's problem is simply to compare points of view and describe trends. It is not."[31] Although he was once elected its president, and duly served, Morison almost never attended meetings of the American Historical Association. When he once did show up, he walked through a crowded hotel mezzanine, dazed academics parting before him like the Red Sea. Reaching the end of the room, he turned around and walked back, and back and forth again.

A friend came up to him and asked, "Sam, what are you doing?"

"Doing?" Morison replied. "*Doing*! Why, what do you think I'm doing? *Mixing*!"[32]

Morison also complained about what he called a "chain reaction of dullness": professors who write "dull, solid, valuable monographs" train graduate students to write dull, solid, valuable monographs, and, before you know it, the only history people read is written by journalists.[33] Morison didn't

resent this—to the contrary, he urged his students to learn from the best journalists, and the best novelists, too—but it worried him. He at one time went so far as to support altogether Orwellian calls by members of the American Historical Association requiring that historians be licensed, like doctors, and subject to grand jury prosecution "if they misused the past."[34]

History isn't brain surgery. Even when it's done badly, it's not deadly. Still, it can knock you down. Philbrick rested his argument, or, rather, the arc of his plot, on his reading of Benjamin Church. "The great mystery of this story," Philbrick wrote, "is how America emerged from the terrible darkness of King Philip's War to become the United States." The answer? Church: "Out of the annealing flame of one of the most horrendous wars ever fought in North America, he forged an identity that was part Pilgrim, part mariner, part Indian, and altogether his own." Church, for Philbrick, is the ur-American, the ancestor of everyone "from Daniel Boone to Davy Crocket to Natty Bumppo to Rambo." He went further: by believing that "success in war was about coercion rather than slaughter," Philbrick argued, Church "anticipated the welcoming, transformative beast that eventually became—once the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were in place—the United States."[35]

Huh? Is this the same Benjamin Church who, the year before he fell off his horse and died, a battle-weary "old soldier," had his son write a history recalling his glory days as a reluctant and principled Indian fighter by way of both enhancing his reputation and reconciling himself to a war that many Puritan New Englanders, like him, had since come to feel pretty badly about? In him we see the birth of a nation? The regret, in *Entertaining Passages*, breaks your heart. It was meant to. But it is evidence of remorse, not of restraint (and, even if it weren't, what restraint has to do with declaring

American independence is bewilderingly unclear). In one chapter, Thomas Church tells the story of his father finding an old Indian man in the woods, after the war's end:

> The Captain ask'd his name, who replyed, his name was *Conscience*; *Conscience*, said the Captain (smiling), then the War is over; for that was what they were searching for, it being much wanting.[36]

This, of course, is an allegory, not an experience. It is Church, father and son, abdicating the slaughter, four decades after it was all over. It reveals a great deal about how New Englanders remembered the war, but it's about the shoddiest evidence you can think of for telling the story of how they waged it, and a hopelessly leaky boat in which to try to sail to 1776 and 1787.

Those poor, misunderstood Puritans. Time still moves forward, not backward, and relying on the eighteenth century to understand the seventeenth is still a grave chronological error.

"The place of the Pilgrim Fathers in American history can best be stated by a paradox," Morison once wrote. "Of slight importance in their own time, they are of great and increasing significance in our time."[37] To them we look, in vain, to see ourselves. In this we are not alone: as Morison's colleague Perry Miller astutely observed, the Puritans, at the end of King Philip's War, made the same mistake: "They looked in vain to history for an explanation of themselves."[38]

The way Morison wrote about King Philip's War, and especially about Indians, is distressing at best. In his 1956 book, *The Story of the Old Colony*, Morison boasted, "whenever there was trouble with the Indians, Plymouth men were up in front, shooting!"[39] But even if he never fathomed New England's Algonquians, and never really tried to, Morison made close study of people like William Bradford, placing him, as best as he could, in his proper time and place. In preparing *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Morison crafted an edition that would be, as he put it, "modern (*not* modernized)."[40] It would not do, Morison knew, to try to update William Bradford. Better to understand him "by way of the Middle Ages." Of the vast gulf separating seventeenth-century New Englanders from himself, Morison wrote with grace and eloquence: "The ways of the puritans are not my ways, and their faith is not my faith," he confessed. "Nevertheless they appear to me a courageous, humane, brave, and significant people."[41]

For all his ambivalence about academic history, Morison was first and foremost a scholar. (During one of the nation's many bouts of anti-intellectual insanity, Morison—for God's sake, *Morison*—was targeted; in the early 1950s, just after he retired from the navy, he was labeled a "Harvard Red-ucator" and listed among Harvard's Communist-sympathizing "Egotistical, Arrogant, Eggheads.")[42] Yet, just after Morison's death, his colleague Bernard Bailyn observed, "There is no 'Morison school.'"[43] Because he wrote more for the public than for his fellow historians, Morison had few academic disciples, and if the chain reaction of dullness continues unbroken, decades after Morison's death, Morison is as much to blame as anybody.

In 1716, Benjamin Church, or at least his son Thomas, looked back at King Philip's War and decided that it was possible to be both victorious and virtuous in the kind of war the colonists had fought against the Indians—a people at a vast technological disadvantage, fighting a holy war, with almost nothing left to lose. But it wasn't possible. At least, nothing in the evidence from 1675 and 1676 suggests that it was. And pretending that Benjamin Church found "Conscience" in the woods of Plymouth in that winter of war, rather than understanding why, at the end of his life, he came to wish he had, doesn't make it any more possible centuries later.

The ways of the Puritans are not our ways. Their faith is not our faith. And their wars are not our wars.