

# Not Your School's Reading List 6: Great Men and Their Deeds

At *Intellectual Takeout*, we strive to offer not only commentary on current events but also tangible advice for engaging with our increasingly chaotic world. That's why we're proud to present this ongoing series of literature recommendations.

This week's entries feature extraordinary men and the often-tragic circumstances they journeyed through. From explorers to soldiers to writers to scholars, the men behind these autobiographies, journals, and letters led fascinating lives.

Read the previous list [here](#).

## 1. Marco Polo. [\*The Travels\*](#). 1298.

"Marco Polo (1254-1329) has achieved an almost archetypal status as a traveller, and his *Travels* is one of the first great travel books of Western literature, outside the ancient world. *The Travels* recounts Polo's journey to the eastern court of Kublai Khan, the chieftain of the Mongol empire which covered the Asian continent, but which was almost unknown to Polo's contemporaries."

## 2. Christopher Columbus. [\*The Four Voyages\*](#). 1530.

"No gamble in history has been more momentous than the landfall of Columbus's ship the Santa Maria in the Americas in 1492 – an event that paved the way for the conquest of a 'New World'. The accounts collected here provide a vivid narrative

of his voyages throughout the Caribbean and finally to the mainland of Central America. Columbus himself is revealed as a fascinating and contradictory figure.”

### **3. Benjamin Franklin. The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. 1791.**

“A lively, spellbinding account of his unique and eventful life, now a classic of world literature that is sure to inspire and delight readers everywhere. Few men could compare to Benjamin Franklin. Virtually self-taught, he excelled as an athlete, a man of letters, a printer, a scientist, a wit, an inventor, an editor, and a writer, and he was probably the most successful diplomat in American history.”

### **4. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Journals of Lewis and Clark. 1905.**

“From 1804 to 1806, accompanied by co-captain William Clark, the Shoshone guide Sacajawea, and thirty-two men, Lewis mapped rivers, traced the principal waterways to the sea, and established the American claim to the territories of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon. Together the captains kept this journal: a richly detailed record of the flora and fauna they sighted, the native tribes they encountered, and the awe-inspiring landscape they traversed.”

### **5. Ernst Jünger. The Storm of Steel. 1920.**

“A first-hand account of World War I trench combat lifted from the diaries of Ernst Jünger, a German infantryman who would

become one of Europe's most talented writers. ... *The Storm of Steel* remains the definitive account of World War I, following Jünger through several major engagements as he develops from an eager young soldier into a battle-hardened officer."

## **6. Erich Maria Remarque. All Quiet on the Western Front. 1928.**

"'The greatest war novel of all time' ... In 1914 a room full of German schoolboys, fresh-faced and idealistic, are goaded by their schoolmaster to troop off to the 'glorious war'. With the fire and patriotism of youth they sign up. What follows is the moving story of a young 'unknown soldier' experiencing the horror and disillusionment of life in the trenches."

## **7. Cristoforo Baseggio. The Death Company. 1929.**

"Venetian front, 1915. The Austro-Hungarian army has taken control of key mountain locations. ... Tension in the Italian lines has taken the form of a grim silence, as if the men already know their doom is approaching and wish only for it to envelop them quickly. Colonel Baseggio of the Italian Royal Army, a veteran of many mountain engagements in Africa, creates a new section, based not on doctrinal tactics, but on intrepid actions."

## **8. Howard K. Smith. Last Train from Berlin. 1942.**

"Howard K. Smith worked as a young reporter in Berlin during Hitler's rise to power, and for the first two years of the Second World War. Finally granted a visa to leave the country—coincidentally on December 7th, 1941—he wrote everything censors had forbidden about the physical,

emotional, and psychological manipulation of the German people by Hitler, Goebbels, and their lackeys.”

## 9. Serge Obolensky. [One Man in His Time](#). 1958.

“Few men lived lives larger than Serge Obolensky. ... He served as a cavalry officer on the Eastern Front of the First World War. Then, as his nation collapsed into Bolshevik tyranny, he chose to stay and fight as a guerilla for the doomed White Army. Eventually forced into exile, Serge rubbed shoulders with the elite of European society, wandering through the height of the Roaring Twenties and eventually landing in America.”

## 10. Peter Kemp. [No Colours or Crest](#). 1959.

“Peter Kemp ... was a young law student who volunteered to fight for the Nationalists against the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War. Although seriously injured during that conflict, Kemp’s extensive irregular warfare experience and enormous bravery brought him to the attention of the elite British Special Operations Executive. After a brief time as a commando raider Kemp is thrust into the chaotic world of espionage.”

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