

Visiting American Writers

Peter Stark

Amy Ragsdale

river. They jumped on board, grasping long wooden poles with which, standing on the raft, they could push against the bottom of the river, propelling the crude craft forward through the water.

They pushed out into the broad Allegheny in the twilight. The sudden power of the current seized the raft, jerking it downstream. Thick floes of ice swirling in the river pressed around them. The raft wedged between moving floes. It jostled and bumped, its logs driven underwater by the force of the current and floating ice, threatening to capsize. “[W]e expected every Moment our Raft to sink, and ourselves to perish,” Washington recorded in his journal.

Determined to save himself and Gist and the important mission, Washington shoved his pole to the ice and leaned on it.

Universidade dos Açores

Ponta Delgada

Wednesday, May 4, 2022 ~ Anfiteatro IX, 14:00

Talks

- Peter Stark: “History’s First Draft”
- Amy Ragsdale: “A Short History of Freedom of Expression and Feminism”

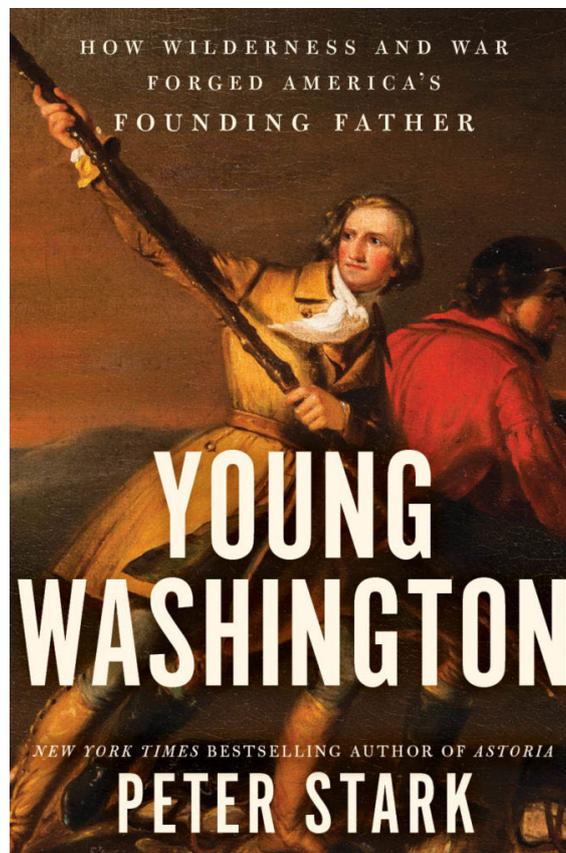


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Peter Stark: “History’s First Draft”

Peter Stark’s most recent book, *Young Washington*, tells a very different story than many of us know about the man who would become the first U.S. president. This is a George Washington in his early 20s who is vain, ambitious, and emotionally needy as he struggles to make a name for himself in the American wilderness. In his visit to the University of the Azores, Peter Stark will speak about his work in reconstructing and telling the story of past events as vividly and accurately as possible using a broad spectrum of resources, from letters, diaries, and news reporting to his own personal experiences. His work makes him acutely aware of the importance of the veracity of these information sources and the fundamental role of freedom of expression in the telling of history. Also using examples from the current day, such as how the Tiananmen Square massacre is remembered (or not), and the many competing narratives over the 2020 U.S. presidential election and events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6th, 2021, the talk will pose the larger question: “Who writes the first draft of history, and how is it revised?”





