

Blog Title	Key Ideas	Release Date
My Book is NOW AVAILABLE for Pre-Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readers can now purchase my book on Amazon or the University Press of Kansas website • Includes a brief summary of the main arguments and contribution of my book • Praise / blurbs from historians Daniel Feller, Donald Ratcliffe, and Sean Patrick Adams 	November 17, 2018
Article in We're History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A short piece I've written called "A Vast Political Corporation" in <i>We're History: America Then for Americans Now</i> • Shows how the Jacksonians appropriated public subsidies and nationwide patronage networks in the Post Office to help defeat the Second Bank of the United States 	October 27, 2018
My Interview with Colin Woodward on the Amerikan Rambler Podcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historian Colin Woodward was nice enough to interview me for Episode #111 • We discussed my Bay Area roots, country-rock and psychedelic rock music from the 1960s, the trials and tribulations of a doctoral program, the faddish and pro-business nature of publishing in academia, current events, and many other topics 	October 5, 2018
The Problems with Libertarianism, Part IV: Academia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are more libertarians in academia than you might expect • They exert a disproportionate influence on social media and Wikipedia (perhaps this reflects their general embrace of technology and pro-business philosophy?) • Libertarians seemed to have gravitated toward the small subfield of economic history in the antebellum era. Why? Probably because they implicitly romanticize an era of economic inequality, the gold standard, and low public debt prior to the modern welfare state • The Ludwig Von Mises Institute is a libertarian think tank in Alabama that has deep connections to racist, neo-Confederate ideology • A few years ago, I wrote about how I had to correct a thinly sourced Wikipedia entry on the Panic of 1837 whose only citation was to a scholar at the Von Mises Institute 	September 23, 2018
The Problems with Libertarianism, Part III: Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The connections between racism and limited government in the context of US history are numerous and go back decades. Much of this has to do with white southerners' fears about a powerful federal government that would wipe out slavery, but it also extends to opposition to the New Deal and Civil Rights Movement • Cliven Bundy embodies the libertarian problem with race • Academic research confirms that members of the Tea Party, ostensibly proponents of low taxes and limited government, were really animated by white identity, Obama's birth certificate, and anti-immigrant hostility • A lot of Holocaust deniers and members of the Alt Right identify as libertarians • Explores possible reasons for why libertarians are almost always white men 	September 22, 2018
The Problems with Libertarianism, Part II: Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some libertarian positions are desirable—opposition to torture, American imperialism, and the "War on Drugs"—but it is possible to arrive at those positions based on different philosophical assumptions. • Many libertarians support a return to the Gold Standard, which has been widely condemned by economists and historians as a major cause of the Great Depression • Most libertarians support the tenets of supply economic theory: cutting taxes, privatization, deregulation, anti-unionism, all of which have contributed to greater economic inequality and have not lived up to the promise of promoting lower prices, greater consumer choice, more jobs, and higher GDP • Then there is libertarians' opposition to environmental, labor, public health, and civil rights laws and their historical support for segregationist and authoritarian political regimes 	September 21, 2018
The Problems with Libertarianism, Part I: Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the philosophical assumptions undergirding libertarian thinking? • Liberty is defined in the traditional, narrow, and classically liberal sense as an individual's right to property, free from governmental interference • Inequality is natural; markets operate best when they are "free" and offer "choice" • The only type of relevant discrimination comes from the state, not individuals • Analysis: choice is often an illusion; states always shape markets; libertarians seek to scuttle programs and government agencies that are highly popular and democratic 	September 19, 2018
Check Out My Latest Book Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My review of <i>Cherokee in Controversy</i>, published in the <i>Journal of Southern History</i> 	July 28, 2018
Bucking Conventional Wisdom: Henry Clay was NOT the Chief Driving Force Behind Biddle's Re-Charter Effort in 1832	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conventional wisdom is that Biddle applied early for a re-charter effort because of the presidential ambitions of Henry Clay. But this is a thinly sourced claim • It was actually the Second Bank's board of directors, especially Thomas Cadwalader, who were most influential in pushing for re-charter. • This post gets into the weeds of the re-charter controversy and provides detailed citations. 	July 9, 2018
