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Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] After 20 years of military occupation and combat, the United States is planning to pull out of Afghanistan. This decision grows more controversial by the day. It might feel like everyone has a hot take on it right now. Looking at the two decades of U.S. involvement and the decades of diplomatic disarray, there is so much to take in. Cable news, documentaries, and teachers can help you learn more about this. Sometimes, however, it's best to turn on your e-reader or hit "play" on your audiobook). To help, we've compiled a list of books that provide a range of context and first-person insights into what was (and is) actually going on in Afghanistan. After all, Afghanistan is a country with a heritage that predates the U.S., so learning about the country outside of the "War on Terror" is important. Whether you're for or against the Afghanistan War — or you're still developing your thoughts — these books can help guide you to a more thoughtful, well-rounded opinion. 1. 'Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden — From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001' by Steve Coll Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] You may be wondering, "how did the U.S. end up having enemies in Afghanistan in the first place?" Ghost Wars by Steve Coll answers that and so much more. This Pulitzerwinning text outlines the U.S.'s relationship with Afghanistan, including the CIA's lesser-discussed work in the 1970s. Covering nearly everything prior to September 11, 2001, this work of journalism has become required reading for those looking to understand the conflict in Afghanistan. This subject wasn't being taught in schools while it was happening, and is hardly a focal point of American History today, so there's a lot to take in here. But it's a great place to start to understand the Courtesy: [Goodreads] Rashid Ahmed's Taliban: Islam, Oil and the Great New Game in Central Asia covers the group that's dominating a lot of the discussion surrounding Afghanistan. The Taliban's beliefs center around a strict interpretation of Sharia Law, which is part of the Islamic tradition. (Don't worry, the book will dive deeper into that topic if you're unsure of what that means.) The group was not a political force until the mid-1990s, but Ahmed covers more than that. Connecting the Taliban to the oil and gas industries, this book shines a light on how the Taliban are in power, a chief concern remains how the women in Afghanistan will be affected by their reign. Under Taliban are in power, a chief concern remains how the women in Afghanistan will be affected by their reign. cannot choose whether or not they want to wear burgas, garments that cover most of their bodies at all times. Moreover, during the Taliban's past rule women and girls were not allowed to attend school and receive an education. A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice by Malalai Joya tells the personal account of one woman who dared to learn despite the oppressive regime she was living under. 4. 'Lone Survivor: The Eyewitness Account of Operation Redwing and the Lost Heroes of SEAL Team 10' by Marcus Luttrell with Patrick Robinson Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] Lone Survivor is one of the first primary sources from the war in Afghanistan to break into the cultural consciousnesses. The book details the training process one goes through to become a Navy SEAL. It was a team of SEALs that eventually captured Osama bin Laden, so there's a lot of insight into the American military contained within this work's pages. The book goes on to tell of a mission where Marcus Luttrell's entire team was slain in battle — except for him. With unfiltered honesty, Luttrell's story is one that will remind you to never give up. 5. 'My Life with the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another book about the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted to include another by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] We wanted the Taliban' by Abdul Salam Zaeef Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] more thorough understanding of the topic at large. Abdul Salam Zaeef was a founding member of the Taliban, and My Life With the Taliban is a memoir about the group's formation and development. Like Ghost Wars, Zaeef starts in the late 1970s, but gives a different perspective on the Taliban's rise to power through the 1990s. Zaeef was eventually captured and turned over to U.S. forces, who, in turn, detained Zaeef at Guantanamo Bay. Guant people talking about Afghanistan right now. Few of these voices are from queer people who know firsthand what it's like to grow up there. In Overcoming: Alone Against the World, Hamid Zaher shares a queer perspective on life in Afganistan. Zaher was essentially exiled from Afghanistan and experienced Islamophobia in addition to discrimination for being queer. You don't need to like memoirs or books off the beaten path to be informed by this one. 7. 