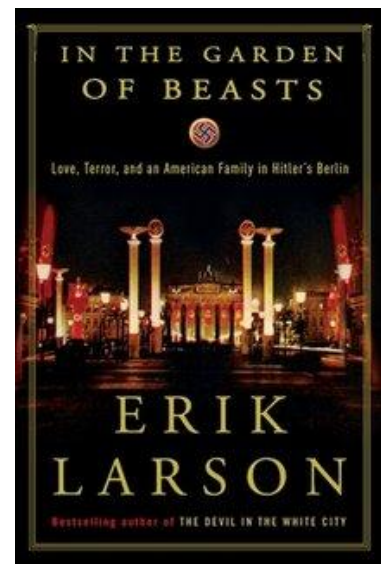


# Microhistories

In the last ten years or so a certain kind of non-fiction has become very popular and there are lots of examples in local libraries. A microhistory is defined as the study of the past on a small scale to illustrate larger trends. Some microhistories concentrate on one year, or one event. Other microhistories concentrate on the history of a substance like coffee, water, chocolate or salt. Here are some great authors of microhistory to try out.

## Erik Larson

Larson, an American writer originally made his name with a book called *Isaac's Storm*, about the greatest natural disaster which ever hit the United States, the devastating hurricane of 1900, which destroyed Galveston Texas. One of his best books was *The Devil in the White City* about the World Exhibition in Chicago in 1893 and a serial murderer busy at the same time. Larson combines fine detail with riveting storytelling. His latest book, just published this month, *In the Garden of Beasts* examines one year in the life of the American ambassador to Nazi Germany just as Hitler was assuming power. Non-fiction that almost reads like fiction...



## Mark Kurlansky

Kurlansky's books concentrate on one topic rather than one historic event. With witty anecdotes and well-researched history, he tackles such diverse topics as cod and salt charting their huge impact on modern civilization. I had no idea salt was so important before I read his book entitled *Salt: a world history*. Mass appeal for foodies, historians and curious people...

## Winchester, Simon.

Winchester's first book, *The Professor and the madman*, was a runaway best seller. He narrated the life of William Minor, a convicted murderer, who basically helped write the Oxford dictionary. Winchester's simple style and imaginative historical journalism has captured a large audience over the years. Try some of his other books on the 1906 earthquake of San Francisco, the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano of 1883, and the English geologist William Smith. His latest book is an elegant study of Lewis Carroll, early photography and Alice Liddell, the Alice of Alice in Wonderland.

## Bryson, Bill

Bryson is a wonderful author. He started out his career in writing extremely funny travel books based on his wanderings in Appalachia, England, Australia and China. However, he also has some great microhistory books. His *History of Almost Everything* covers everything from the Big Bang to the rise of civilization. His latest book, *At Home: a short history of private life*, starts with an examination of the objects in his parsonage in England and leads to a rift on the history of the kitchen, bedroom, living room and bathroom. He covers topics as diverse as rats, lawnmowers, pillows, lives of servants and the spice trade. As usual, Bryson succeeds in putting a humorous twist into his writing.

## Johnson, Steven.

*The ghost map: the story of London's most terrifying epidemic.* Johnson's thrilling account of the Victorian-era cholera epidemic of London shows how one heroic doctor revolutionized the way we think about cities, disease and sanitation. A gripping story with lots of lessons for today...also highly recommended by critics.