My Interview on the Age of Jackson Podcast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to my podcast interview on the <i>Age of Jackson</i> podcast, hosted by Daniel Gullotta • We discuss Robert Remini's <i>Andrew Jackson and the Bank War</i> (1967) 	March 31, 2018

Review of David M. Gold's book on Rufus Ranney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My third book review of the year! This one is published in <i>Ohio Valley History</i> and can be found through a subscription to the <i>Project Muse</i> database 	November 18, 2017
A Handy Handbook for Financial Historians: My Review of Sharon Ann Murphy's Other People's Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to my recent review of Sharon Ann Murphy's <i>Other People's Money</i>, published in <i>Common-place: the Journal of Early American Life</i> 	November 17, 2017
I Now Have a Book Contract!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have wonderful news! The University Press of Kansas has offered me a contract to publish my book manuscript as a monograph! 	November 4, 2017
The Harms of Laptop Use in the Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I highly recommend Berg and Seeber's <i>The Slow Professor</i> (University of Toronto Press) A 2013 article by Sana, Weston, and Cepeda in <i>Computers and Education</i> shows how using laptops in the classroom inhibits students' ability to learn concepts from lecture. Authors came to this conclusion by noting that students who used laptops scored lower on tests based on lecture More troublingly, laptop use doesn't just distract the user: it potentially distracts a group of students sitting around the person using the laptop This research would seem to support classroom policies that ban laptop use 	September 16, 2017
The Talk (Almost) No One is Willing to Have, Part 5: Ratemyprofessors.com is a Joke and No One Should Take it Seriously	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A horrible human being I once knew suggested that I give up my chosen career path merely because of a few bad student remarks from ratemyprofessors.com RMP can be manipulated, (until recently) it judged professors by their "hotness," it is voluntary, and promotes a consumerist, anti-intellectual attitude toward education If entertainment is our goal, why not put a salesperson or supermodel in front of the classroom? Peer reviewed research shows students are more likely to rate a professor favorably on RMP if they anticipate high grades or the professor is deemed "hot" Unfortunately, most students take the same approach toward official student evaluations that they take toward RMP 	September 2, 2017
The Talk (Almost) No One is Willing to Have, Part 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade inflation and student evaluations are tied into a customer-based business model which poses major ethical problems for professors It is a game all of us play with a wink and nod. Sadly, it will be tough to change because there are too many constituencies vested in preserving the status quo: administrators, parents, and students all want high grades and high evaluations links to the academic studies and summarizes oped pieces that back up these claims Student evaluations force professors to adjust their teaching toward an arbitrary test Average grades have increased over time but the average time that students devote to study has decreased If we can't get rid of student evaluations, we should at least train students how to write them since they have a large bearing on whether professors are hired or fired 	August 29, 2017
The Talk (Almost) No One is Willing to Have, Part 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflections on the connection between grade inflation and the privatized, customer-based business model of higher education While the peer reviewed research on grade inflation is not extensive (important to consider why?), it does show grade inflation over time Studies show students will rate a professor higher if they expect to receive a higher grade Departments are under pressure to attract students. If students view themselves as customers, they'll look for the greatest bang for their buck (i.e. the highest grade with the least amount of effort). Thus, departments facing budget cuts due to low enrollment can stave off disaster by subtly raising their grades The utmost priority should be whether learning is taking place in the classroom; everything else should be secondary, including whether the customer is pleased or not How to reverse this downward spiral? Make education free as it once was under the California Master Plan of 1960 	August 27, 2017
An Unnamed Financier Writes to Nicholas Biddle (1831)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a letter from the Nicholas Biddle Papers This is a relatively unknown letter from the Microfilm and one that is not published in any edited volumes I have transcribed the letter here Contains some important ideas about Biddle's corporate lobby, Jacksonian demagoguery, and Biddle's relationship with branch offices 	May 14, 2017
