Questions about the nature of money have gained a new urgency in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Even as many people have less of it, there are more forms and systems of money, from local currencies and social lending to mobile money and Bitcoin. Yet our understanding of what money is—and what it might be—hasn’t kept pace. In *The Social Life of Money*, Nigel Dodd, one of today’s leading sociologists of money, reformulates the theory of the subject for a postcrisis world in which new kinds of money are proliferating.

What counts as legitimate action by central banks that issue currency and set policy? What underpins the right of nongovernmental actors to create new currencies? And how might new forms of money surpass or subvert government-sanctioned currencies? To answer such questions, *The Social Life of Money* takes a fresh and wide-ranging look at modern theories of money.

One of the book’s central concerns is how money can be wrested from the domination and mismanagement of banks and governments and restored to its fundamental position as the “claim upon society” described by Georg Simmel. But rather than advancing yet another critique of the state-based monetary system, *The Social Life of Money* draws out the utopian aspects of money and the ways in which its transformation could in turn transform society, politics, and economics. The book also identifies the contributions of thinkers who have not previously been thought of as monetary theorists—including Nietzsche, Benjamin, Bataille, Deleuze and Guattari, Baudrillard, Derrida, and Hardt and Negri. The result provides new ways of thinking about money that seek not only to understand it but to change it.

Nigel Dodd is professor of sociology at the London School of Economics. He is the author of *The Sociology of Money* and *Social Theory and Modernity*.
How J. Edgar Hoover’s Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature

William J. Maxwell

Few institutions seem more opposed than African American literature and J. Edgar Hoover’s white-bread Federal Bureau of Investigation. But behind the scenes the FBI’s hostility to black protest was energized by fear of and respect for black writing. Drawing on nearly 14,000 pages of newly released FBI files, F.B. Eyes exposes the Bureau’s intimate policing of five decades of African American poems, plays, essays, and novels. Starting in 1919, year one of Harlem’s renaissance and Hoover’s career at the Bureau, secretive FBI “ghostreaders” monitored the latest developments in African American letters. By the time of Hoover’s death in 1972, these ghostreaders knew enough to simulate a sinister black literature of their own. The official aim behind the Bureau’s close reading was to anticipate political unrest. Yet, as William J. Maxwell reveals, FBI surveillance came to influence the creation and public reception of African American literature in the heart of the twentieth century.

Taking his title from Richard Wright’s poem “The FB Eye Blues,” Maxwell details how the FBI threatened the international travels of African American writers and prepared to jail dozens of them in times of national emergency. All the same, he shows that the Bureau’s paranoid style could prompt insightful criticism from Hoover’s ghostreaders and creative replies from their literary targets. For authors such as Claude McKay, James Baldwin, and Sonia Sanchez, the suspicion that government spy-critics tracked their every word inspired rewarding stylistic experiments as well as disabling self-censorship.

Illuminating both the serious harms of state surveillance and the ways in which imaginative writing can withstand and exploit it, F.B. Eyes is a groundbreaking account of a long-hidden dimension of African American literature.

William J. Maxwell is associate professor of English and African American studies at Washington University in St. Louis. He is the author of New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars and the editor of Claude McKay’s Complete Poems.
Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II

Roger L. Geiger

This book tells the compelling saga of American higher education from the founding of Harvard College in 1636 to the outbreak of World War II. The most in-depth and authoritative history of the subject available, *The History of American Higher Education* traces how colleges and universities were shaped by the shifting influences of culture, the emergence of new career opportunities, and the unrelenting advancement of knowledge.

Roger Geiger, arguably today’s leading historian of American higher education, vividly describes how colonial colleges developed a unified yet diverse educational tradition capable of weathering the social upheaval of the Revolution as well as the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening. He shows how the character of college education in different regions diverged significantly in the years leading up to the Civil War—for example, the state universities of the antebellum South were dominated by the sons of planters and their culture—and how higher education was later revolutionized by the land-grant movement, the growth of academic professionalism, and the transformation of campus life by students. By the beginning of the Second World War, the standard American university had taken shape, setting the stage for the postwar education boom.

