

HCIC Book Club * June 30, 2015



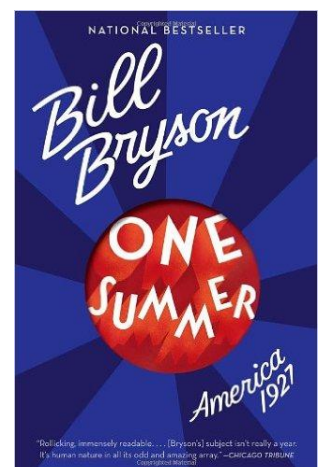
From left: Darren Gergle, Judy Olson, Steve Whittaker, Terry Roberts, Mary Czerwinski, Dan Russell, Stu Card, Jim Herbsleb, Gary Olson, Elizabeth Churchill

We met at Soif Restaurant in Santa Cruz to talk about life, HCI theory, fine wine, and books. These are the notes from that evening.

Round 1: Our favorite book...

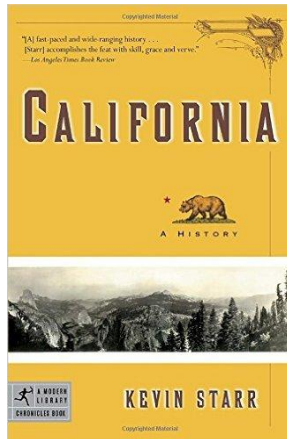
Judy: *One Summer: America, 1927.* Bill Bryson (2013)

The summer of 1927 began with Charles Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic. Meanwhile, Babe Ruth was closing in on the home run record. In Newark, New Jersey, Alvin "Shipwreck" Kelly sat atop a flagpole for twelve days, and in Chicago, the gangster Al Capone was tightening his grip on bootlegging. The first true "talking picture," Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, was filmed, forever changing the motion picture industry.



1927 was a year of extraordinary change. Judy loves this for the quality of the writing and its novel approach to telling the story of the time.

Gary: *the multi-volume series on the history of California, collectively called "Americans and the California Dream, 1850–1915." Although he's only read two of them, Gary calls this "the best history series I've read..."*



Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915
Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era (1985)
Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s (1990)
Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California (1996)
The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s (1997)
Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940-1950 (2002)
Golden dreams: California in an age of abundance, 1950-1963 (2009)
Coast Of Dreams: California on the Edge, 1990-2002 (2004)

Dan: *The Martian.* Andy Weir (2014)

Six days ago, astronaut Mark Watney became one of the first people to walk on Mars.

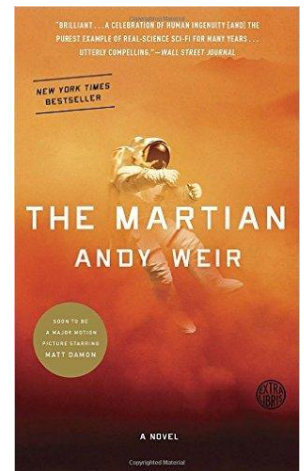
Now, he's sure he'll be the first person to die there.

After a dust storm nearly kills him and forces his crew to evacuate while thinking him dead, Mark finds himself stranded and completely alone with no way to even signal Earth that he's alive—and even if he could get word out, his supplies would be gone long before a rescue could arrive.

Chances are, though, he won't have time to starve to death. The damaged machinery, unforgiving environment, or plain-old "human error" are much more likely to kill him first.

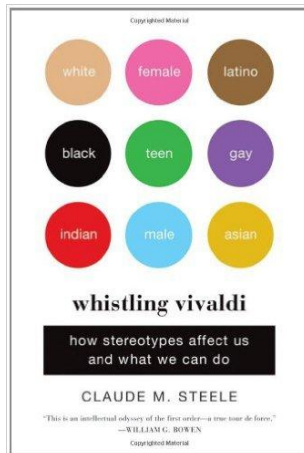
But Mark isn't ready to give up yet. Drawing on his ingenuity, his engineering skills—and a relentless, dogged refusal to quit—he steadfastly confronts one seemingly insurmountable obstacle after the next. Will his resourcefulness be enough to overcome the impossible odds against him?

