Very Short Introductions online

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Abolitionism
A Very Short Introduction
Richard S. Newman

The abolitionist movement launched the global human rights struggle in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, redefining the meaning of equality throughout the Atlantic world. In the twenty-first century, it remains a touchstone of democratic activism—a timeless example of mobilizing against injustice. Abolitionism: A Very Short Introduction highlights the key people, institutions, themes, and events that shaped the antislavery struggle across the Atlantic world. Highlighting the activist exertions of abolitionists from the Caribbean and Great Britain to the United States and Iberian society, this short text shows that abolitionism was a potent social movement that ended the most profitable institution of the early modern era: racial slavery.

Accounting: A Very Short Introduction
Christopher Nobes

If you read the ‘business pages’ of a newspaper or if you listen to the financial news on the television or radio, you will often hear terms such as ‘liability’, ‘balance sheet’ or ‘earnings’. Accounting: A Very Short Introduction provides a guide to understanding and using accounting information. It examines the key concepts and the main types of accounting work, from bookkeeping and financial reporting to auditing and management accounting. It traces the development of accounting over the centuries; examines the building blocks of financial reports, such as assets and liabilities; and looks at how accounting differs between countries and the importance of international standards.

Adam Smith: A Very Short Introduction
Christopher J. Berry
In 1776, Adam Smith (1723–90) wrote The Wealth of Nations, the foundational book that led to him being called the ‘father of economics’. However, Adam Smith was far more than an economist. Adam Smith is introduced through an overview of his writings and moral philosophy. Adam Smith: A Very Short Introduction offers a balanced and nuanced view of this seminal thinker, embedding his fierce defence of free trade, competition, and assault on special interests in contemporary European history, politics, and philosophy. It outlines Smith’s central ideas and how his intellectual and social environment influenced his thinking. It also discusses Smith’s influence on subsequent generations, and the ways in which he has been interpreted.

Adolescence: A Very Short Introduction
Peter K Smith

Adolescence is a turbulent period to live through. Marking the transition from the world of childhood to adult life, the adolescent faces many challenges and opportunities, including puberty, cognitive changes, forming their own identity, relating to often conflicting demands from parents and peers, and negotiating first romantic relationships. Adolescence: A Very Short Introduction provides a guide to the classical research that has informed our knowledge on adolescence, as well as the results of modern research into the contemporary adolescent experience. It also examines a number of aspects of adolescence, including the cultural and historical context, the biological changes to the adolescent brain, and the controversies that adolescence brings.

Advertising: A Very Short Introduction
Winston Fletcher

Advertising: A Very Short Introduction dispels the myths surrounding the advertising industry. Advertising is a diverse entity, and campaigns work (or fail to work) in a plethora of ways. How does the advertising industry work? What part do all the key players (the advertisers, the media, and the agencies) play? Where does the public sit in the world of advertising? This VSI examines how advertisers determine whether they have been successful, how they know if the money they have spent has been wasted, and what the benefits of advertising are and what the future may hold for the industry.

African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction
Eddie S. Glaude Jr.
African American Religion: A Very Short Introduction explores the history and circumstances of African American religion through three examples: conjure, African American Christianity, and African American Islam. It argues that the phrase “African American religion” is meaningful only insofar as it describes how through religion, African Americans have responded to oppressive conditions. This bold claim frames the interpretation of the historical record of diverse religious experiences in the African American community. The common tendency to racialize African American religious experiences as an inherent proclivity towards religiousness is rejected and instead the focus is on how religious communities and experiences have developed in the African American community and the context in which these developments took place.

African History: A Very Short Introduction
John Parker and Richard Rathbone

African History: A Very Short Introduction looks at Africa's past and reflects on the changing ways it has been imagined and represented by examining the unity and diversity of African cultures, slavery, religion, colonial conquest, the diaspora, and the importance of history in understanding contemporary Africa. Africa has been known as ‘the cradle of mankind’, and its recoverable history stretches back to the Pharaohs. But the idea of study of ‘African history’ itself is new. Why is it still contested and controversial? Who invented the idea of ‘Africa’? How is African history pieced together, given such a lack of documentary evidence? How did Africa interact with the world 1,000 years ago?

