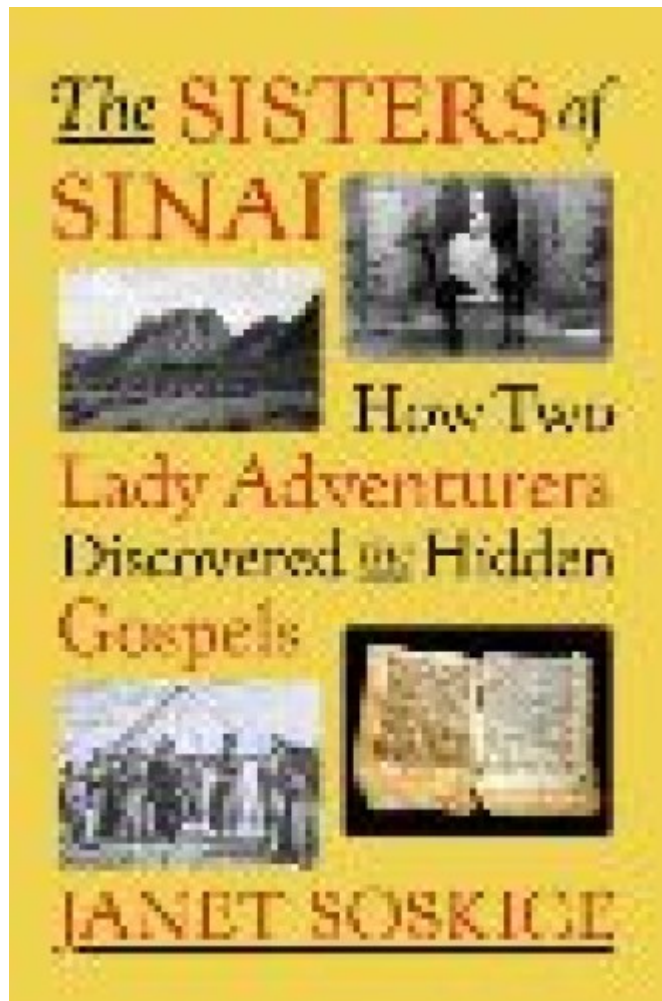


CC recommends

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

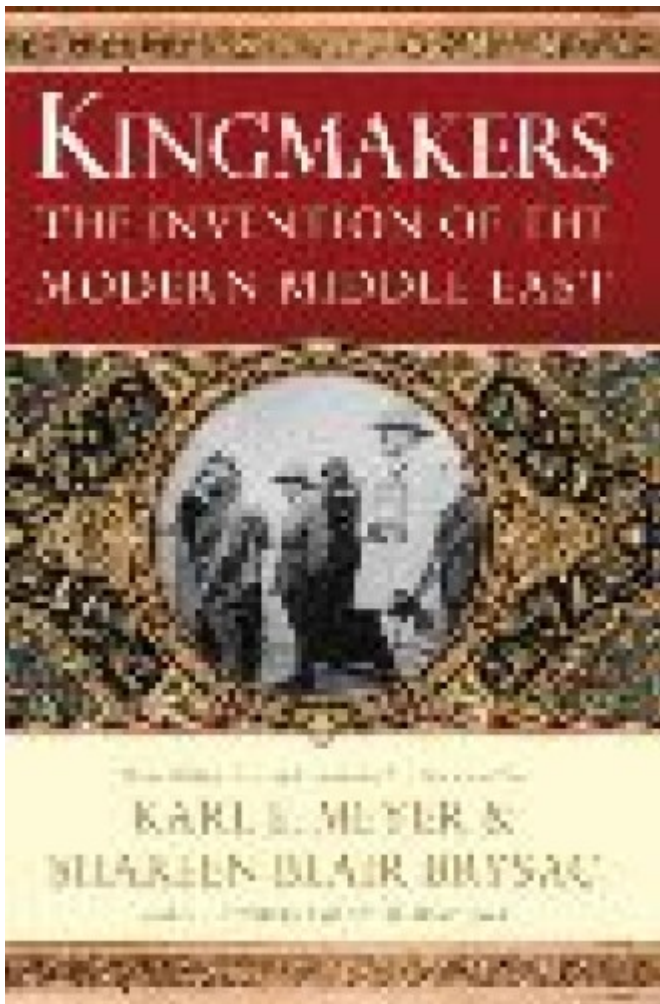
This review appears in the [December 15, 2009](#) issue.

