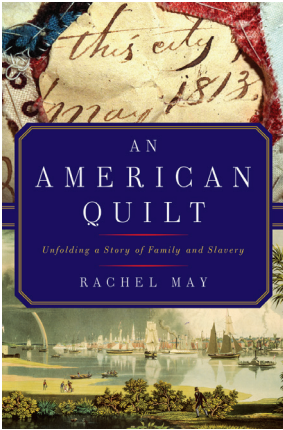


January 2023

Reading Guide:***An American Quilt: Unfolding a Story of Family and Slavery* (2018)****by Rachel May**

1. Author Rachel May describes her book as a work of “creative nonfiction.” Did you enjoy her approach to writing about a historical topic? What about her method worked and didn’t work for you?
2. Rachel May includes her thought processes and reactions to the history she discovered in the book, weaving together memoir and historical narrative. What do you think she intended to accomplish with this approach? Do you think she achieved her goals?
3. The author mentioned a number of times that she was surprised at various points during her research for the book. What, if anything, did you find startling or surprising in the book?
4. It is not uncommon for historians to wrestle with very limited sources in exploring historical personages and narratives. How do you think Rachel May’s attempt to address this challenge compares to other works we have read, or that you are familiar with, that grapple with this issue?
5. Would this narrative have worked better as historical fiction? Why or why not?
6. What questions do you have after reading this book? What do you want to learn more about?
7. Would you recommend this book to others? Who do you think the ideal reader for this book would be?

Author Biography

Rachel May, PhD, MFA, is the author of *Quilting with a Modern Slant*, named a Library Journal and Amazon Best Book of 2014. Her writing has received multiple awards, and she has been awarded residencies at the Millay Colony and the Vermont Studio Center. She is an assistant professor in the English department of Northern Michigan University.

Related Books (descriptions courtesy of Amazon.com)

For history from an under-acknowledged perspective:

A Black Women's History of the United States (2020) by Daina Ramey Berry and Kali N. Gross

A Black Women's History of the United States reaches far beyond a single narrative to showcase Black women's lives in all their fraught complexities. Berry and Gross prioritize many voices: enslaved women, freedwomen, religious leaders, artists, queer women, activists, and women who lived outside the law. The result is a starting point for exploring Black women's history and a testament to the beauty, richness, rhythm, tragedy, heartbreak, rage, and enduring love that abounds in the spirit of Black women in communities throughout the nation.

For more on African American artisans and craft:

Crafting Lives: African American Artisans in New Bern, North Carolina, 1770-1900 (2013) by Catherine W. Bishir

From the colonial period onward, black artisans in southern cities--thousands of free and enslaved carpenters, coopers, dressmakers, blacksmiths, saddlers, shoemakers, bricklayers, shipwrights, cabinetmakers, tailors, and others--played vital roles in their communities. Yet only a very few black craftspeople have gained popular and scholarly attention. Catherine W. Bishir remedies this oversight by offering an in-depth portrayal of urban African American artisans in the small but important port city of New Bern. In so doing, she highlights the community's often unrecognized importance in the history of nineteenth-century black life.

Award winning book on gender roles and the economics of slavery:

They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South (2019) by Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers

Bridging women's history, the history of the South, and African American history, this book makes a bold argument about the role of white women in American slavery. Historian Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers draws on a variety of sources to show that slave owning women were sophisticated economic actors who directly engaged in and benefited from the South's slave market. By examining the economically entangled lives of enslaved people and slave owning women, Jones-Rogers presents a narrative that forces us to rethink the economics and social conventions of slaveholding America.

Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club

Join us for the next Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club featuring *In the Shadow of the Empress: The Defiant Lives of Maria Theresa, Mother of Marie Antoinette, and Her Daughters* by Nancy Goldstone, March 8, 2023, at 1:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. on Zoom.

For more information, visit mfab.org/historybookclub.

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