This is really a hacker's book. As Watney says, with a problem this big, "... I'm going to have science the hell of out it.."



Darren: *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do.* Claude M. Steele (2011)

Steele writes about the work he and his colleagues have done on “stereotype threat,” the tendency to expect, perceive, and be influenced by negative stereotypes about one's social category, such as one's age, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, profession, nationality, political affiliation, mental health status, and so on.



When trying to understand certain performance gaps between groups, Steele and his colleagues did not focus on internal psychological factors. Instead, they tried to understand the possible causal role of identity contingencies, the things you have to deal with in a situation because you have a given social identity. Over the years they carried out a series of creative experiments to study this bias effect. In their experimental conditions, the identity contingency was either cleverly removed or it was deliberately induced. The results

are striking and profound. A book we should all read as we design our own studies.

Terry: *Spider Woman's Daughter.* Anne Hillerman (2013)

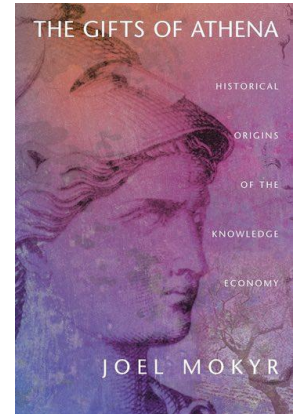
Anne Hillerman, the talented daughter of bestselling author Tony Hillerman, continues his popular Leaphorn and Chee series with *Spider Woman's Daughter*, a Navajo Country mystery, filled with captivating lore, startling suspense, bold new characters, vivid color, and rich Southwestern atmosphere.

Navajo Nation Police Officer Bernadette Manualito witnesses the cold-blooded shooting of someone very close to her. With the victim fighting for his life, the entire squad and the local FBI office are hell-bent on catching the gunman. Bernie, too, wants in on the investigation, despite regulations forbidding eyewitness involvement. But that doesn't mean she's going to sit idly by, especially when her husband, Sergeant Jim Chee, is in charge of finding the shooter.

Bernie and Chee discover that a cold case involving his former boss and partner, retired Inspector Joe Leaphorn, may hold the key. Digging into the old investigation, husband and wife find themselves inching closer to the truth...and closer to a killer determined to prevent justice from taking its course.

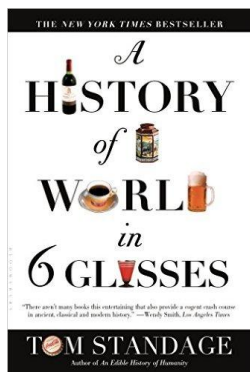
Jim: *Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (2004) Joel Mokyr

The growth of technological and scientific knowledge in the past two centuries has been the overriding dynamic element in the economic and social history of the world. Its result is now often called the knowledge economy. But what are the historical origins of this revolution and what have been its mechanisms? Here is an original framework to analyze the concept of "useful" knowledge. He argues that the growth explosion in the modern West in the past two centuries was driven not just by the appearance of new technological ideas but also by the improved access to these ideas in society at large--as made possible by social networks comprising universities, publishers, professional sciences, and kindred institutions. Through a wealth of historical evidence set in clear and lively prose, he shows that changes in the intellectual and social environment and the institutional background in which knowledge was generated and disseminated brought about the Industrial Revolution, followed by sustained economic growth and continuing technological change.



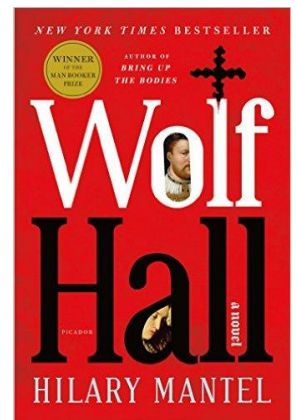
(Jim recommends that you NOT get the Kindle edition, as the scanning process has messed up some of the equations in the book...)

