



Short List

What to read this week, from a history of a secret Nixon meeting to an exploration of French colonialism in Congo and a look back at Bernini's Rome

AUGUST 25, 2021

READING TIME: 2 MINUTES

THREE DAYS AT CAMP DAVID: *HOW A SECRET MEETING IN 1971 TRANSFORMED THE GLOBAL*

ECONOMY

by Jeffrey E. Garten

In the game of Do You Remember Where You Were When Famous News Event X Happened?, Richard Nixon's announcement on the evening of Sunday, August 15, 1971, that the U.S. was abandoning the gold standard is probably not on your list. But Nixon's decision to no longer guarantee that foreign countries could redeem U.S. dollars for gold (at the rate of \$35 an ounce) had far-reaching consequences, some good and some not so good, that still affect us today.

Jeffrey E. Garten captures the decision-making in high dramatic style, turning what could have been a dry primer on international economics into a brisk adventure. The "Nixon Shock" ended America's domination of the world economy, hastening the rise of free markets and globalization and enhancing the power of Wall Street and central banks everywhere. The book is well worth its price, even if you pay in Dogecoin.

448 pages, Harper, \$29.99

IN THE FOREST OF NO JOY: THE CONGO- OCÉAN RAILROAD AND THE TRAGEDY OF FRENCH COLONIALISM

by J. P. Daughton

The Congo-Océan railroad is less than 320 miles long, stretching from Brazzaville, on the upper Congo River, to Pointe-Noire, on the Atlantic coast. Yet its construction, in the 1920s, proved to be devastatingly difficult, crossing mountains and gorges, and

claiming the lives of as many as 20,000 African men, women, and children. J. P. Daughton vividly brings to life the tragedy of this enterprise and addresses in compelling fashion the shocking culpability of the French colonialists, who convinced themselves they were doing good for Africa while ignoring the grisly toll.

384 pages, W. W. Norton, \$30

**THE ARTIST AND THE ETERNAL CITY:
*BERNINI, POPE ALEXANDER VII, AND THE
MAKING OF ROME***

by Loyd Grossman

Rome may look glorious today, but back in the mid-17th century, it had lost much of its luster. Then came Pope Alexander VII, determined to restore the prestige of the Catholic Church in the face of the Protestant Reformation and once again make Rome a destination for what at the time passed for the chattering classes.

How Alexander VII accomplished this—by relying on the talents of the artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini—is what fascinates Loyd Grossman, and the number of monuments and fountains and chapels and piazzas that are Bernini's work is astounding. Popes, as it turns out, can make good city planners, especially if they have the wisdom to hire a Bernini. This is a compelling tale, beautifully told by a writer who loves Rome as much as he does life itself.

256 pages, Pegasus, \$28.95

[Three Days at Camp David](#), [In the Forest of No Joy](#), and [The Artist and the Eternal City](#) are available at your local independent bookstore, on Bookshop, and on Amazon.