In Review



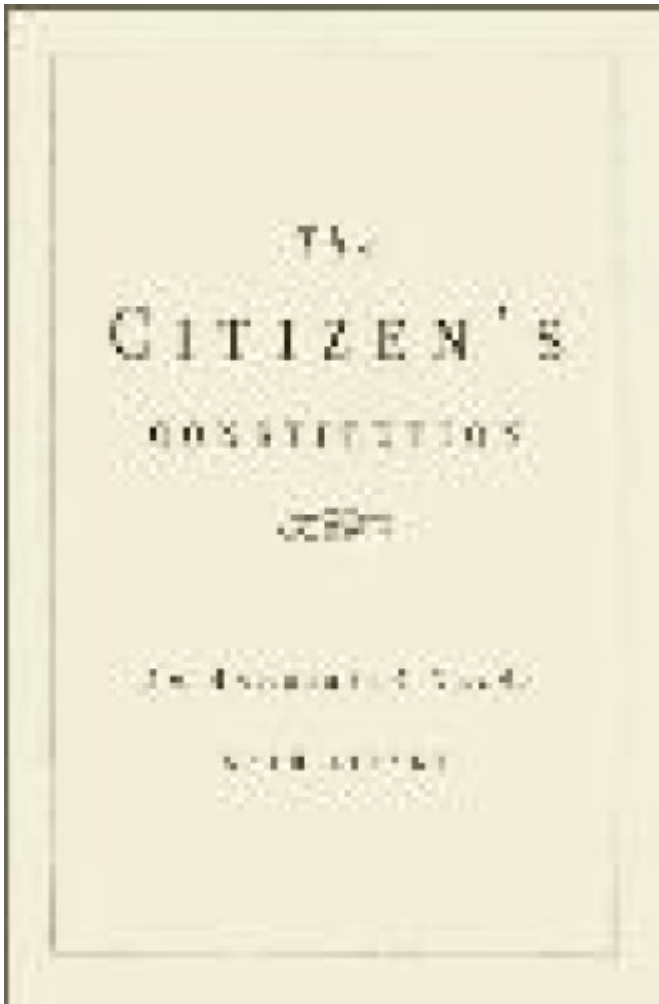
The Sisters of Sinai: How Two Lady Adventurers Discovered the Hidden Gospels

Janet Soskice
Knopf



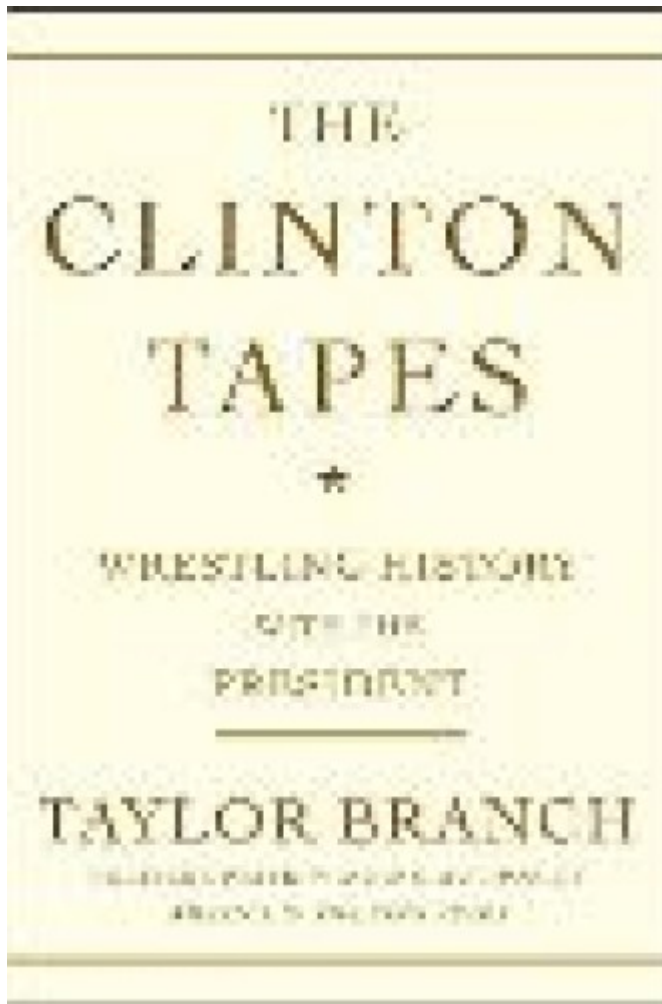
Kingmakers: The Invention of the Modern Middle East

Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac
Norton



The Citizen's Constitution: An Annotated Guide

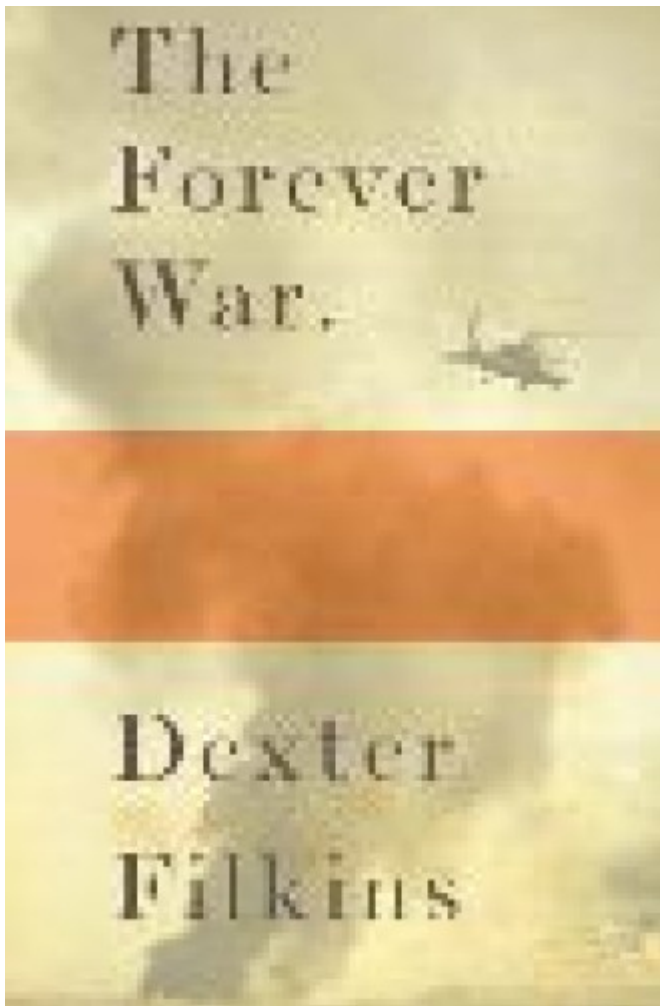
Seth Lipsky
Basic Books



The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History with the President

