

## 250<sup>th</sup> Celebration Book-of-the-Month Reading List

### **2024: 1774 and 1700-1800**

January 2024:

*Seeds of Discontent, The Deep Roots of the American Revolution—1650-1750* by J. Revell Carr

Settlement of Vermont began in earnest in 1761. The settlers came from the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. They shared the same roots. The “seeds of discontent” evolved over a century of time. Slavery was the least of the irritants that led to separation from England.

February 2024:

*God, War, and Providence* by James A. Warren

The Puritan movement from Boston to Bennington from 1630 to 1761 served as the model for religious and social forms of government throughout New England. Roger Williams was an early dissenter. Williams’ approach toward his indigenous neighbors provided a sharp contrast. King Phillip’s War rippled throughout southern New England, including parts of Vermont.

March 2024:

*Declaration of Independence/Constitution/Bill of Rights: How To Read The Constitution and Why*, by Kim Wehle

In July of 1776, the colonists declared independence from England. It took 12 years to agree to the constitution we still honor today. Quickly thereafter, the first 10 amendments to the constitution, the Bill of Rights, was adopted. Focus on the separate powers of the three branches of government and on the separation of state and federal powers.

The documents all are short and read simply, perhaps sounding self-evident. To get a flavor for how complicated the issues can be and how the thinking can change over time, pick a pair of U. S. Supreme Court cases and read them in full (they are readily available on line). Select either the “separate but equal” cases

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(*Plessy v. Fergusson* decided in 1896 which was reversed by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954) or the "abortion" cases (*Roe v. Wade* of 1973, reversed by *Dobbs v. Jackson* of 2022). For each case, read the opinion of the Court as well as all consenting and dissenting opinions.

Or, read the affirmative action cases (*Bakke v California* decided in 1978 and *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* in 2023).

April 2024:

### Articles of Confederation

The Articles were the first attempt to design a structure of government for our country.

Choose your own sources to study and answer the questions: Why did the Articles fail? How did the Constitution attempt to solve the problem?

May 2024:

### *Federalist Papers* by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay

The papers helped convince people to accept the new order. As you read, focus on the papers which deal with powers and limitations of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.

June 2024:

### *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine

Paine was perhaps the most read author of the Revolutionary period. His *Common Sense* (January 1776) blamed British rule for at does the ideal government most of the problems in the colonies and was a call for independence. The source for his his reasoning: common sense.

July 2024:

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### *Ben Franklin* by Walter Isaacson

Franklin was the first great American—a printer by trade; he was a scientist, a community organizer, a philosopher, and a diplomat. His transformation from loyal servant of the crown to pillar of republican reform helps us understand the transition from colony to independent republic.

### August 2024:

*His Excellency* by Joseph J. Ellis or *The Indispensable Man* by James Thomas Flexner [If you have another favorite biography of Washington, please feel free to substitute it.]

Why was Washington so indispensable? Was he a great orator, debater, philosopher, or writer? How many battles did he win in his 8-year term (4 or 5?) as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army? How did he become “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen”? What interests did Washington represent?

### September 2024:

### *John Adams* by David McCullough

After Washington, came John Adams. He had been the attorney for the British soldiers after the Boston massacre. He was our ambassador to both France and England in the 1780s. He was our first Vice President. Adams was the only President of the first five, not from Virginia. His son was the sixth President.

### October 2024:

### *Thomas Jefferson, The Art of Power* by Jon Meacham

Most noted as the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was our first Secretary of State and third President. He ran a bitter campaign against Adams in 1796 and lost, before engaging in a long-term correspondence with Adams, each dying on July 4, 1826.

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November 2024:

*Ethan Allen, His Life and Times* by Willard Sterne Randall

A legend and folk hero, Allen left his mark. Was he all bluster and blarney? How did he become the leader of the Green Mountain Boys and why did he lose favor with some historians? Some consider Ethan as instrumental to the formation of Vermont?

December 2024:

*Vermont Tradition, The Biography of An Outlook on Life* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher

Fisher tells what it was like to live in Vermont in those early years. She defines for us the Vermont Tradition.

### **2025: 1775 and 1800—1900**

January 2025:

*The Age of Jackson* by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.

Andrew Jackson was the first President who was not one of the founding fathers. In contrast to his predecessors, Jackson represented the common man. Yet, he championed a National Bank. This book is considered the definitive biography "Old Hickory".

February 2025:

*Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation* by John Ehle

Andrew Jackson favored the Indian Removal that led to "the trail of tears". A Bennington man, J. Everts opposed the removal, as did Davy Crockett.

March 2025:

*Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau

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Henry David Thoreau was one of Concord literary circle that included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, and Nathaniel Hawthorn. He is buried in Poets Corner in Concord.