Irish Through and Through Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued discussion of results from my DNA test from Ancestry.com Presents family tree and old family photographs Notes history of Irish Americans in San Francisco Briefly, Irish stereotypes and their recent drift toward conservatism 	April 22, 2017
Irish Through and Through, Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows chart of results from my DNA test – I'm 78% Irish! Differences between Catholic Irish and Protestant northern Irish 	April 20, 2017

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Siblings can have somewhat different percentages, which makes sense from an evolutionary standpoint (no species would survive long if all offspring of parents shared the same exact DNA of their parents) 	
Some Old Ways Work For a Reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Results from the First Unit Test are in from my students and they are promising Recently I forbid electronics in my classroom and stopped making my fully annotated PowerPoints available to students on Blackboard (our LMS). Could this be linked to higher scores? It's certainly possible Historians of all people should be suspicious of the discourse of inevitable technological triumph and ask themselves whether implementing more technology in the classroom results in greater learning or serves other less-than-noble interests 	April 14, 2017
The Transatlantic Financial Crisis of 1837 – OUP Encyclopedia of Latin American History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Oxford Research Encyclopedia has published my encyclopedia entry/article You can also link to a PDF of the article on my website Includes links to primary sources, digital materials, a discussion of the historiographical literature, images, and further reading This was a long process and rigorous process involving several rounds of revisions and peer review 	March 30, 2017
Political Geography: Race, Immigration, and Voter Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've put together a presentation of maps showing race, immigration, hate speech, the presence of hate groups, and voter patterns according to political party in the 2016 presidential election Students seemed to have found this discussion worthwhile Considers the possibility that 1) greater ethnic diversity may make a country more politically conservative because of the divide-and-conquer phenomenon; that is, wealthy elites can distract and divide the less fortunate along racial lines, getting the white working class on their side; and more interestingly, 2) have the large numbers of whites in the Upper Midwest, whose ancestors were once immigrants and yet exhibit hostility toward immigrants today, forgotten their history? 	February 12, 2017
The Talk (Almost) No One is Willing to Have – Grade Inflation, Part 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows evidence of grade inflation from multiple accounts, including academic studies Higher grades does not reflect higher performance, achievement, or mastery of skills among students Giving out too many A's devalues what it means to get an "A," which should be only for exceptional work At least one study argues that giving out lower—or fairer—grades can push students to learn more (this seems reasonable and what we want) Explains why grade inflation harms both faculty and students 	January 26, 2017
The Talk (Almost) No One is Willing to Have—Grade Inflation, Part 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many students put way too much emphasis on grades, which are not a reflection of character or inner worth Reminds students that for their essay assignment, there were plenty of handouts, hints, and suggestions about how to write an effective essay I did not always get "A's" in every class in college so it's helpful to take a long-term view Focus on the journey, not exclusively on the outcome, and your educational experience will be more enjoyable Analogy to playing tennis 	January 23, 2017
My Review of Paul Kahan, <i>The Bank War</i> (Westholme, 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a derivative work based almost entirely on the work of other scholars, especially Govan and Kaplan While it is well written, this is not a work of serious scholarship: it fails to take international events into account; professes certainty on subjects where experts are more equivocal; contains long and detailed passages that do not have citations The author has written five books since 2008 and there are about 50 reviews on Amazon, all of which were written within a few days of each other say almost the same thing—seems very suspicious Update: Go to reviewmeta to see that "unnatural reviews" are detected 	January 22, 2017
Reimagining the Second Bank of the United States in Early American History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to my guest post at the Junto, a group blog for early American historians Thanks Benjamin Park and Rachel Herrmann for giving me the opportunity, and Liz Covart for recommending that I write for this 	January 18, 2017