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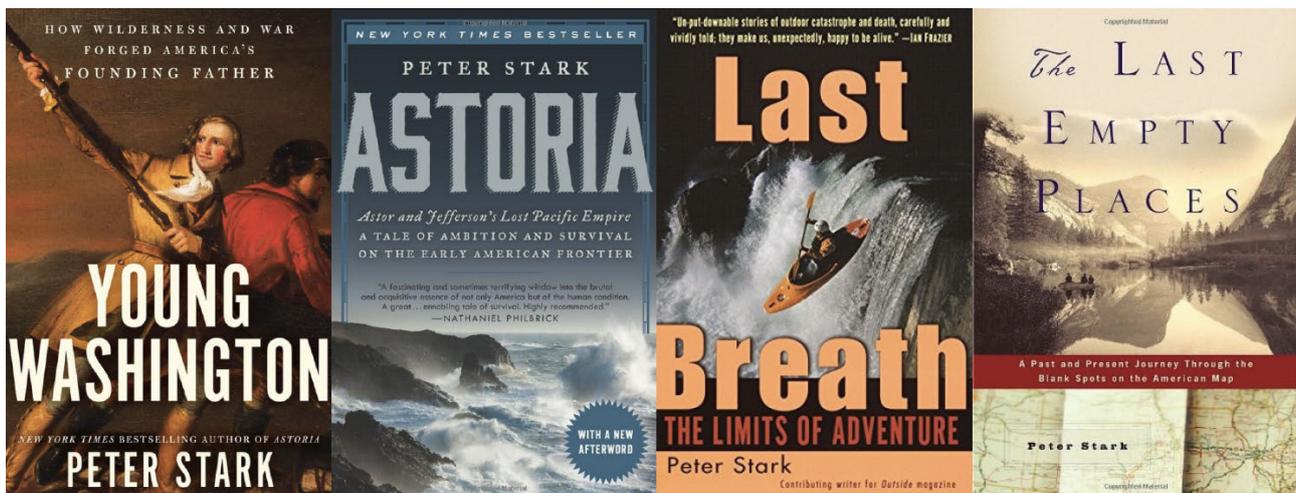


Peter Stark is an award-winning adventure/exploration writer and historian with an interest in the American frontier, particularly the interaction of native peoples and European immigrants. Born in Wisconsin, he studied English and anthropology at Dartmouth College, earned a Masters in Journalism from the University of Wisconsin, and headed off to remote spots of the world writing magazine articles and books. With a home base in Missoula, Montana, he and his family have periodically lived abroad, most recently in a small town in northeast Brazil.

A long-time correspondent for *Outside* magazine, Peter Stark's articles and essays have also appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Smithsonian*, *Men's Journal*, and many others. His book *Astoria* (Ecco/HarperCollins, March 2014) tells the gripping story of John Jacob Astor's hugely ambitious wilderness expedition to establish the first American colony on the West Coast and a global trade empire. A *New York Times* bestseller, *Astoria* was a PEN USA Literary Award finalist and has been adapted into an epic, two-part play. His most recent book, *Young Washington: How Wilderness and War Forged America's Founding Father* (Ecco/HarperCollins, May 2018), tells the story of a young and struggling George Washington in the Ohio wilderness of the 1750s. It was a finalist for the prestigious George Washington Book Prize.

He is currently at work on a book about the great Native American leader Tecumseh, who united tribes across the middle of the North American continent to resist white immigration and settlement of their lands. It will be published by Random House in 2023.

www.peterstarkauthor.com



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Amy Ragsdale: “A Short History of Freedom of Expression and Feminism”

Early feminists, the Modern Dance pioneers—Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis—sought to embody the values of the still-new America with its celebration of individualism and innovation. They threw off the shackles of classical ballet, a highly formal style developed in the courts of fifteenth-century Europe. Instead of ballet’s rigidly codified movement vocabulary and its taint of classist aristocracy, they fought for the opportunity to develop their own unique, individual voices, for their creative and expressive freedom. Additionally, they threw off the binding physical constraints of ballet’s cramping pointe shoes and ribbed corsets, replacing them with bare feet and loosely flowing gowns. Not only were they breaking from the traditional costumes of ballet, but they were rebelling against women’s clothing of their own time, the corsets, long skirts, and pinched, high-heeled shoes. Their desire to move freely coincided with the revival of the Bloomer Movement, which encouraged women in the late 19th century to shed their weighted skirts for bloomers, enabling them to engage in more strenuous physical exercise.

