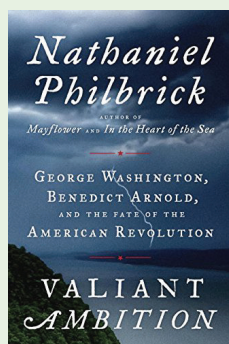


TOP PICK

VALIANT AMBITION



By Nathaniel Philbrick

Viking, \$30, 448 pages
ISBN 9780525426783, audio, eBook available

HISTORY

From victor to turncoat

REVIEW BY ANNE BARTLETT

The state of play in the American Revolution, late 1777: One famous general has lost every significant battle he's been in, often because he couldn't curb his aggressive instincts. Another famous general has won several major victories, including one that will prove to be the most pivotal of the war.

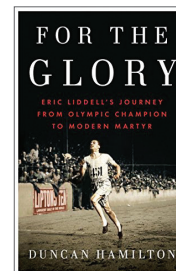
The initially unsuccessful general was George Washington; the winner was Benedict Arnold. We know how it turned out—in the coming years, Washington became First in the Hearts of His Countrymen and Arnold became First Traitor. But how on earth did it happen? Nathaniel Philbrick, author of the bestsellers *In the Heart of the Sea* and *Mayflower*, tackles this fascinating reversal of fortune in *Valiant Ambition*, an engrossing narrative of the war's most difficult years.

In Philbrick's view, both men were indeed valiant and ambitious, but their fundamental characters were diametrically opposed. Washington had a true moral compass, a long horizon and the capacity to learn from his mistakes. Arnold was impetuous, greedy and consumed with self-regard. When Congress mistreated Arnold, he became enraged, started smuggling contraband and ultimately sold out to the British.

The British unwittingly helped both men to their fates. The dysfunction of the infant American government was nothing compared to the internecine warfare of the British generals, who spent much of their energy scheming against each other. General William Howe beat Washington in every pitched battle they fought, but his hatred for his compatriot General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne exceeded his desire to win what he probably considered a pointless colonial dust-up. Perhaps Philbrick's least favorite character is the British spy Major John André, the ruthless charmer whose careless misstep led to Arnold's downfall and André's own execution.

Philbrick argues that the quarrelsome, divided Americans needed Arnold's perfidy as much as they did Washington's greatness to unify their new nation. He pushes aside the patriotic myth to unveil the war's messy reality—and it's still a rousing adventure.

FOR THE GLORY



By Duncan Hamilton

Penguin Press
\$28, 400 pages
ISBN 9781594206207
Audio, eBook available

BIOGRAPHY

Maybe they made the wrong movie.

Or, at least, perhaps there should have been a sequel to *Chariots of Fire*, the 1981 historical drama that became an international hit and won four Academy Awards. That's because, as British author Duncan Hamilton writes in *For the Glory*, Scottish sprinter Eric Liddell's life was really just beginning when he won a gold medal in the 400 meters at the 1924 Summer Olympics after missing out on the 100-meter event by famously refusing to race on Sunday in accordance with his Christian beliefs.

As Hamilton depicts in this vivid and heartfelt narrative, Liddell went on to make a far more lasting mark in life than his athletic triumphs. A year after his Olympic glory in Paris, he began serving as a teacher and missionary in a remote region of China, where he was born the son of missionary parents. It was a difficult life in an environment already hostile to outsiders, and it became progressively more difficult as war clouds threatened. Ultimately, Liddell and other Westerners were sent to a Japanese work camp, where he died at age 43 from a brain tumor in 1945.

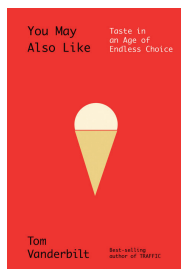
Hamilton's passion for his subject shows through on every page as he recounts life in the camp, where Liddell worked tirelessly, gave up his meager rations and counseled despondent fellow internees. He also could be cajoled into the occasional footrace, never being beaten until near the end of his life.

Through it all, Liddell held to his beliefs and inspired countless others to follow in his footsteps. Hamilton makes it clear: His race became theirs, and the human race was the better for it.

—SHEILA M. TRASK

—KEITH HERRELL

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE



By Tom Vanderbilt

Knopf
\$26.95, 320 pages
ISBN 9780370958242
Audio, eBook available

SOCIAL SCIENCE

Traffic breaks it down for us in an intensive investigation of what we like, why we like it and why sometimes it's so hard to decide.

Drawing on voluminous research into the ways we like, and dislike, everything from art to music, Vanderbilt tries to pin down our preferences, something we think we know about ourselves but really don't. We may be quick to hit the "Like" button on Facebook, but what that means turns out to be both subjective and situational. In *You May Also Like: Taste in an Age of Endless Choice*, Vanderbilt talks to the geniuses behind algorithm-based curation systems like Pandora, the food-science folks responsible for military rations and art historians who can predict your preferences in paintings. You'll find

yourself thinking that surely you wouldn't be manipulated by cues like the color of your cola (clear doesn't taste as good as caramel color to most folks), but as Vanderbilt's evidence stacks up, you realize there are many unconscious social, environmental and cognitive reasons for your choices.

You'll also find that Pooh was right. One of the mysteries Vanderbilt unpacks is the phenomenon of satiety, and how it changes the taste of food. There are reasons the anticipation of a good meal is so exciting and the first few bites taste so good. Vanderbilt delivers the explanations with ample documentation and enough humorous asides to make his book deliciously palatable the whole way through.

In the wise words of Winnie-the-Pooh, "[A]lthough eating honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called." Tom Vanderbilt *does* know what this precious moment is called—today it's known as "liking"—and the bestselling author of