How Bills of Exchange Worked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walks the reader through the intricacies of bills of exchange, the arcane credit instruments that were central to foreign and domestic commerce in the era I study Provides a (hopefully) clear rendition of how these instruments worked since few historians can actually communicate this concept clearly to the reader Contains an image of a bill of exchange based on a personal photograph taken from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. 	December 16, 2016

Pierce Butler: A Founding Father We Should Remember	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we think of the Founding Fathers, this enigmatic character is not typically someone that comes to mind • And yet, this South Carolinian was a major force behind some of the Constitution’s most important provisions, including the creation of the electoral college and three-fifths clause, which protected the interests of southern slaveholders • It is crucial that we understand this institutional history because over 200 years later, the giveaway to slave interests in Philadelphia has now given us the disastrous Trump presidency, in spite of his losing the popular vote to Hillary Clinton by 2.87 million votes 	November 25, 2016
Election Night Post-Mortem: Fascist Idiocracy and the Angry, White Male Syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger, consternation, befuddlement over the unlikely ascent of Trump, who has disregarded constitutional norms and exhibited authoritarian, racist, and sexist impulses • Whites without a college degree are the largest voting bloc in America: their votes, particularly in the South and industrial Midwest, drove Trump to victory • The most vulnerable in society will almost certainly suffer • Compelling reasons to not refer to Trump as a legitimate president • “Both sides” are not equally responsible for the toxic polarization and dysfunction that plagues our political system: to present them as two equally legitimate and informed sides in a debate does a disservice and does not get us closer to truth • Much of Trump’s support comes from KKK, white nationalist, and neo-Confederate types, and hate groups are on the rise • Trump repeatedly lies, perhaps more than any other candidate • Voter anger and distrust of “elites” does not just boil down to pure pocketbook economics • Third-party support may have tipped election to Trump 	November 12, 2016
My most recent article, “Funding the Bank War,” is now out!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to the publication of “Funding the Bank War: Nicholas Biddle and the Public Relations Campaign to Re-Charter the Second Bank of the U.S., 1828-1832,” <i>American Nineteenth Century History</i> 17, no. 3 • Includes article abstract 	September 21, 2016
My article in HNN: The Rise and Fall of the White Working Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to my article, published by Rick Shenkman at <i>History News Network</i> • Takes a historical view of how poor whites in the US have benefited from racialized policies like colonial-era slave codes to the Black Codes in Reconstruction to modern-day Jim Crow policies like Voter ID. 	June 26, 2016
A Day in the Life of Calvin & Hobbes: Brexit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presents the debate over Brexit as a dialogue between Calvin & Hobbes with Plato’s Dialogs as a very rough model • Calvin is the irrational, anti-intellectual pro-Brexit person who succumbs to fear-driven, nationalistic impulses and who disdains “experts” • Hobbes tries to be the voice of reason, telling Calvin how his views are narrow, misinformed, and misleading 	June 24, 2016
Doing Something New with History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While too many academic historians are concerned with chasing the latest fads, it is important to consider the ways in which the discipline of history reinvents itself • These include the opening up of new archives, individuals that donate their family collections to archives, new analytical models, new digital tools, and the release of classified information from intelligence agencies • In addition, the passage of time can change our perspective on past events • Archaeologists and anthropologists make new discoveries that alter the way we teach about the peopling of North America by paleo-Americans • Current events change how we view the past—see Dylan Roof shooting in Charleston and the dismantling of Confederate memorials 	June 5, 2016
Pearl Harbor and Oral History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over twelve years ago, in 2004, I interviewed my grandfather, Rusty, about his experiences serving in the navy in WWII • Transcripts of the interview are included • Rusty describes being at Pearl Harbor the day it was bombed and his post-war experiences benefitting from the GI Bill • My other grandfather, Bud, also served in the navy. 	April 10, 2016