As important as this break from classical movement vocabulary and costume was the desire of these Modern Dance pioneers to be free to express things that mattered to them, that they felt were contemporary and relevant. Rather than be tied to the fairy tales of classical ballet with their delicate, swooning ballerinas, these Modern Dance mavens wanted to be able to express their own emotions and thoughts about the world around them. Initially, Duncan’s desire to ground herself in the real world caused her to draw from the movements of nature, wind and waves, but as she became involved in World War I and was later invited to perform in, and moved to, the new Soviet Union, her choreographic work became political, and the movement reflected that shift, changing from frolicking and airy to forceful and weighted. Ruth St. Denis was the first dance multiculturalist. Curious about a wider world, she was intrigued by the spirituality of the dances of Native America and India and Egypt. With an instinct for entertainment, St. Denis capitalized on the exoticism of these other cultures. Her dances were considered shocking and risqué with their overt appeal to the senses. Today they might be considered cultural appropriation.

It is not surprising that Modern Dance should have been born in the United States—a culture that prides itself on individualism, innovation and freedom of expression; a country continually challenging its traditions. As a result, one hundred and fifty years later, Modern Dance, now commonly called Contemporary Dance, has as many faces as it does choreographers. It continues to be used as a way to express inner life and commentary on the outer world.

Amy Ragsdale will give an audiovisual talk tracing this lineage of rebellion from the birth of Modern Dance in the United States in the late 1800s to contemporary times and addressing why it is a uniquely American art form born of the value for freedom of expression, and how this value for freedom of expression and individual voice translates to the craft of creative writing.



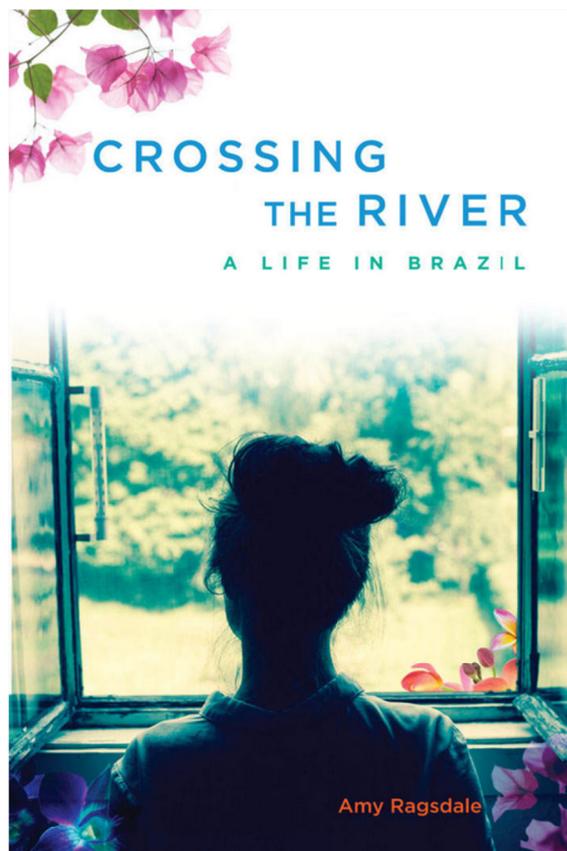
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Amy Ragsdale is a choreographer and writer based out of Missoula, Montana. Ms. Ragsdale was on the faculty of the Theatre and Dance Department at the University of Montana for twenty years, where she headed the Dance Program, founded two dance companies—Mo-Trans and Headwaters Dance Co.—and earned the university’s Outstanding Faculty Award. She has been the recipient of grants from the NEA, Paul G. Allen, and PROP Foundations and was awarded one of the 2009 Governor’s Arts Award for the State of Montana. She has taught contemporary dance in Spain, Indonesia, Martinique, Mozambique and Brazil. Her choreographic work has been performed throughout the Northwest and in New York, and televised on Montana PBS, KSPS, and CNN’s *World News*. She is the author of a travel memoir *Crossing the River: A Life in Brazil*, released by SEAL Press. Her articles and columns on travel and dance have appeared in *High Desert Journal*, *Mamalode*, and *Outside Magazine On-line*, where she initiated the column “Raising Rippers.” Amy earned a B.A. in Art History from Harvard College and an M.A. in Movement Studies from Wesleyan.

www.amyragsdale.net



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