Breathtaking in scope and rich in narrative detail, *The History of American Higher Education* is the most comprehensive single-volume history of the origins and development of American higher education.

Roger L. Geiger is Distinguished Professor of Higher Education at Pennsylvania State University. His books include *Tapping the Riches of Science: Universities and the Promise of Economic Growth and Knowledge and Money: Research Universities and the Paradox of the Marketplace.*

“The thoroughness, judiciousness, and clarity of this book make it the gold standard on the subject. Encyclopedic in coverage, *The History of American Higher Education* commands more information, scholarship, and analysis than any other work of its kind. Geiger is the acknowledged leader in the field.”

—James Axtell, author of *The Making of Princeton University: From Woodrow Wilson to the Present*
In this exquisitely written book, Denery draws on centuries of rumination on the moral issues surrounding lying to address the question of how we should live in a fallen world. The serpent in the Garden of Eden led humankind astray with lies. The Devil is the father of lies. Premodern sources agonized constantly over the act of lying. Denery not only superbly narrates the long history of this obsession, but also locates the conditions that reveal an Enlightenment shift toward a not entirely comfortable modernity.

“Is it ever acceptable to lie? This question plays a surprisingly important role in the story of Europe’s transition from medieval to modern society. According to many historians, Europe became modern when Europeans began to lie—that is, when they began to argue that it is sometimes acceptable to lie. This popular account offers a clear trajectory of historical progression from a medieval world of faith, in which every lie is sinful, to a more worldly early modern society in which lying becomes a permissible strategy for self-defense and self-advancement. Unfortunately, this story is wrong.

For medieval and early modern Christians, the problem of the lie was the problem of human existence itself. To ask “Is it ever acceptable to lie?” was to ask how we, as sinners, should live in a fallen world. As it turns out, the answer to that question depended on who did the asking. The Devil Wins uncovers the complicated history of lying from the early days of the Catholic Church to the Enlightenment, revealing the diversity of attitudes about lying by considering the question from the perspectives of five representative voices—the Devil, God, theologians, courtiers, and women. Examining works by Augustine, Bonaventure, Martin Luther, Madeleine de Scudéry, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and a host of others, Dallas G. Denery II shows how the lie, long thought to be the source of worldly corruption, eventually became the very basis of social cohesion and peace.

Dallas G. Denery II is associate professor of history at Bowdoin College. He is the author of Seeing and Being Seen in the Later Medieval World: Optics, Theology, and Religious Life and the coeditor of Uncertain Knowledge: Scepticism, Relativism, and Doubt in the Middle Ages.
SEA OF STORMS
A History of Hurricanes in the Greater Caribbean
from Columbus to Katrina

Stuart B. Schwartz

The diverse cultures of the Caribbean have been shaped as much by hurricanes as they have by diplomacy, commerce, or the legacy of colonial rule. In this panoramic work of social history, Stuart Schwartz examines how Caribbean societies have responded to the dangers of hurricanes, and how these destructive storms have influenced the region’s history, from the rise of plantations, to slavery and its abolition, to migrations, racial conflict, and war.

Taking readers from the voyages of Columbus to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Schwartz looks at the ethical, political, and economic challenges that hurricanes posed to the Caribbean’s indigenous populations and the different European peoples who ventured to the New World to exploit its riches. He describes how the United States provided the model for responding to environmental threats when it emerged as a major power and began to exert its influence over the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, and how the region’s governments came to assume greater responsibilities for prevention and relief, efforts that by the end of the twentieth century were being questioned by free-market neoliberals. Schwartz sheds light on catastrophes like Katrina by framing them within a long and contentious history of human interaction with the natural world.