Elizabeth: *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*. Tom Standage (2006)



Standage tells the story of humanity from the Stone Age to the 21st century through the lens of beer, wine, spirits, coffee, tea, and cola. Beer was first made in the Fertile Crescent and by 3000 B.C.E. was so important to Mesopotamia and Egypt that it was used to pay wages. In ancient Greece wine became the main export of her vast seaborne trade, helping spread Greek culture abroad. Spirits such as brandy and rum fueled the Age of Exploration, fortifying seamen on long voyages and oiling the pernicious slave trade. Although coffee originated in the Arab world, it stoked revolutionary thought in Europe during the Age of Reason, when coffeehouses became centers of intellectual exchange. And hundreds of years after the Chinese began drinking tea, it became especially popular in Britain, with far-reaching effects on British foreign policy. Finally, though carbonated drinks were invented in 18th-century Europe they became a 20th-century phenomenon, and Coca-Cola in particular is the leading symbol of globalization.

England in the 1520s is a heartbeat from disaster. If the king dies without a male heir, the country could be destroyed by civil war. Henry VIII wants to annul his marriage of twenty years and marry Anne Boleyn. The pope and most of Europe opposes him. Into this impasse steps Thomas Cromwell: a wholly original man, a charmer and a bully, both idealist and opportunist, astute in reading people, and implacable in his ambition. But Henry is volatile: one day tender, one day murderous. Cromwell helps him break the opposition, but what will be the price of his triumph?



Stu: *The Book from the Ground: From point to point.* Bing Xu (2014)



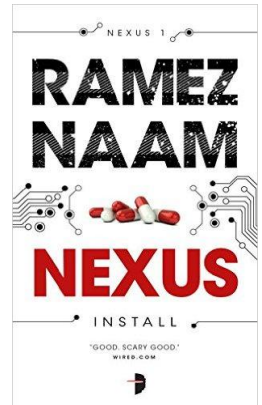
Following his classic work *Book from the Sky*, the Chinese artist Xu Bing presents a new graphic novel -- one composed entirely of symbols and icons that are universally understood. Xu Bing spent seven years gathering materials, experimenting, revising, and arranging thousands of pictograms to construct the narrative of *Book from the Ground*. The result is a readable story without words, an account of twenty-four hours in the life of "Mr. Black," a typical urban white-collar worker. Our protagonist's day begins with wake-up calls from a nearby bird and his bedside alarm clock; it continues through tooth-brushing,

coffee-making, TV-watching, and cat-feeding. He commutes to his job on the subway, works in his office, ponders various fast-food options for lunch, waits in line for the bathroom, daydreams, sends flowers, socializes after work, goes home, kills a mosquito, goes to bed, sleeps, and gets up the next morning to do it all over again. His day is recounted with meticulous and intimate detail, and reads like a postmodern, post-textual riff on James Joyce's account of Bloom's peregrinations in *Ulysses*. But Xu Bing's narrative, using an exclusively

visual language, could be published anywhere, without translation or explication; anyone with experience in contemporary life--anyone who has internalized the icons and logos of modernity, from smiley faces to transit maps to menus--can understand it.

Mary: *Nexus: Nexus Arc Book 1.* Ramez Naam (2015)

(Book 1 of the Nexus trilogy: Nexus, Crux, and Apex) Mary's colleague Naam, is an expert in new technologies and author of *More Than Human: Embracing the Promise of Biological Enhancement* (2005), this is his debut sf novel. Nexus is a nanotechnology that allows human minds to link up. But rogue scientists are using it to turn ordinary people into killers (shades of Richard Condon's classic novel *The Manchurian Candidate*). The American government recruits—in other words, blackmails—Kade Lane, a grad student who's been known to tinker with Nexus, to get close to the suspected leader of the mind-control program. But, as Kade soon discovers, one man's villain is another's visionary, and he's forced to choose sides in a hurry, before someone else decides he's too dangerous to stay alive. Naam has set himself a difficult challenge here: he's telling a story in which much of the action and dialogue takes place inside the characters' minds. But he succeeds admirably: one scene, in particular, in which a character races to make changes to the Nexus system by reprogramming it inside his own head, is nail-bitingly tense, when it could easily have come off as preposterous. The dialogue might be a bit raw in places, and there might be a slight overuse of exclamation points, but those are minor rookie mistakes. What matters here is the remarkable scope of the story and its narrative power.