African Politics: A Very Short Introduction
Ian Taylor

African Politics: A Very Short Introduction explores how politics is practised on the African continent, providing an overview of the different states and their systems. It considers the nature of the state in sub-Saharan Africa and why its state structures are generally weaker than elsewhere in the world. Exploring the historical and contemporary factors that account for Africa’s underdevelopment, it also analyses why some African countries suffer from high levels of political violence while others are spared. Unveiling the ways in which African state and society actually function beyond the formal institutional façade, this VSI discusses how external factors—both inherited and contemporary—act upon the continent.
African Religions: A Very Short Introduction
Jacob K. Olupona

African Religions: A Very Short Introduction offers a wide-ranging look at the myriad indigenous religious traditions on the African continent, drawing on archeological research, historical evidence, ethnographic studies, and archival materials. African religious belief—exploring myths, gods and local deities, ancestor worship, rites of passage, festivals, and divination—are considered and the role these religions play in everyday African life, from birthing and death, marriage and family dynamics, to diet, dress and grooming, health care, and even governance, is discussed. Christianity and Islam has spread throughout Africa, but the more extreme fundamentalist sects—which decry traditional religion as paganism—have driven a near total collapse of indigenous practice.

Ageing: A Very Short Introduction
Nancy A. Pachana

Ageing: A Very Short Introduction discusses the lifelong dynamic changes in biological, psychological, and social functioning involved in ageing. Increased lifespans have created an urgent need to find ways to enhance our functioning and well-being in the later decades of life. This is reflected in relevant policies and action plans from the WHO and the UN. Looking to the future, this VSI considers advancements in provision for our ageing populations, including revolutionary models of nursing-home care. Understanding the process of ageing is not only important for individuals but also for societies and nations if the full potential of those entering later life is to be realized.

Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction
Robin Le Poidevin

Agnosticism: A Very Short Introduction asks if there is more to agnosticism than merely the absence of belief. What is agnosticism? Who were the first to call themselves ‘agnostics’? Agnosticism is something we encounter in science and ethics and should be considered as an historical and cultural phenomenon. It is not confined to the religious sphere. Some of the preconceptions and assumptions amongst both believers and non-atheists are examined and the philosophical case for agnosticism is set out. Agnosticism is a more complex attitude than simply a failure to either commit to, or reject, religious belief.
Agriculture: A Very Short Introduction
Paul Brassley and Richard Soffe

Agriculture: A Very Short Introduction explains what farmers do and why they do it. Beginning with the most basic resource, the soil, it shows why it is important, and how farmers can increase its productivity, before turning to the plants and animals that grow on it, and tracing the connections between their biology and the various ways in which farmers work with them. It concludes by looking at some of the controversial issues facing contemporary agriculture: its sustainability; its impact on wildlife and landscape; issues of animal welfare; and the effect of climate change and the development of genetically modified organisms on farmers.

Alexander the Great: A Very Short Introduction
Hugh Bowden

Alexander the Great: A Very Short Introduction demonstrates the profound influence the legends of Alexander's life have had on our historical understanding of him by focusing on the evidence from his own time. Aged just 20, Alexander the Great became king of Macedon in 336 bc; he died aged 32. During his reign, he conquered the Achaemenid Persian Empire, the largest empire that had ever existed, leading his army from Greece to Pakistan, and from the Libyan desert to the steppes of Central Asia. He had a profound effect on the world he moved through and his achievements became legendary both in his lifetime and in the centuries that followed.