Spanning more than five centuries and drawing on extensive archival research in Europe and the Americas, Sea of Storms emphasizes the continuing role of race, social inequality, and economic ideology in the shaping of our responses to natural disaster.

Stuart B. Schwartz is the George Burton Adams Professor of History and chair of the Council on Latin American and Iberian Studies at Yale University. His many books include All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World.

““This is a magnificent book. In a breathtaking narrative spanning five centuries of hurricanes and their consequences, Schwartz accomplishes what no one has done before: a transnational history of the Caribbean region through the optic of one of the most widely shared of its historical experiences.”

—Francisco A. Scarano, coeditor of The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples

THE LAWRENCE STONE LECTURES

JANUARY

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HISTORY

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Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy* as a prisoner condemned to death for treason, circumstances that are reflected in the themes and concerns of its evocative poetry and dialogue between the prisoner and his mentor, Lady Philosophy. This classic philosophical statement of late antiquity has had an enduring influence on Western thought. It is also the earliest example of what Rivkah Zim identifies as a distinctive and vitally important medium of literary resistance: writing in captivity by prisoners of conscience and persecuted minorities.

*The Consolations of Writing* reveals why the great contributors to this tradition of prison writing are among the most crucial figures in Western literature. Zim pairs writers from different periods and cultural settings, carefully examining the rhetorical strategies they used in captivity, often under the threat of death. She looks at Boethius and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as philosophers and theologians writing in defense of their ideas, and Thomas More and Antonio Gramsci as politicians in dialogue with established concepts of church and state. Different ideas of grace and disgrace occupied John Bunyan and Oscar Wilde in prison; Madame Roland and Anne Frank wrote themselves into history in various forms of memoir; and Jean Cassou and Irina Ratushinskaya voiced their resistance to totalitarianism through lyric poetry that saved their lives and inspired others. Finally, Primo Levi’s writing after his release from Auschwitz recalls and decodes the obscenity of systematic genocide and its aftermath.

A moving and powerful testament, *The Consolations of Writing* speaks to some of the most profound questions about life, enriching our understanding of what it is to be human.

**Rivkah Zim** teaches early modern English and comparative literature at King’s College London. She is the author of *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535–1601.*
THE AGE OF THE CRISIS OF MAN

Thought and Fiction in America, 1933–1973

MARK GREIF

In a midcentury American cultural episode forgotten today, intellectuals of all schools shared a belief that human nature was under threat. The immediate result was a glut of dense, abstract books on “the nature of man.” But the dawning “age of the crisis of man,” as Mark Greif calls it, was far more than a historical curiosity. In this ambitious intellectual and literary history, Greif recovers this lost line of thought to show how it influenced society, politics, and culture before, during, and long after World War II.

During the 1930s and 1940s, fears of the barbarization of humanity energized New York intellectuals, Chicago proto-conservatives, European Jewish émigrés, and native-born bohemians to seek “re-enlightenment,” a new philosophical account of human nature and history. After the war this effort diffused, leading to a rebirth of modern human rights and a new power for the literary arts.

Critics’ predictions of a “death of the novel” challenged writers to invest bloodless questions of human nature with flesh and detail. Hemingway, Faulkner, and Richard Wright wrote flawed novels of abstract man. Succeeding them, Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, Flannery O’Connor, and Thomas Pynchon constituted a new guard who tested philosophical questions against social realities—race, religious faith, and the rise of technology—that kept difference and diversity alive.

By the 1960s, the idea of “universal man” gave way to moral antihumanism, as new sensibilities and social movements transformed what had come before. Greif’s reframing of a foundational debate takes us beyond old antagonisms into a new future, and gives a prehistory to the fractures of our own era.

Mark Greif is assistant professor of literary studies at the New School. He is a founder and editor of the journal n+1.