Taylor Branch

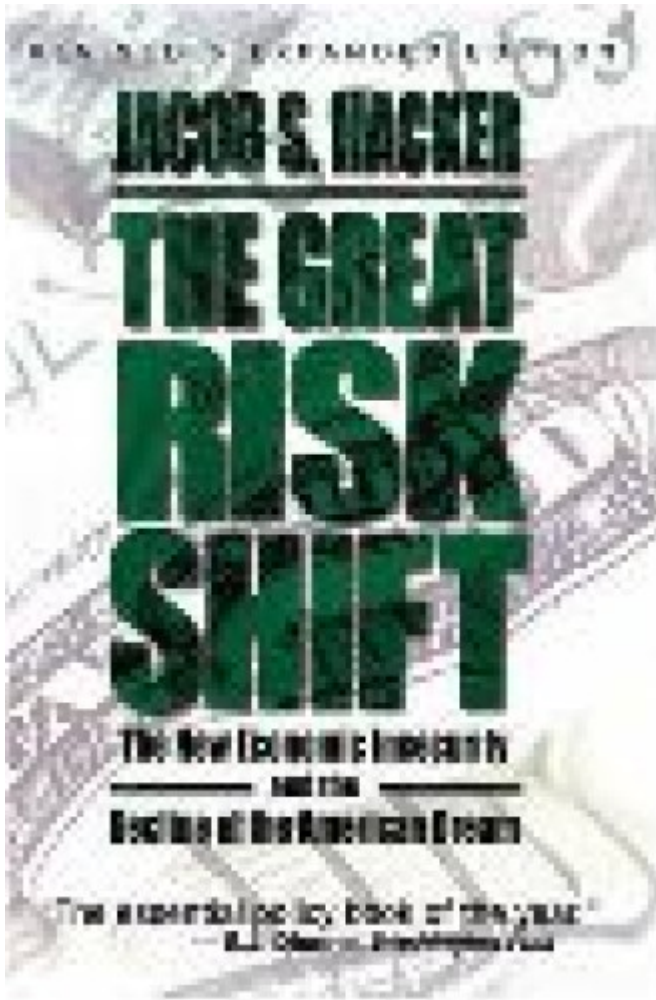
Simon & Schuster



The Forever War

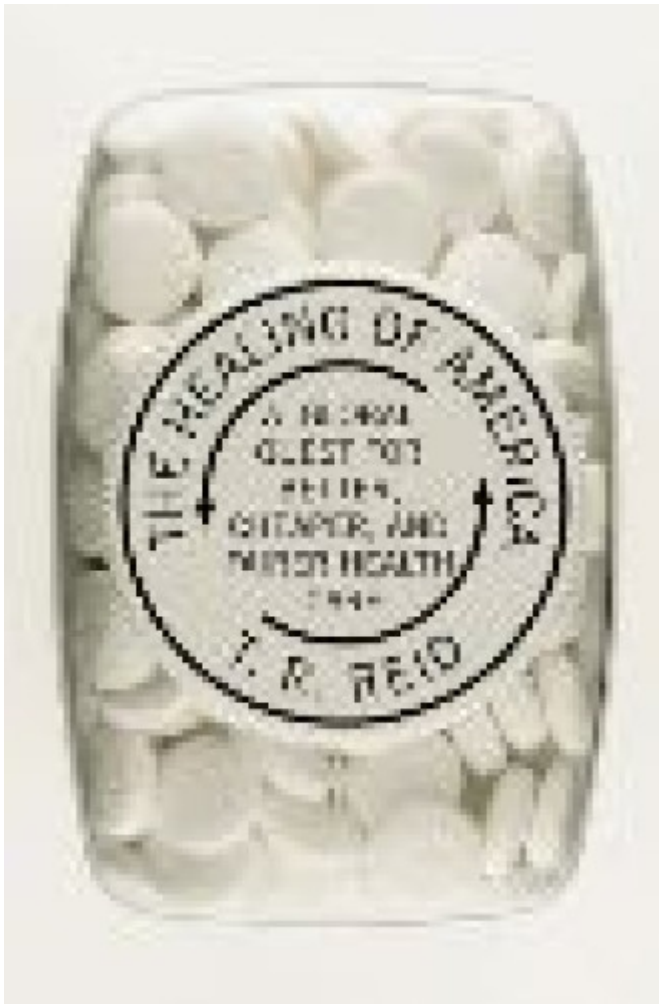
Dexter Filkins

Vintage



The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream

Jacob S. Hacker
Oxford University Press



The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care

T. R. Reid
Penguin

In 1892 Agnes and Margaret Smith, identical twin sisters from Scotland, took a nine-day camel ride to the Greek Orthodox monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai in search of ancient biblical manuscripts. They discovered the earliest known Syriac version of the four canonical Gospels. Soskice, a philosophical theologian at Cambridge, calls these Gospels hidden because they were the underwriting on a palimpsest manuscript that was stored in a remote desert monastery. Neither sister had a university degree, but they left a mark on biblical scholarship.

The Middle East as we know it today is largely the creation of Western powers who were responding to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and motivated by the

politics of oil. Myers and Blair Brysac use the biographies of policy makers and power brokers like Gertrude Bell, T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), Kermit Roosevelt and Paul Wolfowitz to document the way Britain, the U.S. and other nations put their imprint on this part of the world. “The one truly transcendent law in the Middle East is that of unintended consequences,” the authors say.

This guide lards each section of the constitution with readable annotations that draw on the writings of the Founders, case law and current events. On the First Amendment, for example, Lipsky quotes Jefferson’s letter in which he uses the phrase “a wall of separation between Church & State” and points out that the Congregational Church of Connecticut wasn’t disestablished until 1818. Whether you regard the Constitution as malleable or immutable, you will find this guide interesting and useful.

While president, Bill Clinton was periodically interviewed by his friend, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Taylor Branch. The tapes were stored away and even Branch didn’t have access to them. After each one of his 79 dialogues with the president, Branch would record his own recollections of what had transpired. With Clinton’s encouragement, Branch has published his account of their conversations, providing Clinton’s perspectives on events as they happened and sometimes showing the president in unguarded moments.

For most Americans, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been a disturbing background noise. Filkens, correspondent for the *New York Times*, puts names and faces on the soldiers and the sufferers in this stunning collection of frontline reports over the past decade. Whether he is embedding himself with U.S. troops or exploring Afghan villages or Iraqi neighborhoods, Filkens is unsurpassed at conveying the bravery, absurdity and horror of the “war on terror.”

Although the economy has grown over the past 30 years, the chance that average U.S. workers will find themselves in poverty at some point in their lives has actually increased threefold. That is not just because global competition has endangered jobs, argues Hacker, a political scientist at Yale. It’s because corporations and governments have decided to shift responsibility for pensions, health care and worker retraining to the workers themselves, making them more vulnerable in times of economic stress. Hacker is especially incisive in showing how demands for an “ownership society” and for “personal responsibility” have undermined the mid-20th-century consensus view—shared by prominent business leaders

themselves—that the sharing of economic risks was good for everybody.

Reid, a veteran journalist, compares the U.S. health-care system to that of other major industrial countries. Though he finds no system without flaws, he explodes many myths about so-called rationing in government-guaranteed health-care systems, and he makes it clear that the rest of the industrial world receives better care than Americans do, and for less money. Unlike the U.S., most industrial countries have decided that health care is a right, not a commodity.

David Heim and Richard A. Kauffman are the Century's executive editor and senior editor, respectively.

More CC recommends:

[Theology](#) ~ [History and current events](#) ~ [Fiction](#)

[Poetry](#) ~ [Graphic novels](#) ~ [Children's books](#)

[Television on DVD](#) ~ [Popular music](#) ~ [Choral music](#)