The Difficulty of Obtaining Accurate Unemployment Data from the 1930s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is finding accurate unemployment data from the 1930s so difficult? Part of it is because the modern field of economics was still developing but another part lies in the assumption that governments should prioritize exchange rates and balanced budgets, not prices and employment • The Historical Statistics of the United States (HSUS) graph, published in some US history textbooks, is based on the work of Stanley Lebergott in the 1950s. It says unemployment may have reached close to 25% • But more recent articles by Coen, Darby, and Romer, which I have linked to, show the flaws in Lebergott’s estimates. • I averaged the data from three articles, showing that unemployment was probably somewhere between 20-22% at its peak • Why did U3 not stay above 10% for that long during the Great Recession? It is because the FED learned from its past mistakes; we have deposit insurance; we have a safety net; and 	February 28, 2016

	we have left the gold standard, which was a rigid, inflexible, and asymmetric system	
My impressions of Edward E. Baptist's The Half Has Never Been Told	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Half Has Never Been Told</i> is a provocative, powerfully written, breakthrough work that asks us to reorient our understanding of US history and challenges our assumptions about capitalism and slavery • Notes that the work has set off vigorous scholarly debates, including one at the Junto where the redoubtable pseudoerasmus chimed in • Disputes Baptist's characterizations of the BUS as inherently against state banks and as beholden to Henry Clay's political ambitions • Related: Here's a more recent blog where I go over this more in depth because Baptist is not the only one making this thinly sourced claim 	December 25, 2015
A Historian's Report Card on the FED: An Assessment of FED Policy and the Benefits of Moderate Inflation, 2008-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to an article on the FED I published for <i>History News Network</i>. • Eight years after the financial crisis, there are still many structural issues with the economy—a crumbling infrastructure and high CEO pay—but the FED deserves some credit for its aggressive asset purchases • FED critics on the political right pointed to “currency debasement” and “hyperinflation” but year after year, these predictions have failed to materialize • Besides, moderate inflation can have some benefits when it comes to lowering interest rates, lowering unemployment, attracting tourists, benefiting exporters, and stimulating consumer spending, which accounts for almost 70% of GDP 	November 30, 2015
Historians Use Logic, Too	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historians can sometimes construct arguments with premises in the same way that mathematicians do, only instead of using numbers, historians use facts and concepts • 1) Much of the slave experience in the early US included torture; 2) slavery was central to the way that early capitalism developed in the US; 3) therefore, torture was a part of the way that capitalism developed in the US. • The implication is that far from being liberating, the story of capitalism involves subjugation and exploitation > this is important for those who wish to emphasize the “positive” aspects of US history. 	August 8, 2015
The Striking Similarities Between John Quincy Adams and Jimmy Carter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both presidents served only one term; both were criticized for their effete and cerebral way of looking at the world; both were highly religious men who used their religion to fight for progressive causes; both had successful post-presidency careers • Similarly, the men who succeeded Adams and Carter—Jackson and Reagan, respectively—were larger-than-life figures who helped define their age; who relied on a certain masculinity that could be interpreted as anti-intellectual. 	July 31, 2015
Marketing the Practical Skills of Historians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I've developed a long-term critique of the commercialization of academia, which is manifested in a lot of ways, including the pervasive practice of buzzwords. • Another symptom is the ceaseless pressure to market our skills, which eschews a more idealistic and artistic way to think about the discipline of history • Related to this, in my view there is too much focus on viewing college purely in vocational terms—in other words, considering a person's job prospects as the ultimate validation of a college degree—rather than considering college as an experience or an intellectual journey • Having all of that said, I've developed a handout that elucidates many of the practical skills that historians use and which students of history can seek to develop in their classes 	June 29, 2015
Jackson on the \$20 bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, I am pleased that someone other than a white man will soon appear on the \$20 bill • Yet quite honestly, I'm not sure there's a lot at stake here and I find it hard to get animated about this issue (there's a lot more important stuff out there, like climate change) • Some of the non-scholarly assessments of Jackson (and I'm only talking about banking here, not slavery or Indian Removal) are a bit sloppy in emphasizing Jackson's anti-intellectualism. Closer inspection of the sources, which readers can find in my book, show that Jackson and his advisers actually possessed a decent competency of finance. 	June 29, 2015