“This is a substantial, even brilliant, contribution to the literary history of midcentury America. Mark Greif is a bold, idea-intensive critic.”
—David A. Hollinger, author of After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History

JANUARY
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392 pages. 6 x 9.
LITERATURE • HISTORY
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“Robert Wuthnow offers a conclusive account of how and why Texas has so profoundly defined modern American religion and politics. He draws out one illustrative character and colorful anecdote after another, and combines them with incisive analysis of sociological data to create a compelling portrait of the Lone Star State’s ascent. A good read as much as an exceptional piece of scholarship, Rough Country proves that as Texas has gone, so has the nation.” —Darren Dochuk, author of From Bible Belt to Sunbelt

“Robert Wuthnow offers a conclusive account of how and why Texas has so profoundly defined modern American religion and politics. He draws out one illustrative character and colorful anecdote after another, and combines them with incisive analysis of sociological data to create a compelling portrait of the Lone Star State’s ascent. A good read as much as an exceptional piece of scholarship, Rough Country proves that as Texas has gone, so has the nation.” —Darren Dochuk, author of From Bible Belt to Sunbelt

Tracing the intersection of religion, race, and power in Texas from Reconstruction through the rise of the Religious Right and the failed presidential bid of Governor Rick Perry, Rough Country illuminates American history since the Civil War in new ways, demonstrating that Texas’s story is also America’s. In particular, Robert Wuthnow shows how distinctions between “us” and “them” are perpetuated and why they are so often shaped by religion and politics.

Early settlers called Texas a rough country. Surviving there necessitated defining evil, fighting it, and building institutions in the hope of advancing civilization. Religion played a decisive role. Today, more evangelical Protestants live in Texas than in any other state. They have influenced every presidential election for fifty years, mobilized powerful efforts against abortion and same-sex marriage, and been a driving force in the Tea Party movement. And religion has always been complicated by race and ethnicity.

Drawing from memoirs, newspapers, oral history, voting records, and surveys, Rough Country tells the stories of ordinary men and women who struggled with the conditions they faced, conformed to the customs they knew, and on occasion emerged as powerful national leaders. We see the lasting imprint of slavery, public executions, Jim Crow segregation, and resentment against the federal government. We also observe courageous efforts to care for the sick, combat lynching, provide for the poor, welcome new immigrants, and uphold liberty of conscience.

A monumental and magisterial history, Rough Country is as much about the rest of America as it is about Texas.

Robert Wuthnow is the Gerhard R. Andlinger ’52 Professor of Social Sciences and director of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University. He is the author of many books, including Small-Town America, Red State Religion, and Remaking the Heartland (all Princeton).
The Hero’s Fight
African Americans in West Baltimore and the Shadow of the State

Patricia Fernández-Kelly

Baltimore was once a vibrant manufacturing town, but today, with factory closings and steady job loss since the 1970s, it is home to some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in America. The Hero’s Fight provides an intimate look at the effects of deindustrialization on the lives of Baltimore’s urban poor, and sheds critical light on the unintended consequences of welfare policy on our most vulnerable communities.

Drawing on her own uniquely immersive brand of fieldwork, conducted over the course of a decade in the neighborhoods of West Baltimore, Patricia Fernández-Kelly tells the stories of people like D. B. Wilson, Big Floyd, Towanda, and others whom the American welfare state treats with a mixture of contempt and pity—what Fernández-Kelly calls “ambivalent benevolence.” She shows how growing up poor in the richest nation in the world involves daily interactions with agents of the state, an experience that differs significantly from that of more affluent populations. While ordinary Americans are treated as citizens and consumers, deprived and racially segregated populations are seen as objects of surveillance, containment, and punishment. Fernández-Kelly provides new insights into such topics as globalization and its effects on industrial decline and employment, the changing meanings of masculinity and femininity among the poor, social and cultural capital in poor neighborhoods, and the unique roles played by religion and entrepreneurship in destitute communities.

Blending compelling portraits with in-depth scholarly analysis, The Hero’s Fight explores how the welfare state contributes to the perpetuation of urban poverty in America.