Algebra: A Very Short Introduction
Peter M. Higgins

Algebra marked the beginning of modern mathematics, moving it beyond arithmetic, which involves calculations featuring given numbers, to problems in which some quantities are unknown. Now, it stands as a pillar of mathematics, underpinning the quantitative sciences. Algebra: A Very Short Introduction explains algebra from scratch. Over the course of ten chapters, it offers a step by step approach for readers keen on developing their understanding of algebra. Using theory and example, it renews the reader’s acquaintance with school mathematics, before taking them progressively further and deeper into modern algebra, including groups, rings, fields, and vector spaces.
American Cultural History: A Very Short Introduction
Eric Avila

American Cultural History: A Very Short Introduction provides a chronological look at American culture—the values, attitudes, beliefs, and myths of a particular society and the objects through which they are organized—addressing literature, music, art, architecture, theater, film, television, and the Internet. In doing so, it emphasizes culture’s role in the shaping of national identity and how previous generations of Americans have imagined themselves, their nation, and their relationship to rest of the world. Across the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, generation, and geography, diverse Americans have forged a national culture with a global reach, inventing stories to underscore the problems and possibilities of an American way of life.

American Foreign Relations: A Very Short Introduction
Andrew Preston

For better or worse, be it militarily, politically, economically, technologically, or culturally, Americans have had a profound impact on the wider world beyond them. American Foreign Relations: A Very Short Introduction analyzes the key episodes, themes, and individuals in the history of American foreign relations. While discussing diplomacy and the periods of war that have shaped national and international history, it also addresses such topics as industrialization, globalization, imperialism, and immigration. Covering the American Revolution through the War on Terror, it examines the connections between domestic politics and foreign affairs, as well as the importance of ideals and values.

American History: A Very Short Introduction
Paul S. Boyer

American History: A Very Short Introduction spans the earliest migrations to the present looking at the United States's failures to live up to its oft-stated ideals. The establishment of the North American colonies had very different meanings for colonists, native peoples, and enslaved Africans. The late nineteenth century saw industrial expansion, appalling conditions, and an exploited labor force. The twentieth-century emergence of a suburban society of consumer abundance meant a better life for many, yet left behind crime-ridden inner cities and spawned a stultifying mass culture. While American popular culture has
demonstrated global appeal, the projection of U.S. military power abroad has sometimes failed in its purpose and damaged the nation’s international standing.

American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction
David A. Gerber

American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction examines the many legal efforts to curb immigration and to define who is and is not an American. It looks at immigration from the perspective of the migrant — farmers and industrial workers, mechanics and domestics, highly trained professionals and small-business owners — who willingly upped sticks for the promise of a better life. Americans have come from every corner of the globe, and have been brought together by a variety of historical processes — conquest, colonialism, the slave trade, territorial acquisition, and voluntary immigration. What is the relationship between race and ethnicity in the life of these groups and in the formation of American society?

American Legal History: A Very Short Introduction
G. Edward White

Law has played a central role in American history. From colonial times to the present, law has reflected the changing society in which legal decisions have been made and has played a powerful role in shaping that society, though not always in positive ways. American Legal History: A Very Short Introduction sheds light on the impact of law on several key social issues: Native American affairs, slavery, business, home life, and criminal and civil offences. The expansion of laws regarding property rights is also considered, as well as the evolution of criminal punishment, the rise of tort law after the Civil War; and the progress in legal education.

American Naval History: A Very Short Introduction
Craig L. Symonds

American Naval History: A Very Short Introduction charts the history of the United States Navy from its birth during the American Revolution, through its emergence as a global power amid the world wars of the twentieth century, and to its current role as a superpower in the twenty-first century. It highlights iconic moments of great drama pivotal
to the nation’s fortunes: John Paul Jones’ attacks on the British during the Revolution, the Barbary Wars, and the arduous conquest of Iwo Jima. It also illuminates the technological, institutional, and functional changes of the U.S. Navy and captures its evolving culture and the debates between policymakers about what role the institution should play in world affairs.