=====

Round 2: Lightning reviews--next favored book...

Elizabeth: *Assassination Vacation.* Sarah Vowell.

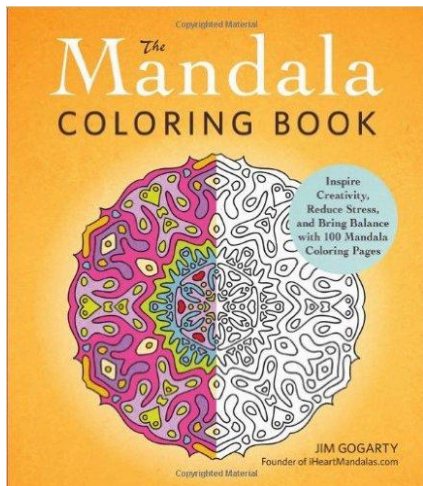
Elizabeth recommends the Audiobook version, as Vowell has a very distinctive voice. (Dan is reading it now on his phone, and notes that this is one of the few books to make him laugh out loud while reading it in line at the coffee shop...)

Sarah Vowell exposes the glorious conundrums of American history and culture with wit, probity, and an irreverent sense of humor. With *Assassination Vacation*, she takes us on a road trip like no other -- a journey to the pit stops of American political murder and through the myriad ways they have been used for fun and profit, for political and cultural advantage.

From Buffalo to Alaska, Washington to the Dry Tortugas, Vowell visits locations immortalized and influenced by the spilling of politically important blood, reporting as she goes with her trademark blend of wisecracking humor, remarkable honesty, and thought-provoking criticism. We learn about the jinx that was Robert Todd Lincoln (present at the assassinations of Presidents Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley) and witness the politicking that went into the making of the Lincoln Memorial. The resulting narrative is much more than an entertaining and informative travelogue -- it is the disturbing and fascinating story of how American death has been manipulated by popular culture, including literature, architecture, sculpture, and -- the author's favorite -- historical tourism. Though the themes of loss and violence are explored and we make detours to see how the Republican Party became the Republican Party, there are all kinds of lighter diversions along the way into the lives of the three presidents and their assassins, including mummies, show tunes, mean-spirited totem poles, and a nineteenth-century biblical sex cult.

Judy: *The Mandala Coloring Book: Inspire Creativity, Reduce Stress, and Bring Balance with 100 Mandala Coloring Pages.* Jim Gogarty (2013)

Just what it says. Relaxing. Become one with the universe by coloring...



Gary: *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution.* Francis Fukuyama (2011).

Virtually all human societies were once organized tribally, yet over time most developed new political institutions which included a central state that could keep the peace and uniform laws

that applied to all citizens. Some went on to create governments that were accountable to their constituents. We take these institutions for granted, but they are absent or are unable to perform in many of today's developing countries--with often disastrous consequences for the rest of the world.

Drawing on a broad body of knowledge--history, evolutionary biology, archaeology, and economics--Fukuyama has produced a brilliant, provocative work that offers fresh insights on the origins of democratic societies and raises essential questions about the nature of politics and its discontents.

Dan: *Hallucinations*. Oliver Sacks (2012)

To many people, hallucinations imply madness, but in fact they are a common part of the human experience. These sensory distortions range from the shimmering zigzags of a visual migraine to powerful visions brought on by fever, injuries, drugs, sensory deprivation, exhaustion, or even grief. Hallucinations doubtless lie behind many mythological traditions, literary inventions, and religious epiphanies. Drawing on his own experiences, a wealth of clinical cases from among his patients, and famous historical examples ranging from Dostoevsky to Lewis Carroll, the legendary neurologist Oliver Sacks investigates the mystery of these sensory deceptions: what they say about the working of our brains, how they have influenced our folklore and culture, and why the potential for hallucination is present in us all.