Patricia Fernández-Kelly is senior lecturer in sociology at Princeton University. Her books include For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico’s Frontier. She co-produced the Emmy Award–winning documentary The Global Assembly Line.

“Fernández-Kelly tells these life stories with novelistic flair. This is not ordinary ‘interview’ data. It is hard won over years of direct immersion—watching people grow up, change jobs, give birth. The Hero’s Fight is inflected with intimacy. It is also a book of wide-ranging commentary that masters an extraordinary range of literatures.”

—Harvey Molotch, author of Against Security: How We Go Wrong at Airports, Subways, and Other Sites of Ambiguous Danger

February

Cloth $35.00
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440 pages. 11 line illus. 2 tables. 6 x 9.

URBAN STUDIES • SOCIOLOGY

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Developing a groundbreaking theory about the difficulties of collective action in American politics, this book considers how interest groups, public political participation, and the responsiveness of elected officials play a role in the distinct lack of policies aimed at ameliorating the effects of economic insecurity in the United States. One of the most important books in decades.”

—James N. Druckman, Northwestern University

**American Insecurity**

Why Our Economic Fears Lead to Political Inaction

Adam Seth Levine

Americans today face no shortage of threats to their financial well-being, such as job and retirement insecurity, health care costs, and spiraling college tuition. While one might expect that these concerns would motivate people to become more politically engaged on the issues, this often doesn’t happen, and the resulting inaction carries consequences for political debates and public policy. Moving beyond previously studied barriers to political organization, *American Insecurity* sheds light on the public’s inaction over economic insecurities by showing that the rhetoric surrounding these issues is actually self-undermining. By their nature, the very arguments intended to mobilize individuals—asking them to devote money or time to politics—remind citizens of their economic fears and personal constraints, leading to undermobilization and nonparticipation.

Adam Seth Levine explains why the set of people who become politically active on financial insecurity issues is therefore quite narrow. When money is needed, only those who care about the issues but are not personally affected become involved. When time is needed, participation is limited to those not personally affected or those who are personally affected but outside of the labor force with time to spare. The latter explains why it is relatively easy to mobilize retirees on topics that reflect personal financial concerns, such as Social Security and Medicare. In general, however, when political representation requires a large group to make their case, economic insecurity threats are uniquely disadvantaged.

Scrutinizing the foundations of political behavior, *American Insecurity* offers a new perspective on collective participation.

Adam Seth Levine is an assistant professor in the Department of Government at Cornell University.
The huge prison buildup of the past four decades has few defenders today, yet reforms to reduce the number of people in U.S. jails and prisons have been remarkably modest. Meanwhile, a carceral state has sprouted in the shadows of mass imprisonment, extending its reach far beyond the prison gate. It includes not only the country’s vast archipelago of jails and prisons but also the growing range of penal punishments and controls that lie in the never-never land between prison and full citizenship, from probation and parole to immigrant detention, felon disenfranchisement, and extensive lifetime restrictions on sex offenders. As it sundered families and communities and reworks conceptions of democracy, rights, and citizenship, this ever-widening carceral state poses a formidable political and social challenge.

In this book, Marie Gottschalk examines why the carceral state, with its growing number of outcasts, remains so tenacious in the United States. She analyzes the shortcomings of the two dominant penal reform strategies—one focused on addressing racial disparities, the other on seeking bipartisan, race-neutral solutions centered on reentry, justice reinvestment, and reducing recidivism.

In this bracing appraisal of the politics of penal reform, Gottschalk exposes the broader pathologies in American politics that are preventing the country from solving its most pressing problems, including the stranglehold that neoliberalism exerts on public policy. She concludes by sketching out a promising alternative path to begin dismantling the carceral state.

Marie Gottschalk is professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania. A former editor and journalist, she was a member of the National Academy of Sciences Committee on the Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration.