In *Civil Disobedience* (1849), Thoreau set the standard for peaceful disagreement with government action. He spoke of the individual's allegiance to a higher power and the right to object when faced with government action to the contrary. Thoreau set the example for Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. 100 years later.

In his own time, Thoreau became a strong abolitionist, and a fan of John Brown.

April 2025:

*Midnight Rising: John Brown and the Raid that Sparked the Civil War* by Tony Horwitz

Abolitionists promoted racial equality from the beginning. Brown raised the tensions to a new level with his raid on Harpers Ferry.

May 2025:

*Ethan Allen & The Capture of Fort Ticonderoga* by Ricard B. Smith and also *Concord Hymn* by Ralph Waldo Emerson

Just 3 weeks after the shot heard around the world at Lexington and Concord, Ethan led the first patriot offensive of the Revolution against the British on May 10, 1775. The attack was not authorized by the Continental Congress, but it had at least the tacit support of the Connecticut Colonial leaders.

The capture of Ft. Ticonderoga ended one chapter for the Green Mountain Boys and opened a new one. Their emphasis shifted from the Yorkers to the British when they were invited to join the newly formed Continental Army.

June 2025:

*Bunker Hill* by Nathaniel Philbrick

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Five weeks after the capture of FT. Ticonderoga, the British attacked the defensive positions of the Patriots at Breed's Hill outside Boston. The Patriots retreated but it was pyrrhic victory for the British.

Two days after the battle, the Continental Congress commissioned George Washington the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army that largely did not exist.

July 2025:

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Race equality was one of those dreams that was left unresolved by the founding fathers. The Civil War would bring the tensions to a head. Stowe wrote the novel that caused Abraham Lincoln to remark that this was the woman who started the Civil War.

August 2025:

*A Team of Rivals, The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Goodwin

The inability to resolve the issue of racial equality came to a head in the War Between the States. The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) and the Dred Scott decision stirred a young Abe Lincoln to become a voice of moderation, to preserve the union.

The Lincoln-Douglas debates between Stephen Douglas who was born in Vermont and Lincoln born in Kentucky, framed the issue first and foremost as a regional one based on property rights. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation changed the game.

All along the way, his cabinet and others like Frederick Douglas, challenged him. Lincoln stood strong, persevering and holding the nation together as best he could. The 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Constitution solidified the gains won on the battlefield.

September 2025:

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### *Frederick Douglass, Prophet of Freedom* by David W. Blight

Born a slave on the East Shore of Maryland in 1818, Frederick Douglass escaped slavery at the age of 20. He became one of the great writers of the era and the most celebrated orator of the abolitionist movement. He was frustrated by Lincoln's hesitations but rejoiced in the victory of Emancipation, and then felt betrayed by the roadblocks to Reconstruction. OR

### *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (1884)

Reconstruction and the Jim Crow movement delayed justice. Born in Missouri and living in Hartford, Connecticut, Twain wrote a touching novel about a young white boy who befriended a black man in this adventure on the Mississippi River. Twain traveled the world entertaining audiences with his stories and humor.

### October 2025:

### *The Black Reconstruction in America* by W.E.B. Du Bois (1935)

Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 1868, Du Bois was the first African-American to earn a doctorate from Harvard University. He was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. In his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction in America*, he challenged the prevailing orthodoxy that blacks were responsible for the failure of the Reconstruction Era. Borrowing a phrase from Frederick Douglass, he popularized the term "color line" in attacking the injustice of the "separate but equal" doctrine prevalent in America after Plessy v. Ferguson (1896).

### November 2025:

### *Up From Slavery: An Autobiography* by Booker T. Washington (1900)

Born into slavery in 1856, Booker T. Washington was an American educator, establishing schools like the Tuskegee Institute, helping black people learn useful, marketable skills. A controversial figure during his life, W.E.B Du Bois criticized

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some of his views. In 1998, the *Modern Library* listed this autobiography as No.3 on its list the 100 best nonfiction books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1999, *Intercollegiate Review* listed it as one of the "50 Best Books of the Twentieth Century".

December 2025:

*Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr: Yankee from Olympus* by Catherine Drinker Bowen

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., born in 1841 the son of a Boston physician, served as an associate justice of the U.S Supreme Court from 1902 to 1932, participating in all the important cases that shaped the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Think of what was happening: Teddy Roosevelt and the busting of trusts, World War I, Woodrow Wilson, the roaring 20s, etc.

His opinions supporting civil liberties made him a favorite of the progressives politicians. Called the "Great Dissenter, his dissents often became the law of the land in later decisions.

### **2026: 1776 and 1900-2000**

January 2026:

*Century of Struggle:*

*The Women's Rights Movement in the United State* by Eleanor Flexner

The struggle for women's voting rights was one of the longest and most successful challenges ever posed to the American system of electoral politics.

