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DIANE BRONSON

There are lots of good books at the library, but some proclaim their greatness even in their titles.

Each of these titles provides "great" reading that will keep you absorbed for the foreseeable future.

"The Great Warming: Climate Change and the Rise and Fall of Civilization," by Brian M. Fagan. If global warming doesn't concern you, it should, after seeing what it's done in the past. From about 800 A.D. to 1300 A.D., a global warming phase known as the Medieval Warm Period impacted human societies from the Arctic to the Sahara. It brought prolonged droughts and famine to the American Southwest and South Asia while increasing harvests in Europe, changed trade routes, and contributed to the Mayan empire's downfall.

"The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World," by Jay Winik. As the 1790s began, America was fragile, Russia was big and powerful and France was in a revolution. But in contrast to the way conventional histories tell it, none of these remarkable events occurred in isolation. Historian Winik shows how their fates combined in one extraordinary moment to change the course of civilization.

"Great Commanders Head-to-Head: The Battles of the Civil War," by Kevin Dougherty. Retired army officer Dougherty examines how the leading generals of the Civil War measured up against each other at some of the most important battles of the conflict - including Antietam, First Manassas, and Sherman's march through Georgia - analyzing the strengths, weaknesses and strategies of the leaders, and offering insights into the aftermath of the battles.

"Down the Great Unknown: John Wesley Powell's 1869 Journey of Discovery and Tragedy through the Grand Canyon," by Edward Dolnick. Rafting the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon is a popular trip for tourists. But for the first people to ride those rapids, danger lay at every turn. The river was terra incognita, they had the wrong kind of boats, hostile locals, and dwindling supplies all made their journey perilous - but they still managed to explore the uncharted Green and Colorado rivers and make it back to civilization.

"Quantum: Einstein, Bohr, and the Great Debate about the Nature of Reality," by Manjit Kumar. The birth of atomic physics in the early 20th century opened wide a door that had been assumed pretty much shut. All of a sudden we couldn't believe anymore that scientific knowledge was complete. The debates that dominated the rest of the century continue today,

as experts grapple with defining the nature of reality. Kumar, an editor for Wired UK, brings clarity and elegance to his story without the overwhelming mathematics that can defeat non-specialists.

"The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History," by John M. Barry. The deadly 1918-1920 influenza pandemic, nearly forgotten today, killed between 50 and 100 million people around the world, most of them young, healthy adults. The mutating virus confounded efforts to stop it, and spread rapidly through most of the world, assisted by World War I troop movements and wartime censorship, appearing suddenly in populations unprepared for its threat. Barry theorizes on the origins of the killer flu (still not fully understood) as well as how governments failed in dealing with the seriousness of the situation.

"The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast," by Douglas Brinkley. As the Gulf Coast wrestles today with BP's gigantic oil spill, let's not forget that it was only five years ago that Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the same region. As one of those displaced by the storm, Brinkley provides a personal account of Katrina and its aftermath, while his interviews with federal, state, and local officials offer a different perspective.

"The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity," by Richard Florida. Although we've not yet weathered all the effects of the 2008 financial crash, Florida finds reason for optimism in what he calls the latest "great reset," times (like the Great Depression) when new technologies arise and "the economy is recast and society remade, and when the places where we live and work change to suit new needs."

Diane Bronson is the collection development coordinator for Live Oak Public Libraries. Contact her at 912-652-3615 or by e-mail at bronsond@liveoakpl.org [1].

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