Darren: *Ready Player One: A Novel*. Ernest Cline (2012)

In the year 2044, reality is an ugly place. The only time teenage Wade Watts really feels alive is when he's jacked into the virtual utopia known as the OASIS. Wade's devoted his life to studying the puzzles hidden within this world's digital confines—puzzles that are based on their creator's obsession with the pop culture of decades past and that promise massive power and fortune to whoever can unlock them. But when Wade stumbles upon the first clue, he finds himself beset by players willing to kill to take this ultimate prize. The race is on, and if Wade's going to survive, he'll have to win—and confront the real world he's always been so desperate to escape.

Terry: *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes (Saqi Essentials)*. Amin Maalouf (1989)

A beautifully composed book that draws almost exclusively from Arabic primary sources to tell the tale of the Western conquest, 1100-1300 AD. The book raises many fascinating topics -- the influence of Arab society on the Holy Roman Empire, the rise of a slave class to become the masters of all Islam.

The first encounter between Muslim and Crusader is told from the perspective of Kilij Arslan, a seventeen-year-old sultan who would go on to become a legendary leader in the struggle of the Islamic people. The "Franj", as the invaders were called, were pouring into his country by the tens of thousands. A skilled military leader, Arslan carefully withdrew his forces into a defensive position, only to be startled by his first glimpse of this "army": ragged, untrained peasants with strips of cloth pinned to their tunics in the shape of the cross. Reluctantly forced into battle, Arslan easily smashed the Crusader legion into bits, considering the matter settled. He had no way of knowing that what he had seen was only the rumor of war, not the war itself.

What may be most surprising to Western readers, was that the majority of the Islamic struggle during the Crusader period was not against Europeans, but against other Muslim leaders. The "empire" of Islam was sharply divided, and the question of rule was always at issue.

A fascinating, timely book.

Jim: *The Circle*. Dave Eggers (2014)

When Mae Holland is hired to work for the Circle, the world's most powerful internet company, she feels she's been given the opportunity of a lifetime. The Circle, run out of a sprawling California campus, links users' personal emails, social media, banking, and purchasing with their universal operating system, resulting in one online identity and a new age of civility and transparency. As Mae tours the open-plan office spaces, the towering glass dining facilities, the cozy dorms for those who spend nights at work, she is thrilled with the company's modernity and activity. There are parties that last through the night, there are famous musicians playing on the lawn, there are athletic activities and clubs and brunches, and even an aquarium of rare fish retrieved from the Marianas Trench by the CEO. Mae can't believe her luck, her great fortune to work for the most influential company in the world—even as life beyond the campus grows distant, even as a strange encounter with a colleague leaves her shaken, even as her role at the Circle becomes increasingly public. What begins as the captivating story of one woman's ambition and idealism soon becomes a heart-racing novel of suspense, raising questions about memory, history, privacy, democracy, and the limits of human knowledge.

(Ask Dan for his personal review of the Circle... which he didn't dare post on GoodReads.)

Elizabeth: *Elizabeth is Missing: A Novel.* Emma Healey (2015)

In this darkly riveting debut novel—a sophisticated psychological mystery that is also an heartbreakingly honest meditation on memory, identity, and aging—an elderly woman descending into dementia embarks on a desperate quest to find the best friend she believes has disappeared, and her search for the truth will go back decades and have shattering consequences.

Maud, an aging grandmother, is slowly losing her memory—and her grip on everyday life. Yet she refuses to forget her best friend Elizabeth, whom she is convinced is missing and in terrible danger.

But no one will listen to Maud—not her frustrated daughter, Helen, not her caretakers, not the police, and especially not Elizabeth’s mercurial son, Peter. Armed with handwritten notes she leaves for herself and an overwhelming feeling that Elizabeth needs her help, Maud resolves to discover the truth and save her beloved friend.

This singular obsession forms a cornerstone of Maud’s rapidly dissolving present. But the clues she discovers seem only to lead her deeper into her past, to another unsolved disappearance: her sister, Sukey, who vanished shortly after World War II.

As vivid memories of a tragedy that occurred more fifty years ago come flooding back, Maud discovers new momentum in her search for her friend. Could the mystery of Sukey’s disappearance hold the key to finding Elizabeth?