February 2026:

*The Elizabeth Cady Stanton--Susan B. Anthony Reader* by Ellen Carol Dubois

These two leaders of the suffrage movement had local ties. Susan B. Anthony was born in Adams, Massachusetts in 1820. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was from upstate New York. The two traveled around the country delivering speeches in favor of women's suffrage.



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Anthony also championed Temperance, abolition, the rights of labor, and equal pay for equal work.

March 2026:

*Theodore Rex* by Edmund Morris (Theodore Roosevelt)

When Theodore Roosevelt swept into the Presidency in 1901, he brought a sea of change. As Governor of New York, he had fought corruption and challenged the Albany establishment. Vice President of the U.S., Rough Rider, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, President of the New York City Board of Police Commissioners, Commissioner of the United Civil Service Commission, conservationist, naturalist, historian, author, adventurer ... Roosevelt would make his mark fighting the powerful Trusts.

But as a youth, Roosevelt weak and sickly, was the most unlikely of heroes. He made himself strong and was fiercely competitive. He was the youngest man to become of the United States at age 42.

April 2026:

*Coolidge* by Amity Shlaes.

Silent Cal was Vermont's answer to the roaring twenties. He set a tone and style markedly different from those who had gone before and would come after. He was a dignified leader, who was firm and effective.

May 2026:

*Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Champion of Freedom* by Conrad Black or *The Glory and the Dream, Volume 1* by William Manchester

Again, feel free to substitute your favorite book on FDR for these two classics.

FDR led this nation through much of the Great Depression and World War II. His approaches to governing were sometimes controversial and often creative to the point of pushing the envelope to the edge of acceptability.

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June 2026:

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck

The Great Depression was a time of great hardship for many Americans. The struggle for the American Dream suffered in the face of natural disasters, compounding the economic and social challenges.

Steinbeck's novel is much more than a story, it is epic metaphor telling of the struggles faced by generations of poor in America.

July 2026:

*George Washington's War, The Saga of the American Revolution* by Robert Leckie  
(pp. 103-527; 632-658)

From the fall of Quebec in 1759 to Cornwallis' Surrender at Yorktown, a sweeping review of the events leading up to and ending the American Revolution.

August 2026:

*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Dealing with racial inequality in the American South the 1920s and 30s, the novel is renowned for its warmth and humor. Atticus Finch has served as a moral hero for readers and a model of integrity for lawyers, i.e., "the most enduring fictional image of racial heroism," i.e., according to historian Joseph Crespino. Crespino says that "In the twentieth century, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is probably the most widely read book dealing with race in America."

Harper Lee, who grew up in Monroeville, Alabama in the 1920s and 30s, also addressed issues of class, courage, compassion, and gender roles in the Deep South. From her, we get a glimpse of the up-hill challenges our minorities have faced in overcoming prejudice.

If you get a chance, view the movie of the same name starring Gregory Peck. The film (1962) won 3 Academy Awards including Best Actor for Peck and was nominated for eight, including Best Picture. In 2003, the American Film Institute

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(AFI) named Atticus Finch the greatest movie hero of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 2007, the film ranked 25th on the AFI's list of the greatest movies of all time. In 2020, the British Film Institute included it on their list of the 50 films you should see by the age of 15.

September 2026:

*Points of Rebellion* by William O. Douglas (1969)

William O. Douglas was appointed to the Supreme Court by FDR, serving until 1975, becoming the longest serving justice in history. He was known for his civil libertarian views and often considered the most liberal justice ever.

Douglas' most notable opinions included *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), establishing the right to privacy in a case involving contraceptives.

As a pamphleteer in the tradition of Thomas Paine and Ethan Allen, *Points of Rebellion* is an attack on the Establishment and the American reality but not on democracy and the American dream.

October 2026:

*Animal Farm* or *1984* by George Orwell

From time to time, a piece of fiction calls us to question our base values and their likely consequences. Published in 1945 and originally aimed at the Soviet Union, one has to look over the shoulder to see if life on the Farm is approaching.

November 2026:

*The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* by Clayborn Carson, editor

No one articulated the American Dream better than Martin Luther King, Jr. in his "I have a Dream" speech.

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December 2026:

*Washington's Crossing* by David Hackett Fischer (The Crossing of the Delaware)

On the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington's Crossing of the Delaware, pause to consider the importance of this event. The Patriot cause was looking bleak. The daring of the crossing and attack on Christmas morning turned the tide.

### **2027: 1777 and 2000-present**

January 2027:

*Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War* by Nathaniel Philbrick

For many, the Mayflower was the beginning of the American experience, Columbus and Jamestown notwithstanding. Many New England towns, including Bennington, trace their founders to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, established shortly after Plymouth Colony.

Philbrick highlights the tensions between the Pilgrims and Massasoit as they established a relationship based on mutual need, overcoming initial distrust of each other. Both groups faced threats from other native Americans, including the Massachusetts and the Narragansetts.