Checking in after a Busy Academic Year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hodgepodge of disparate ideas on my mind as I close out a busy academic year • Treating students like customers is a symptom of the same business model of higher education that devalues teachers to the point that many of them cannot afford rent • Summer goals for teaching and research • Links to what some academic historians have said about <i>Selma</i> 	June 14, 2015
Honoring the Career of Historian Patricia Cline Cohen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pat Cohen is retiring. To honor her impressive achievements, a three-day conference is taking place at UCSB, where Pat has served since 1976. • To share what she meant to my own personal and professional development at UCSB, I've written this post • She always gave me her undivided attention • I was impressed with her intellect and expertise on a variety of topics • I am thankful that she was sympathetic and understanding with me at a particularly vulnerable time early in my graduate 	March 22, 2015

What Makes Good Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to an article listing 7 characteristics of good learners • One article from 2008 suggests student egos are inflating over time • If you're struggling in your classes, there could be a variety of causes, but it's possible that you're doing too much multitasking • Numerous scientific studies suggest that our brains are only set up to do one or two things at once and the worst part of it is that we trick our own minds into thinking that we are great multitaskers when in fact, our performance declines during multitasking. 	February 17, 2015
The Politics of Teaching History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A recent scuffle in the Jefferson County school board of Colorado reminds us that the teaching of history is—and has always been—political • Conservatives often want to herald America's achievements while minimizing social strife, class conflict, racism, gendered oppression, imperialism, and civil disobedience. I call this the GI Joe or Disney version of history and it causes pushback from students and scholars • Valuable social criticism, in the minds of many conservatives, is equivalent to disloyalty, subversion, and anti-Americanism • Many policies that are ostensibly patriotic are anything but patriotic 	February 8, 2015
My Thoughts on Selma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On this MLK day, I saw <i>Selma</i> in the movie theaters. • Some reviewers say the movie got its history wrong, but this was not my chief concern • The movie was emotionally powerful • Today's Tea Partiers are the descendants of those who opposed the Civil Rights Movement 	January 19, 2015
Positives from the 2015 AHA Conference in NYC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, attending this conference was a positive experience • I reconnected with some folks I knew in graduate school, had some great falafel from a street vendor (which was far cheaper than the hotel food), and met Sean Wilentz 	January 8, 2015
Esoteric Jargon in Conference Panels Justifiably Gives Academia a Bad Rap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was really looking forward to seeing a conference paper delivered by a historian whose work I had read and admired. I am sorry to say that I was very disappointed. • This historian has written several books and articles, has tenure at an elite university on the East Coast, and is omnipresent. Yet his speech zig zagged in innumerable directions, employed esoteric jargon, and seemed to have a limited appeal, reaching only about 5 select people in an audience of about 100. • Academia often gets a bad rap. Most of the time, the reputation is undeserved, but this speech, sadly, confirms the stereotype that academics are pretentious and out of touch. If I can't understand this guy's speech, who is he really talking to? 	January 8, 2015
Textbook Publishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Textbook publishing companies often put constraints on campus bookstores for when and how students purchase their books (example: students using financial aid can only purchase from the campus bookstore and some publishing companies only offer the newest editions) • These constraints leave the professor and student feeling helpless and dissatisfied • When I think about the pushy nature of textbook publishers, it reminds me of how education has become commoditized. My sense is that it was not always this way and we should reprioritize what education should be about: ideas, not profits. • To get around this troubling trend, many professors offer free, online OER (Online educational resources) or put all of their course materials on Learning Management Systems like Blackboard. This is particularly important for community college students. 	December 26, 2014