'Eagle Down: The Last Special Forces Fighting the Forever War' by Jessica Donati Photo Courtesy: [Goodreads] In 2015, the Afghanistan War became the longest-running foreign conflict in American history. While its end seems unclear, Eagle Down: The Last Special Forces of the Forever War by Jessica Donati grapples with just how long the war in Afghanistan has been and spotlights the stories of the people still fighting it. Former General David Patraeus, who spent a lot of time overseeing the war in Afghanistan, called the book "powerful, important, and searing." There hasn't been enough time for a book to be released that covers today's most current events, but this one focuses on the Obama and Trump eras, which significantly impacted what's happening now. MORE FROM ASK.COM Photo Courtesy: Larry Gerbrandt/Moment/Getty Images; Alice Cooper's "Sacagawea and Jean-Baptiste," 1905 via Wikimedia Commons If you learned of Sacagawea in your high-school history class, it's likely that you think of her as a key part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. But the common depiction of Sacagawea is thoroughly distorted; many truths about her, and her circumstances, have either been twisted or left out entirely in order to suit a particular narrative. That is, the expedition was meant to be a heroic, American endeavor, and, as such, it's often romanticized by historians. However, romanticizing the colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands is harmful — and using Sacagawea as a symbol of this alleged "heroic" mission is even more damaging. With this in mind, we're disclosing key aspects of Sacagawea's life in observance of Women's History Month. Sacagewea's Early Years Born around 1788 or 1789 into the Lemhi Shoshone, and grew up in what is present-day Idaho. Although some accounts suggest that her name is Hidatsa in origin, with "sacaga" meaning "bird" and "wea" meaning "kird" and "wea" meaning "woman," many Shoshone people maintain that it's a Shoshone name that means "boat launcher" and is pronounced more like "Sacajawea" (via National Women's History Museum). Photo Courtesy: Charles M. Russel/Wikipedia "Cagaagawia'sh, in Hidatsa, or Birdwoman, in English, has become an important figure in both American Indian history and identity and as an icon of the women's suffrage movement," Alisha Deegan (Hidatsa/Sahnish), a citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation in North Dakota, and the interpretation and cultural resource program manager at Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site, told Teen Vogue. Deegan goes on to note that, "There are many questions about Cagaagawia'sh and her life, but what we do know demonstrates that she was just 12 years old or so, Sacagawea and several other young Shoshone girls were kidnapped by Hidatsa warriors and, later, enslaved. Over the next few years, Sacagawea became fluent in the Hidatsa language, a form of Siouan language spoken in what is now considered present-day North Dakota. It's around this point in her story that details get a bit murkier. However, it is known that around 1803 or 1804, Sacagawea was sold as an enslaved person to, or "won" by, a French-Canadian fur trapper named Toussaint Charbonneau. Along with several other unknown Indigenous girls, Sacagawea was made to be one of Charbonneau's "wives." Although many history textbooks shy away from the truth, playwright and activist Carolyn Gage does not, writing that this was "a formalized child-rape arrangement brokered by adults," who also enslaved said child. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson purchased western territory that had been claimed by French colonizers. Known as the Louisiana Purchase, this act nearly doubled the size of the United States. At that point, much of the middle of the continent had gone unexplored by white settlers. In order to map a safe route from the East Coast to the Pacific Ocean, Jefferson hired explorer Meriwether Lewis and frontiersman William Clark to lead an expedition of roughly 40 men up the Missouri. Photo Courtesy: Charles Marion Russell/Wikipedia While spending the winter months at an encampment near the Hidatsa-Mandan villages, Lewis and Clark met Charbonneau, who angled to join the expedition as an interpreter. The explorers allowed Charbonneau to join them, but it was clear that they saw Sacagawea, who was just 16 or 17 years old at the time, as more of an asset to their colonialist expedition than Charbonneau, who Lewis later called "a man of no peculiar merit" in his writings. Not only was Sacagawea an interpreter herself, but she was also pregnant at the time, and it's clear that Lewis and Clark felt the optics of having an Indigenous mother with them — an expedition of mostly white men — was beneficial. That is, the Corps of Discovery likely thought that Indigenous people they encountered wouldn't think of them as a war party if Sacagawea was with them. While Sacagawea's abilities (and very presence) were deemed important to note that she didn't have any agency over joining the expedition. In addition to guiding the Corps of Discovery, Sacagawea was able to identify edible plants, communicate with other Indigenous people they encountered, and, in one instance, ensured the survival of the expedition's documentation. That is, when a boat nearly capsized, Sacagawea collected all of the journals, navigational tools, and provisions that might have otherwise been lost — all while carrying her baby, and Jean-Baptiste (nicknamed "Pompey"), on her back. Indebted to her efforts, Lewis and Clark named the Sacagawea River, which flows through present-day Montana, after her. In July of 1805, the expedition reached the three forks of the Missouri