When the second generation of Pilgrims came of age, the bond formed with Massasoit began to unravel. New England was headed to war with Philip, Massasoit's son, due to a mutual lack of diplomacy and respect. The resulting King Philips War was a bloody experience causing the destruction of much of the native population throughout New England.

February 2027:

*The 1619 Project: A New Original Story* edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones

*The 1619 Project* is a highly significant publication raising questions about the original and history of slavery in America. One of the claims made by Hannah-Jones was that some of the colonists fought the Revolutionary War to preserve slavery.

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A collection of essays, each raises questions and challenges the traditional wisdom about race in America. Scholarship is often enhanced when we question our history as it has been presented to us.

Freedom and equality have been basic tenants of the American Dream since at least 1776. Achieving freedom and equality has been a long struggle and we continue to be confronted by obstacles on this path.

March 2027:

*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin (1963)

Born in Harlem in 1924, Baldwin was one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest writers, breaking new literary ground with an exploration of racial and social issues. Baldwin's first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was published in 1953.

Drawing on autobiographic experience and social criticism, *The Fire Next Time* is a scathing criticism of America at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. It was meant to educate the white community what it was like to be black in America. It offered white readers a view of themselves through the eyes of the African-American community.

Baldwin wrote, "If we . . . do not falter in our duty now, we may be able . . . to end the racial nightmare." Baldwin struck a chord with the American people and *The Fire Next Time* sold more than a million copies.

April 2027:

*Tears We Cannot Stop, A Sermon to White America*, Michael Eric Dyson (2017)

*Tears* is a hard-hitting sermon directed at a white congregation. The Reverend Dyson challenges readers "to reject the willful denial of history and to live fully in the complicated present with all of the discomfort it brings."

Dyson's sermon addresses

"five dysfunctional ways that those regarded as white respond when confronted with the reality that whiteness is simultaneously artificial and powerful..." as well as "dysfunctional ways that black people sometimes respond to white racism."

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Dyson suggests that we read black authors and history, citing James Baldwin and W.E.B. Du Bois.

May 2027:

*Profiles in Courage* by John F. Kennedy (1955)

*Profiles* highlights eight United States Senators who defied the opinions of their political parties and constituents to do what they felt was right and suffered losses in popularity as a result.

*Profiles* was a call to integrity and to do the right thing.

June 2027:

*A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (1980, 2009)

In *A People's History*, Howard Zinn presents a different side of history from the "traditional national glorification" of our country. He emphasizes an American history as the exploitation and manipulation of the majority by an elite group of leaders.

In a letter to the New York Times in 2007, Zinn wrote:

"My history . . . describes the inspiring struggle of those who fought slavery and racism . . ., of labor organizers who have led strikes for the rights of working people . . ., of the socialists and others who have protested war and militarism . . ." by an elite.

"Our people are basically decent and caring, and our highest ideas are expressed in the Declaration of independence . . . and all of us, of whatever age, can find immense satisfaction in becoming part of that."

Critics like Chris Beneke and Randall J. Stephens point out blatant omissions of important historical episodes, uncritical reliance on biased sources, and failure to examine opposing views.

July 2027:

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*The Soul of America: The Battle of Our Better Angels* by Jon Meacham (2018)

The Soul of America is a history of America from colonial days to 2018. It traces the ups and downs of public issues including race, civil rights, immigration, women's suffrage, and internal and external threats to the democratic including the KKK and Communism.

August 2027:

*Battle of Bennington & the Bennington Monument* by Phil Holland

The Battle was a pivotal battle in the American Revolution. The British lost more troops than at either the Battle of Bunker Hill or in the two days of fighting preceding General Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga.

September 2027:

*Saratoga, The Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* by Richard M. Ketchum (1997)

The Battle of Bennington led to Saratoga. The surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga led to the entry of the French on behalf of the Patriots. The presence of the French navy at Yorktown led to the surrender of Cornwallis. Washington's victory at Yorktown led to the end of the American Revolution.

October 2027: *The Audacity of Hope* by Barak Obama (2006)

*Audacity* launched the political campaign of the first African-American to be elected to President of the United States.

Hope remains the most enduring aspiration of the American Dream.

November 2027:

*Created Equal, Clarence Thomas in His Own Words*, by Michael Pack and Mark Paoletta (2022)

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Born in dire poverty in the segregated South and abandoned by his father a child, Clarence Thomas triumphed over seemingly insurmountable odds to become one of the most influential associate justices of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Thomas is one of the most conservative associate justices ever to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

December 2027:

*The Course of Human Events* by David McCullough (2004)

David McCullough is one of the most respected historians in recent memory.

McCullough reminds us that history is made up of human beings, not gods. He cites the flaws of the Founding Fathers as he ticks off their accomplishments.