



WELCOME TO OUR NOVEMBER BOOK GROUP, HISTORIANS!

We will meet on Tuesday, November 12 at 6:30 to discuss *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* by William J. Bernstein published in 2008. While trade is something that we seldom talk about nowadays (ha, ha), Bernstein reminds us that in history, trade is the story of people and nations facing trade issues and solving them, often in the same way as other groups have solved them. Many times, the path countries follow

is the same. Trade leads to colonies which leads to naval power which leads to war. This pattern repeats itself with the Venetians and the Genoese, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British. Even the places we fight over are the same geographic locations: Suez, the Strait of Hormuz leading to the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Malacca leading to East Asia, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. In fact, even though trade brings us wonderful goods (think gold and spices), it also brings conflict. After all, as Bernstein tells us, in any trade deal, someone is always unhappy. *A Splendid Exchange* traces human history with trade from the Sumerians to the modern world, exploring these issues and helping us to better understand why trade deals are still fraught, whether local or international.

Our guide for this journey through time and empire is as unexpected as the new products that trade introduced to Europe. William J. Bernstein is a PhD. and M.D., a retired neurologist who is equally well-known in investing circles for his understanding of the dynamics of international trade and economic history. This book grew out of this second field of interest, developed while he was practicing medicine.

What makes *A Splendid Exchange* so fascinating is the small strange twists of history and human bargaining that shape international trade throughout the centuries. For example, camels were almost extinct before humans realized that camels could carry large loads for long distances in extreme conditions. Ancient Athens outgrew its domestic food supply and became dependent on imported grain which triggered the Peloponnesian War and gave rise to the Western obsession with naval supremacy. The Boston Tea Party was, among other things, the first American protest against the growing power and influence of the period's multinational corporations. Pieces of eight were once as common as today's Visa card.

Sound intriguing? You will not get lost in minutiae in this book. Bernstein discusses the history of trade through thematic questions such as: What drove early humans to trade? Can we understand changes in political power by looking at trade? Does the history of trade teach us anything that can help us navigate the troubled waters of globalization in the present day?

As you can see, our discussion of *A Splendid Exchange* should prove to be both a study of a rich history and a discussion of the application of the lessons of that history to present day issues. Want to learn more about globalization? Join us on Tuesday, November 12 at 6:30 as we explore the world of trade.

Donna McBride