

American historians on grit, revolutions, and the topsy-turviness of our era

Who I'd invite to my writers' dinner party

by [Cleophus J. LaRue](#) in the [May 10, 2017](#) issue

I would love to hear a conversation between American historians. Theodore White had the gift of sizing up the significance of individuals with an economy of words. Writing about the massive upheavals of the 20th century and the people most responsible for the topsy-turviness of the era, Teddy White simply noted: "Revolutions are begun by intellectuals." David Halberstam was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who wrote with clarity and irony on the cultural and intellectual genius of America. A masterful storyteller, he had an innate sense of the drive and ambition of Americans great and small. Biographer Ronald C. White has a feel for the descriptive power of narrative and its ability to bring events of the past before the mind's eye in compelling fashion. I often dreamed about Abraham Lincoln while reading Ron White's account of what made him great.

How I would like to sit at these authors' feet as they talked! I imagine that Teddy White would size up the grand sweep of history, Halberstam would discuss the pros and cons of American grit and determination, and Ron White would evaluate the role of religion in the lives of our political leaders.