“Gottschalk’s book is a tour de force. Caught constitutes a searing critique of current incarceration policies and prevailing approaches to prison reform. It is brilliantly argued, breathtakingly capacious in its informational reach, and intellectually bold. A stunning achievement.”
—Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, Cornell University
“With an innovative approach, Owen provocatively argues that previous episodes and ideological battles in Western history can shed light on the questions and likely political developments in the Muslim world today. The topic is very important and will spark many reactions and discussions.”
—Jeremy Pressman, University of Connecticut

How should the Western world today respond to the challenges of political Islam? Taking an original approach to answer this question, *Confronting Political Islam* compares Islamism’s struggle with secularism to other prolonged ideological clashes in Western history. By examining the past conflicts that have torn Europe and the Americas—and been supported by underground networks, fomented radicalism and revolution, and triggered foreign interventions and international conflicts—John Owen draws six major lessons to demonstrate that much of what we think about political Islam is wrong.

Owen focuses on the origins and dynamics of twentieth-century struggles among Communism, fascism, and liberal democracy; the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contests between monarchism and republicanism; and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars of religion between Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and others. Owen then applies principles learned from the successes and mistakes of governments during these conflicts to the contemporary debates embroiling the Middle East. He concludes that ideological struggles last longer than most people presume; ideologies are not monolithic; foreign interventions are the norm; a state may be both rational and ideological; an ideology wins when states that exemplify it outperform other states across a range of measures; and the ideology that wins may be a surprise.

Looking at the history of the Western world itself and the fraught questions over how societies should be ordered, *Confronting Political Islam* upends some of the conventional wisdom about the current upheavals in the Muslim world.

John M. Owen IV is the Ambassador Henry J. and Mrs. Marion R. Taylor Professor of Politics, and a faculty fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics* (Princeton) and *Liberal Peace, Liberal War*. 
Looking Inside the Brain
The Power of Neuroimaging

Denis Le Bihan
Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan

It is now possible to witness human brain activity while we are talking, reading, or thinking, thanks to revolutionary neuroimaging techniques like magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). These groundbreaking advances have opened infinite fields of investigation—into such areas as musical perception, brain development in utero, and faulty brain connections leading to psychiatric disorders—and have raised unprecedented ethical issues. In Looking Inside the Brain, one of the leading pioneers of the field, Denis Le Bihan, offers an engaging account of the sophisticated interdisciplinary research in physics, neuroscience, and medicine that have led to the remarkable neuroimaging methods that give us a detailed look into the human brain.

Introducing neurological anatomy and physiology, Le Bihan walks readers through the historical evolution of imaging technology—from the X-ray and CT scan to the PET scan and MRI—and he explains how neuroimaging uncovers afflictions like stroke or cancer and the workings of higher-order brain activities, such as language skills. Le Bihan also takes readers on a behind-the-scenes journey through NeuroSpin, his state-of-the-art neuroimaging laboratory, and goes over the cutting-edge scanning devices currently being developed. Considering what we see when we look at brain images, Le Bihan weighs what might be revealed about our thoughts and unconscious, and discusses how far this technology might go in the future.

Beautifully illustrated in color, Looking Inside the Brain presents the trailblazing story of the scanning techniques that provide keys to previously unimagined knowledge of our brains and our selves.

Denis Le Bihan is internationally recognized for his contributions to the development of imaging methods for the study of the human brain. He is the founding director of NeuroSpin, an institute of the French Atomic Energy Commission dedicated to ultra-high-field brain imaging. He won the 2012 Honda Prize, Japan’s international award for science and technology, and the 2014 Louis-Jeantet Prize for Medicine.

