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The death of Captain Cook: a hero made and unmade, by Glyn Williams (book review)

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her extensive research, Preston seeks to unravel the centuries of myth that shroud the infamous couple to reveal who they were in their own time and society. In what became a game of propaganda and politics against Octavian, Cleopatra was painted as a villainous seductress who led Antony astray rather than a cultured queen who spoke more than seven languages. Preston's convincing narrative claims that had Cleopatra and Antony won the battle of Actium, not only would their personal love story have unfolded less tragically, but the region would have developed with more tolerance—and perhaps a difference outcome for later historical figures, including Jesus—thus rewriting Western history entirely. This very readable work is highly recommended to all history collections, as well as those in gender or women's studies and biography.—**Crystal Goldman, Univ. of Utah Lib., Salt Lake City**

Risen, Clay. *A Nation on Fire: America in the Wake of the King Assassination*. Wiley. 2009. c.304p. photos. index. ISBN 978-0-470-17710-5. \$25.95. HIST

When Martin Luther King was murdered on April 4, 1968, riots erupted in 125 cities and resulted in 39 deaths, 2600 injuries, and 21,000 arrests. Risen, a former editor at the *New Republic*, presents a well-crafted narrative describing the chaos and fear that gripped Americans, as their homes, businesses, and cities went up in flames during the weeks after the assassination. The author hones in on Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Chicago, the sites of some of the worst rioting, where federal troops were sent to bolster the beleaguered local police forces and state national guards. Included are sympathetic portrayals of African Americans, few of whom rioted, driven to desperation because of decades of substandard living conditions in urban ghettos. As whites continued their exodus from the cities, the suburbs became the new center of political power, fueling the emergence of the modern Republican Party led by Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. While Risen does not claim the riots alone destroyed liberalism and led to the Republican ascent, his is a cautionary tale of what could happen when a government ignores the needs of many of its citizens. Recommended for all public libraries.—**Karl Helicher, Upper Merion Twp. Lib., King of Prussia, PA**

Simms, Brendan. *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783*. Basic Bks: Perseus. 2009. c.832p. illus. maps. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-465-01332-6. \$39.95. HIST
Britain's empire and security, according to Simms (European International Relations,

Univ. of Cambridge; *Unfinest Hour: Britain and the Destruction of Bosnia*), were not so much the results of its vaunted and storied navy, but were, rather, the consequences of its many canny alliances on the continent. To forestall the always anticipated attack by France, Britain's Hanoverian kings cloaked their nation with an ever-shifting canopy of ententes, sometimes with the Dutch, sometimes the Russians, but always with someone who had an interest in containing the dreaded Bourbons. The defeat of Britain by its American colonies marked the end of that phase of British history as well as a definite downturn in the empire's fortunes. Yet again, the continent had played a pivotal role in deciding England's fate. Britain simply could not defend itself from the east while attacking to the west, and the colonists knew it. Simms has created a prolifically annotated and vividly detailed recounting of the 18th-century watershed that temporarily sundered the British Empire. Profoundly scholarly, yet still accessible to the nonscholar, it is recommended for academic and public libraries.—**Michael F. Russo, Louisiana State Univ. Libs., Baton Rouge, LA**

Strauss, Barry. *The Spartacus War*. S. & S. Mar. 2009. c.288p. illus. index. ISBN 978-1-4165-3205-7. \$26. HIST

From 73 to 71 B.C.E., Thracian gladiator Spartacus led a spectacularly successful slave revolt that rocked the Roman Empire. Only a handful of short accounts survive from the classical era, but the legend endures, most prominently in Stanley Kubrick's 1960 sword-and-sandals epic that featured Kirk Douglas and a cast of thousands. While it's certainly possible to construct an illuminating book on a classical subject when the historical record is minimal, e.g., Mary Beard's excellent *The Roman Triumph*, Strauss's popular history here relies on little more than speculation to fill huge gaps in the known record. His reconstruction of the slave army's progress through Italy is swamped in "might have," "maybe," "possibly," "no doubt," and a dozen other synonyms for "I am guessing here." The account is so speculative the reader loses track of what is documented and what is imagined. A deeper exploration of the history of slavery and slave revolts in the Roman Empire might have provided the substance lacking here. Possibly of interest if you have readers who want to follow up on the Kubrick movie.—**Stewart Desmond, New York**

★**VanderVelde, Lea. *Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier*. Oxford Univ. Mar. 2009. c.496p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-0-19-536656-3. \$34.95. HIST**
Although a co-litigant with her husband in

the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, Harriet Robinson Scott has been largely ignored in the historical literature. VanderVelde (law, Univ. of Iowa) addresses this oversight by reconstructing the illiterate slave woman's life and milieu using anthropological research methods, legal documents, military records, and the diaries of Lawrence Talliaferro, who owned Harriett and Dred Scott. Through Harriet Scott's life, the author is able to create a valuable portrait of the development of slavery on the U.S. frontier during an era in which that scourge was leading the country toward civil war. Despite the wealth of historical knowledge presented, the heart of this well-researched work is the tragic tale of how a loving family's effort to gain their freedom was brutally rejected by Supreme Court justices bent on maintaining the institution of slavery at all costs. Essential for academic libraries and highly recommended for public libraries.—**John Burch, Campbellsville Univ. Lib., KY**

Williams, Glyn. *The Death of Captain Cook: A Hero Made and Unmade*. Harvard Univ. 2009. c.208p. illus. index. ISBN 978-0-674-03194-4. \$19.95. HIST

Captain James Cook was one of the best known naval captains of his day and the first European discoverer of the Hawaiian Islands. During his third voyage, he was fatally stabbed in an altercation with native Hawaiians, an event that is still a source of debate for modern scholars. Williams (history, emeritus, Queen Mary Univ. of London; *Voyages of Delusion: The Quest for the Northwest Passage*) examines the puzzling details of Cook's death as well as how the record of it differs (and in some cases, may have been deliberately altered) in the published accounts of his voyage. Williams moves beyond Cook's death to trace the man's historical representation throughout the centuries, his development into a controversial figure celebrated for his discoveries and demonized for his part as an agent of destructive colonialism, and how the circumstances of his death affected both viewpoints. Although the historical material may be familiar, Williams provides an excellent overview and comparison of the facts of Cook's last days, the various influences on his reputation and legacy, and recent scholarship. Recommended for public and academic libraries.—**Kathleen McCallister, Univ. of South Carolina Lib., Columbia**

LAW & CRIME

Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. *Defiant Dads: Fathers' Rights Activists in America*. Cornell Univ. 2008. c.312p. index. ISBN 978-0-8014-4690-0. \$27.95. LAW
Crowley (public policy, Rutgers Univ.) has

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