River, which Sacagawea recognized. About a month later, the Corps encountered Shoshone peoples and, in a twist of fate, Sacagawea realized that the chief, Cameahwait, was her brother. By that fall, the Corps reached the Pacific Ocean, thanks in large part to the horses the Shoshone people provided them. Needing a place to set up their winter encampment, the Corps once again leaned on Sacagawea's insights proved invaluable. In fact, on the return journey, it was Sacagawea who safely guided the group she was with through what's known today as the Bozeman Pass, an act that caused Clark to note that she had been "a pilot through this country." Despite the instrumental role she played, Sacagawea was not given any compensation; the same was true for York, the enslaved Black man who also made the roundtrip journey with the Corps. Sacagawea's Legacy Today There isn't much in the way of written documentation when it comes to Sacagawea's life after the expedition. It is well documented that Sacagawea's son was left in the care of Clark, who was (strangely) eager to oversee the boy's education in St. Louis. After that, Sacagawea seemingly went on fur-trading expeditions and gave birth to a daughter, Lisette, in 1812. Photo Courtesy: Judy Chicago's "The Dinner Party" (Sacajawea place setting), 1974–79, Brooklyn Museum; Alice Cooper's "Sacagawea and Jean-Baptiste," 1905 via Wikimedia Commons When it comes to her death, there's quite a bit of uncertainty, too. While records from a fur-trading post note that she didn't pass away at just 25 years old. The National Women's History Museum points to Indigenous oral histories, some of which suggest that "Sacagawea lived for many more years in the Shoshone lands in Wyoming, until her death in 1884." Cultura Colectiva points out that, "In 1925, Dr. Charles Eastman, an Indigenous physician, was sent by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to look for the remains of the great Sacagawea." In retracing Sacagawea's steps, Dr. Eastman learned of a Shoshone woman, who went by the name Porivo and lived on a Comanche reservation; Dr. Eastman believed this elder to be Sacagawea. "Though it is known that she separated from the abusive Charbonneau, little else is certain about the remainder of Sacajawea's life," the Brooklyn Museum notes. "Most Native people believe she died in 1812 at Fort Mandan and is buried somewhere on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation lands, North Dakota, while some evidence states that she lived with the Shoshone tribe for many years afterwards." In fact, Sacagawea has two "official" burial sites. One, in Corson County, South Dakota, aligns with the story that she died at just 25 years old. This site, located at Fort Manuel, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 as the final resting place of Sacagawea, but this completely discounts the oral history collected by both Dr. Eastman and Dr. Grace Hebard. The second site is located at Fort Washakie in the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. According to the National Park Service, there are more statues dedicated to Sacagawea than any other woman in American history. Unveiled in 1905, Alice Cooper's Sacagawea and Jean-Baptiste is one of the most notable monuments. Often, the sculpture is credited with inspiring now-controversial author Eva Emery Dye, who, in writing, cemented the romanticization and colonialist depiction of Sacagawea. Additionally, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, perhaps not realizing the full story, saw Sacagawea as a symbol of women's independence. And, in 2000, the U.S. Mint aimed to honor her with a golden dollar coin, but printing the likeness of someone who was enslaved by white men on currency is, to say the very least, a problematic choice. But attempts to honor Sacagawea go beyond monuments, misguided coins and named natural landmarks. In fact, she is the only Indigenous woman represented in feminist artist Judy Chicago's installation The Dinner Party, which features place settings for prominent, history-making women. "The circumstances surrounding her life have become the stuff of legend, prompting interpretation by historians, writers, and filmmakers," the Brooklyn Museum, which houses The Dinner Party, notes. "In an era in which women, particularly Native American women, were considered either weak and helpless or dangerous, Sacajawea proved to be an icon of bravery." In a letter entitled "To the Youth / OUR FUTURE," Canadian First Nations artist George Littlechild ponders Sacagawea's complicated, but important, legacy. "It is a known fact that America glorifies historical figures such as Lewis and Clark, that they are commemorated for opening up the West to 'Progress,' thus 'Civilizing' ancestral lands," he writes. "They have become cultural icons for their deeds.... In fact what did they truly do for this land known as America?" Venerated by some but rightly despised by others, Lewis, Clark and the whole expedition were harbingers of the destruction, disease, and death that was yet to come with the United States' westward expansion. "It is up to us to rewrite the history books," Littlechild writes, "to make change and above all to have respect for all humanity..." And, in part, that can start with looking beyond whitewashed history to understand historical figures like Sacagawea more honestly. MORE FROM REFERENCE.COM

