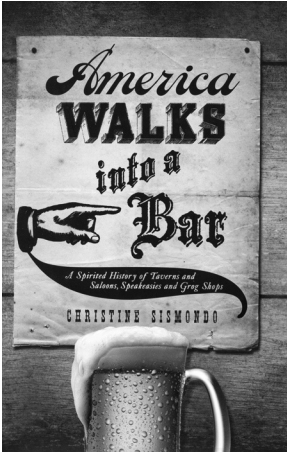


America Walks into a Bar, by Christine Sismondo (314 pages, June 2011), takes us on a “pub crawl through American history,”



as the author puts it. Contending that saloons and taverns were the focal points of such quintessentially American principles as freedom of expression and freedom to associate, Sismondo shows how

these gathering places served as de facto town halls, courthouses, community and business hubs, incubators for new literature and music, and centers for machine, democratic, and radical politics. Yet bars have also been targeted by the temperance and anticorruption movements, a sober reminder that rowdy excesses can lead to repression, with antismoking ordinances and policies prohibiting stroller moms currently trending. Sismondo's narrative is engaging, informal, and filled with memorable anecdotes. \$24.95. Oxford University. 978-0-19-973495-5.

The Forgotten Founding Father: Noah Webster's Obsession and the Creation of an American Culture, by Joshua Kendall (355 pages, April 2011), chronicles the life of America's greatest lexicographer, Noah Webster (1758–1843), whose first dictionary, published in 1806, was notable for its American spelling variants and its inclusion of technical terms in addition to literary

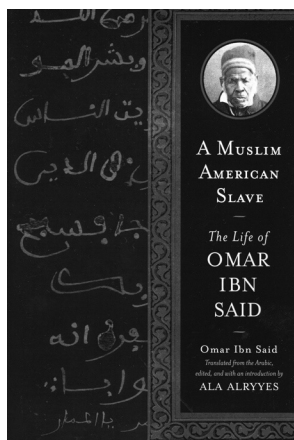
words. Kendall, the author of *The Man Who Made Lists* (2008), a biography of thesaurus compiler Peter Mark Roget, reminds us that Webster was also a prolific author of textbooks, spellers, treatises on infectious disease, and Federalist newspaper articles. He was also a champion of copyright law, abolition, female education, workman's compensation, and higher education, and was one of the founders of Amherst College in 1821. Yet he was a flawed hero, whose critics accused him of arrogance, stubbornness, and poor anger management, which in modern times might be diagnosed as obsessive-compulsive disorder, a condition that Kendall notes may have actually helped him in his 30-year quest to perfect his dictionary. \$26.95. G. P. Putnam's Sons. 978-0-399-15699-1.

Harry Potter and History, edited by Nancy R. Reagin (336 pages, June 2011), extracts the historical elements behind the magic, witchcraft, and social structures of the Potterverse. Following a timeline that compares genuine Muggle history with wizarding history, the book's 13 essays examine medieval mandrakes, charms, and love potions; the use of ancient languages in spells; medieval manuscripts and libraries; the real alchemist Nicolas Flamel; historical persecutions of witches and wizards; how Lord Voldemort symbolizes Nazism; the decline of European aristocracy (the Malfoys); Hogwarts and the British boarding school; and racism, feminism, and class in the wizarding world. A worthy companion to John Granger's literary exploration of J. K. Rowling's work, *Harry Potter's Bookshelf* (Berkley, 2009). \$17.95. John Wiley & Sons. 978-0-470-57472-0.

A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar ibn Said, by Omar ibn Said (222 pages, July 2011), is a translation by Ala Alryyes of Omar's autobiographical essay written in

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Arabic in 1831 when he was a slave in the house of James Owen in Fayetteville, North Carolina, a general of militia and brother of John Owen, governor of North Carolina



in 1828–1830. Although short on details about his life, the work is important as the only American slave narrative written in Arabic using a West African script. Alryyes shows that Omar’s “safe”

pro-slavery text is filled with between-the-lines innuendo that would be recognized only by those who could decipher it. His literary style, which emulates the Qu’ran and includes some Qu’ranic passages, contradicts both his supposed conversion to Christianity in 1820 and the contemporary perception of blacks as innately illiterate. In addition to a new translation set against the original manuscript, which was rediscovered in Virginia in 1995, Alryyes includes several essays by others on Muslims in early America and the context of Omar’s essay in antebellum America. \$19.95. University of Wisconsin. 978-0-299-24954-0.

OK: The Improbable Story of America’s Greatest Word, by Allan Metcalf (210 pages, November 2010), credits Charles Gordon Greene with the invention of the most frequently used word on the planet as an abbreviation for “oll korrekt,” a humorously mangled spelling of “all correct.” The word and its meaning first appeared in the March 23, 1839, issue of Greene’s *Boston Morning Post* at a time when abbreviations oddly were in vogue. After exploring some false hypotheses about its origins, Metcalf proceeds with numerous fun examples of its uses—including the telegraphic OK, the OK

Corral, O’Keh records, George Ade’s revival of the word in *Fables in Slang*, Oklahoma, okey-dokey, and Thomas A. Harris’s 1967 classic of transactional analysis, *I’m OK—You’re OK*. \$18.95. Oxford University. 978-0-19-537793-4.

The Pun Also Rises: How the Humble Pun Revolutionized Language, Changed History, and Made Wordplay More Than Some Antics, by John Pollack (212 pages, April 2011), defines a pun as not just a play on words, but the transformation of one word or thing into another by relating them through sound or sight. Pollack, winner of the 1995 O. Henry Pun-Off World Championships and a former speechwriter for President Bill Clinton, breaks down a remarkable variety of types of pun—homophonic and homographic puns, paradigmatic puns, syntagmatic puns, Spoonerisms, Wellerisms, the chiasmus, Tom Swifities, story puns, knock-knock jokes, daffynitions, meld puns, and portmanteaus. He goes on to describe how the brain processes puns, the tumultuous relationship between low punning and high humor, and the creative benefits of wordplay. \$22.50. Gotham Books. 978-1-592-40623-4.

The University: An Illustrated History, edited by Fernando Tejerina (433 pages, April 2011), is an intriguing attempt to assess the progress of universities from their beginnings in Classical Greece to the quest for new models in the 21st century. Edited by a panel of Spanish academicians who have brought together contributors from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas, this well-illustrated volume offers a global perspective on higher education that includes chapters on the beginnings of Oxford and Cambridge, students and scholars from the Enlightenment to the birth of liberal democracies, three centuries of founding universities in colonial Latin America, entrepreneurial and world-class institutions, and the relationship of the university to its physical space. \$60.00. Overlook Duckworth. 978-1-59020-644-7. *z*