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The fate of gender: nature, nurture, and the human figure, Frank Browning (book review)

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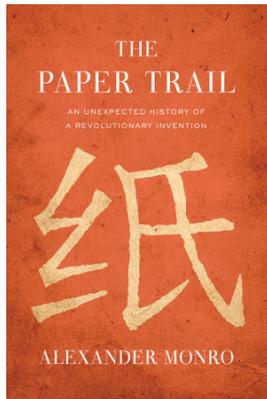
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The Written Word

Kurlansky, Mark. **Paper: Paging Through History.** Norton. May 2016. 416p. photos. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780393239614. \$27.95; ebk. ISBN 9780393285482. HIST

A prolific author of both fiction and nonfiction, most notably the critically acclaimed *Cod* and *Salt*, Kurlansky has done considerable research to produce this illuminating work. His main thesis is that paper didn't cause change; it reflected change. He attests that the appearance of paper, writing, and printing in various societies and times reflected emerging cultural and intellectual needs. In places, Kurlansky's narrative reads more like hastily assembled historical facts, presented in long listings. Despite these shortcomings, for readers interested in exploring how paper emerged and what impact it has had on people across the globe, Kurlansky is a graceful writer and an industrious researcher, presenting a useful start toward further research on the subject. **VERDICT** While Alexander Monro's *The Paper Trail* [reviewed below] is the



more substantial account, Kurlansky's focus on the role paper has played in our modern world offers a necessary discussion. [See Prepub Alert, 11/2/15]—David Keymer, Modesto, CA

★ Monro, Alexander. **The Paper Trail: An Unexpected History of a Revolutionary Invention.** Knopf. 2016. 384p. illus. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780307271662. \$30; ebk. ISBN 9780307962300. HIST
Reporter and former Parliamentary researcher Monro's history of paper is impressive in breadth and depth. Covering 2,000 years and several continents, Monro proves that it's salutary to remember all of the things paper still does for us in addition to

the changes its deployment has caused in multiple societies throughout the centuries. With elegant prose, the author details the agents of change in this nearly multimillennium process. There are paper-makers, calligraphers, and alphabet creators as well as the inventors and modifiers of block print, as the author discusses the Buddhist monks who chose papyrus over silk or bamboo as the medium for their proselytizing in China, the spread of print across the Islamic world, the popularity of Gutenberg's printing press, Martin Luther's Bible, and Denis Diderot's *Republic of Letters*, and even English coffeehouses of the 18th and 19th centuries. Monro has sage observations to make on each of these subjects. **VERDICT** With *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, Elizabeth Eisenstein wrote about the transformative influence of printing; Monro eloquently makes the same case for paper. This may become the go-to book on the history of paper for history lovers of all persuasion. [See Prepub Alert, 8/31/15.]—David Keymer, Modesto, CA

The title of former National Public Radio science reporter Browning's (*The Monk and the Skeptic*) new work may suggest a forward-looking study, but the majority of the book tends more toward current gender issues and controversies. As a result, it touches on a wide range of subjects including the varied forms of sexuality and relationships, surrogate births, gender issues in the workplace and the work/home balance, and the ways humanity is developing, teaching, and expressing the concepts of "feminine" and "masculine." Browning has a talent for relating complex topics accessibly, though the breadth of material included means that some facets are explored briefly. It's a shame, for example, that transgender concerns occupy only a single chapter. **VERDICT** Although the author sacrifices depth for range, this account provides a solid overview of the shifting landscape of gender issues today.—Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans

Charleston Syllabus: Readings on Race, Racism, and Racial Violence. Univ. of Georgia. May 2016. 368p. ed. by Chad Williams & others. notes. bibliog. ISBN 9780820349572. pap. \$29.95. soc sci

What can we learn, and what should we learn from the horrific murders of nine African Americans at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, in June 2015? Chad Williams (African and Afro-American studies, Brandeis Univ.; *Torchbearers of Democracy*), Kikada Williams (history, Wayne State Univ.; *They Left Great Marks on Me*), and Keisha Blain (history, Univ. of Iowa) address such questions with this thematically and chronologically arranged collection of historical documents and contemporary commentary. Condensed from an online crowdsourcing and collaborative project modeled on Georgetown University professor Marsha Chate-lain's #FergusonSyllabus Twitter campaign, the Charleston Syllabus aims to place the shooting in historical context and connect it with national and international events. Six sections move from slavery, survival, and community building to contemporary perspectives on race and racial violence to build an argument of consistent illustration of how the legacies of slavery remain etched in American society and continue to inform the devaluing of black life. **VERDICT** Confronting domestic and global white supremacy, this provocative text documents and demonstrates what has been done and what needs doing nationally and internationally to realize racial justice and equality. It deserves reading and discussion by anyone interested in social transformation.—Thomas J. Davis, Arizona State Univ., Tempe

diamonds in order to understand the cultural fascination with these specific gemstones. The story begins in the Gilded Age, explaining how the diamond industry changed once plentiful jewels were discovered in South Africa. Profiled are famous people connected to the business, including mining magnate Cecil Rhodes and jeweler Harry Winston, along with accounts of notable stones and other acclaimed jewelers. Winding throughout the narrative are the continued machinations of the famed diamond syndicate De Beers, which has used its considerable power to control the diamond market. In fact, Bergstein shows that De Beers has applied its

advertising prowess to shape American taste and purchasing habits, including the establishment of the diamond engagement ring tradition. The symbiotic relationship among De Beers, jewelers, and celebrities is featured prominently. Later chapters address conflict diamonds as well as synthetic and imitation gems. **VERDICT** A captivating look into the world of diamonds that will be of interest to all readers.—Rebekah Kati, Durham, NC

Browning, Frank. **The Fate of Gender: Nature, Nurture, and the Human Figure.** Bloomsbury. Jun. 2016. 320p. bibliog. index. ISBN 9781620406199. \$28. soc sci

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