

MIT Book Discussion Group

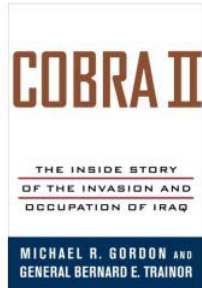
Join your fellow alums for lively conversation and good food. The format is informal, the conversation is lively and the dinner is dutch treat!

Please RSVP with Jennifer Palella at jpalella@alum.mit.edu

July 12

7:30 PM

Location: Khun Thai in Short Hills



Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq By Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor

Informed by unparalleled access to still-secret documents, interviews with top field commanders, and a review of the military's own internal after-action reports, *Cobra II* is the definitive chronicle of America's invasion and occupation of Iraq—a conflict that could not be lost but one that the United States failed to win decisively. From the Pentagon to the

White House to the American command centers in the field, the book reveals the inside story of how the war was actually planned and fought. Drawing on classified United States government intelligence, it also provides a unique account of how Saddam Hussein and his high command developed and prosecuted their war strategy.

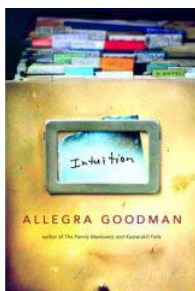
Written by Michael R. Gordon, the chief military correspondent for *The New York Times*, who spent the war with the Allied land command, and Bernard E. Trainor, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general and former director of the National Security Program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, *Cobra II* traces the interactions among the generals, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and President George W. Bush. It dramatically reconstructs the principal battles from interviews with those who fought them, providing reliable accounts of the clashes waged by conventional and Special Operations forces. It documents with precision the failures of American intelligence and the mistakes in administering postwar Iraq.

Unimpeachably sourced, *Cobra II* describes how the American rush to Baghdad provided the opportunity for the virulent insurgency that followed. The brutal aftermath in Iraq was not inevitable and was a surprise to the generals on both sides; *Cobra II* provides the first authoritative account as to why. It is a book of enduring importance and incisive analysis—a comprehensive account of the most reported yet least understood war in American history.

September 20

7:30 PM

Location: Khun Thai in Short Hills



Intuition By Allegra Goodman

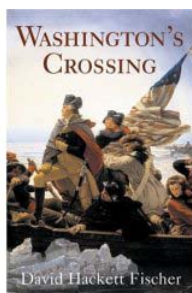
In another quiet but powerful novel from Goodman (Kaaterskill Falls), a struggling cancer lab at Boston's Philpott Institute becomes the stage for its researchers' personalities and passions, and for the slippery

definitions of freedom and responsibility in grant-driven American science. When the once-discredited R-7 virus, the project of playboy postdoc Cliff, seems to reduce cancerous tumors in mice, lab director Sandy Glass insists on publishing the preliminary results immediately, against the advice of his more cautious codirector, Marion Mendelssohn. The research team sees a glorious future ahead, but Robin, Cliff's resentful ex-girlfriend and co-researcher, suspects that the findings are too good to be true and attempts to prove Cliff's results are in error. The resulting inquiry spins out of control. With subtle but uncanny effectiveness, Goodman illuminates the inner lives of each character, depicting events from one point of view until another section suddenly throws that perspective into doubt. The result is an episodically paced but extremely engaging novel that reflects the stops and starts of the scientific process, as well as its dependence on the complicated individuals who do the work. In the meantime, she draws tender but unflinching portraits of the characters' personal lives for a truly humanist novel from the supposedly antiseptic halls of science.

November 15

7:30PM

Location: Khun Thai in Short Hills



**Washington's Crossing
by David Hackett Fischer**

David Hackett Fischer's brilliant volume has already earned him the 2005 Pulitzer Prize in History. A part of the Oxford University Press's *Pivotal Moments in American History Series*, *Washington's Crossing* is at once a gripping tale and definitive scholarly account of epic events in the forging of the American nation. Fischer takes us back to a time when the fate of the new nation hung in the balance, and the American revolutionary cause seemed destined to defeat at the hands of the world's mightiest military and economic power, Great Britain. How did Washington and his small Continental Army stay the course against great odds? How did they defeat highly trained British and Hessian professional military forces at the battle of Trenton and Princeton in the winter of 1776-77? Why did these small battles with only a few thousand soldiers engaged on each side have such decisive consequences?

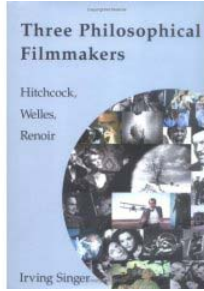
Fischer provides a wealth of insight in exploring these and other intriguing questions, enabling readers to see with fresh eyes – and understand in new ways – events that have long entered American lore. The American Revolution comes alive in the pages of *Washington's Crossing* not only in its masterly narrative of battles and campaigns but in the dramatic and inspiring story it tells of a people fighting for a new ideal of liberty and the triumph of their cause. Of the American soldiers and civilians in the New Jersey campaign, Fischer concludes, "They set a high example, and we have much to learn from them."

David Hackett Fischer is University Professor at Brandeis University. In 1985-6, he was Harmsworth Professor at Oxford.

January 17

7:30 PM

Location: Khun Thai in Short Hills



Three Philosophical Filmmakers – Meaning and Technique in Film By Irving Singer

Singer's account reveals Hitchcock, Welles, and Renoir to be not only consummate artists and inspired craftsmen but also sophisticated theorists of film and its place in human experience. They left behind numerous essays, articles, and interviews in which they discuss the nature of their own work as well as more extensive issues. Singer

draws on their writings, as well as their movies, to show the pervasive importance of what they did as dedicated filmmakers.

Hitchcock used his mastery of contrived devices not as mere formalism divorced from content, Singer notes, but in order to evoke emotional responses that are meaningful in themselves and that matter greatly to millions of people. Singer's discussion of Hitchcock's work analyzes, among other things, his ideas about suspense, romance, and the comic. Singer also makes a detailed comparison of the original Psycho with Gus Van Sant's recent remake. Considering the work of Welles, Singer shows how and why the theme of vanished origins -- "the myth of the past" -- recurs in many of his films, starting with the Rosebud motif in Citizen Kane and continuing much later in his little-known masterpiece The Immortal Story. Expanding upon Renoir's comment that his own films were "always the same film," Singer studies his entire work as a coherent though evolving search for contact and "conversation" with the audience. While recognizing the primacy of technique, Renoir used cinematic artifice in the service of that humanistic aspiration.