Steve: *The Dark Heart of Italy.* Tobias Jones (2005)

In 1999 Tobias Jones immigrated to Italy, expecting to discover the pastoral bliss described by centuries of foreign visitors. Instead, he found a very different country: one besieged by unfathomable terrorism and deep-seated paranoia. *The Dark Heart of Italy* is Jones's account of his four-year voyage across the Italian peninsula.

Jones writes not just about Italy's art, climate, and cuisine but also about the much livelier and stranger sides of the Bel Paese: the language, soccer, Catholicism, cinema, television, and terrorism. Why, he wonders, does the parliament need a "slaughter commission"? Why do bombs still explode every time politics start getting serious? Why does everyone urge him to go home as soon as possible, saying that Italy is a "brothel"? Most of all, why does one man, Silvio Berlusconi—in the words of a famous song—appear to own everything from Padre Nostro (Our Father) to Cosa Nostra (the Mafia)?

The Italy that emerges from Jones's travels is a country scarred by civil wars and "illustrious corpses"; a country that is proudly visual rather than verbal, based on aesthetics rather than ethics; a country where crime is hardly ever followed by punishment; a place of incredible illusionism, where it is impossible to distinguish fantasy from reality and fact from fiction.

Stu: *The Warden*. Anthony Trollope (1855)

In 1851, Trollope was sent to England, charged with investigating and reorganizing rural mail delivery in southwestern England and southern Wales. The two-year mission took him over much of Great Britain, often on horseback. Trollope describes this time as "two of the happiest years of my life".

In the course of it, he visited Salisbury Cathedral; and there, according to his autobiography, he conceived the plot of *The Warden*, which became the first of the six Barsetshire novels. His postal work delayed the beginning of writing for a year. The novel was published in 1855, in an edition of 1000 copies, with Trollope receiving half of the profits: £9 8s. 8d. in 1855, and £10 15s. 1d. in 1856. Although the profits were not large, the book received notices in the press, and brought Trollope to the attention of the novel-reading public

But Stu loves this book, and considers it "the perfect novel..."

Note that the Kindle edition is free.

Mary: *Positive Computing: Technology for Wellbeing and Human Potential*. Rafael A. Calvo and Dorian Peters. (2014)

Calvo and Peters explain that technologists' growing interest in social good is part of a larger public concern about how our digital experience affects our emotions and our quality of life -- which itself reflects an emerging focus on humanistic values in many different disciplines. Synthesizing theory, knowledge, and empirical methodologies from a variety of fields, they offer a rigorous and coherent foundational framework for positive computing. Sidebars by experts from psychology, neuroscience, human--computer interaction, and other disciplines supply essential context. Calvo and Peters examine specific well-being factors, including positive emotions, self-awareness, mindfulness, empathy, and compassion, and explore how technology can support these factors. Finally, they offer suggestions for future research and funding.

Sidebar by: Timothy N. Bickmore, Jeremy Bailenson, danah boyd, Jane Burns, David R. Caruso, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Felicia Huppert, Mary-Helen Immordino-Yang, Adele Krusche and J. Mark G. Williams, Jane McGonigal, Jonathan Nicholas, Don Norman, Yvonne Rogers.

=====

Round 3: Mystery Round: *What is your favorite mode of transportation... and tell us a story to go with it.*

Stu: Ocean liner. QE2, which he took trans-Atlantic. Marvelous.

Dan: Hot air balloon. Flying over Reno, NV in a tiny basket while acting as the spotter for the balloon race.

Steve: Cameroonian jeeps. You have to bid for a spot in the jeep, and might be tossed out if someone on the roadside outbids you! Lots of language negotiation as you try to discover which language you have in common.

Gary: Peruvian jets. Pigs and chickens on the 727, that then takes off from Cuzco, and lands on a dirt strip somewhere else in the country...

Judy: Gondola tram in Switzerland.

Elizabeth: "Shank's Pony" (i.e., your own legs)

Terry: "Cocktail catamaran." lovely ride on the lake, cocktails in hand...

Darren: Punting in Tübingen. With a bbq on the bow...

Mary: Bicycle. Especially as practiced in Indiana as a youth... involving a certain amount of hitchhiking home, and the adventures that follow this...

Jim: Rickshaws in Jaipur.