“Written by the inventor of diffusion MRI, Looking Inside the Brain is a well-informed and accessible book that explores the major outcomes and breakthroughs of brain imaging.”
—Jean-Pierre Changeux, coauthor of The Good, the True, and the Beautiful and What Makes Us Think?
Playing at Acquisitions
Behavioral Option Games

Han Smit & Thras Moraitis

It is widely accepted that a large proportion of acquisition strategies fail to deliver the expected value. Globalizing markets characterized by growing uncertainty, together with the advent of new competitors, are further complicating the task of valuing acquisitions. Too often, managers rely on flawed valuation models or their intuition and experience when making risky investment decisions, exposing their companies to potentially costly pitfalls. Playing at Acquisitions provides managers with a powerful methodology for designing and executing successful acquisition strategies. The book tackles the myriad executive biases that infect decision making at every stage of the acquisition process, and the inadequacy of current valuation approaches to help mitigate these biases and more realistically represent value in uncertain environments.

Bringing together the latest advances in behavioral finance, real option valuation, and game theory, this unique playbook explains how to express acquisition strategies as sets of real options, explicitly introducing uncertainty and future optionality into acquisition strategy design. It shows how to incorporate the competitive dynamics that exist in different acquisition contexts; acknowledge and even embrace uncertainty; identify the value of the real options embedded in targets; and more.

Rooted in economic theory and featuring numerous real-world case studies, Playing at Acquisitions will enhance the ability of CEOs and their teams to derive value from their acquisition strategies, and is also an ideal resource for researchers and MBAs.

Han Smit is professor of corporate finance at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He is the coauthor of Strategic Investment: Real Options and Games (Princeton). Thras Moraitis is a cofounder of X2 Resources, a privately funded mining and metals investment vehicle.

“This accessible book provides important tools to enrich existing valuation techniques and teaches how to deal with economic uncertainty, strategic interaction between economic agents, and behavioral biases. Playing at Acquisitions blends state-of-the-art academic insight with a wealth of practical experience and real-world intuition.”

—Bart Lambrecht, University of Cambridge
John Napier
Life, Logarithms, and Legacy

Julian Havil

John Napier (1550–1617) is celebrated today as the man who invented logarithms—an enormous intellectual achievement that would soon lead to the development of their mechanical equivalent in the slide rule: the two would serve humanity as the principal means of calculation until the mid-1970s. Yet, despite Napier’s pioneering efforts, his life and work have not attracted detailed modern scrutiny. John Napier is the first contemporary biography to take an in-depth look at the multiple facets of Napier’s story: his privileged position as the seventh Laird of Merchiston and the son of influential Scottish landowners; his reputation as a magician who dabbled in alchemy; his interest in agriculture; his involvement with a notorious outlaw; his staunch anti-Catholic beliefs; his interactions with such peers as Henry Briggs, Johannes Kepler, and Tycho Brahe; and, most notably, his estimable mathematical legacy.

Julian Havil explores Napier’s original development of logarithms, the motivations for his approach, and the reasons behind certain adjustments to them. Napier’s inventive mathematical ideas also include formulas for solving spherical triangles, “Napier’s Bones” (a more basic but extremely popular alternative device for calculation), and the use of decimal notation for fractions and binary arithmetic. Havil also considers Napier’s study of the Book of Revelation, which led to his prediction of the Apocalypse in his first book, A Plaine Discovery of the Whole Revelation of St. John—the work for which Napier believed he would be most remembered.

John Napier assesses one man’s life and the lasting influence of his advancements on the mathematical sciences and beyond.

Julian Havil is the author of Gamma: Exploring Euler’s Constant, Nonplussed!: Mathematical Proof of Implausible Ideas, and Impossible?: Surprising Solutions to Counterintuitive Conundrums (all Princeton), as well as The Irrationals: A Story of the Numbers You Can’t Count On (see page 53). He is a retired former master at Winchester College, England, where he taught mathematics for more than three decades.

“Havil is an enthusiastic and engaging writer—he brings to life John Napier’s original work and gives an account of his mathematical ideas. Readers will gain an appreciation for Napier’s brilliance and for an era when scientific computation was still in its infancy. It’s about time someone wrote a book on this subject for a general audience.”
—Glen Van Brummelen, author of Heavenly Mathematics