

The sailor in an iconic VJ Day photo recalls historic lip lock — but others still lay claim to his spot

David Owens

McClatchy News Service

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The 22-year-old sailor, on a month's leave after nearly two years of war, was in New York seeing the Rockettes with his new sweetheart when they heard a ruckus. "They stopped the show and said, 'The war is over. The Japanese have surrendered,'" he recalled.

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planes was all aflame ... when the men on the Bunker Hill that were trapped in the fire, they started jumping," he said. A curtain of fire extended from the flight deck to the water more than 80 feet below, Mendonsa said.

Those who did not die immediately suffered horrible burns.

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The nurses rushed to aid the injured sailors. "I always remember that, when I saw those nurses, what they did that day."

So, when Mendonsa saw a nurse in Times Square on VJ day, he grabbed her and he kissed her, with his sweetheart smiling in the background. Nearby was Life magazine photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt, who snapped the image that came to represent America's joy that the war was over.

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What Mendonsa did not know, and what he would not find out for years, was that the woman he kissed was not a nurse, but a dental assistant named Greta Zimmer Friedman. She actually got two kisses from sailors on VJ day, but only the one from Mendonsa was captured.

For years Mendonsa was among several men who claimed to be the sailor in the iconic photo. Several women also claimed to be the nurse. Authors Lawrence Verria and George Galdorisi set out to determine just who

the kissing sailor was and have settled on Mendonsa. Despite that, others continue to say they're the ones in the photo.

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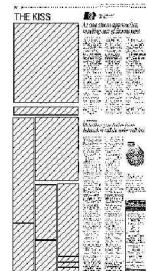
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George Mendonsa, 89, holds one of the most iconic photographs of the 20th century at his Middletown, Rhode Island home. In the photograph, Mendonsa is widely believed to be the sailor kissing an unsuspecting nurse (actually a dental hygienist) in 1945. (MCT)



Mendonsa compares a photograph of his wife to the famous image made by Life Magazine photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt. He claims his wife appears in it. (MCT)

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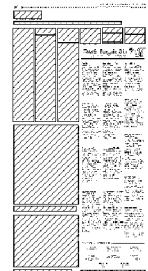
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The Hartford Courant

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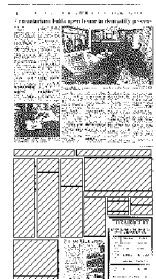
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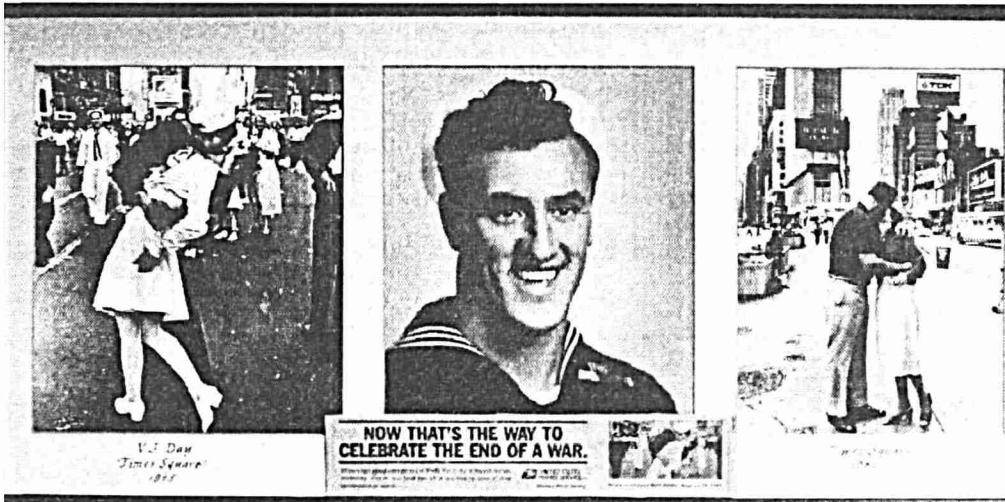
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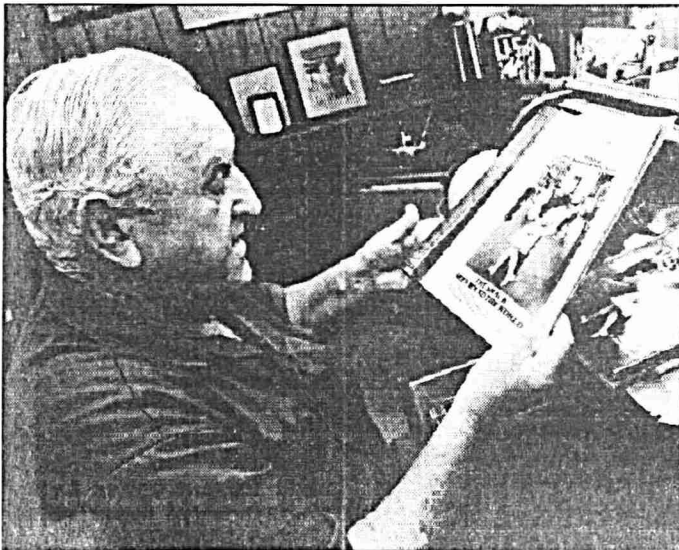
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Photos by The Hartford Courant

At his Middletown, R.I. home George Mendonsa keeps his memories of the ending of World War II—especially the iconic photograph by Alfred Eisenstaedt close to his heart.



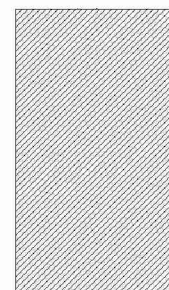
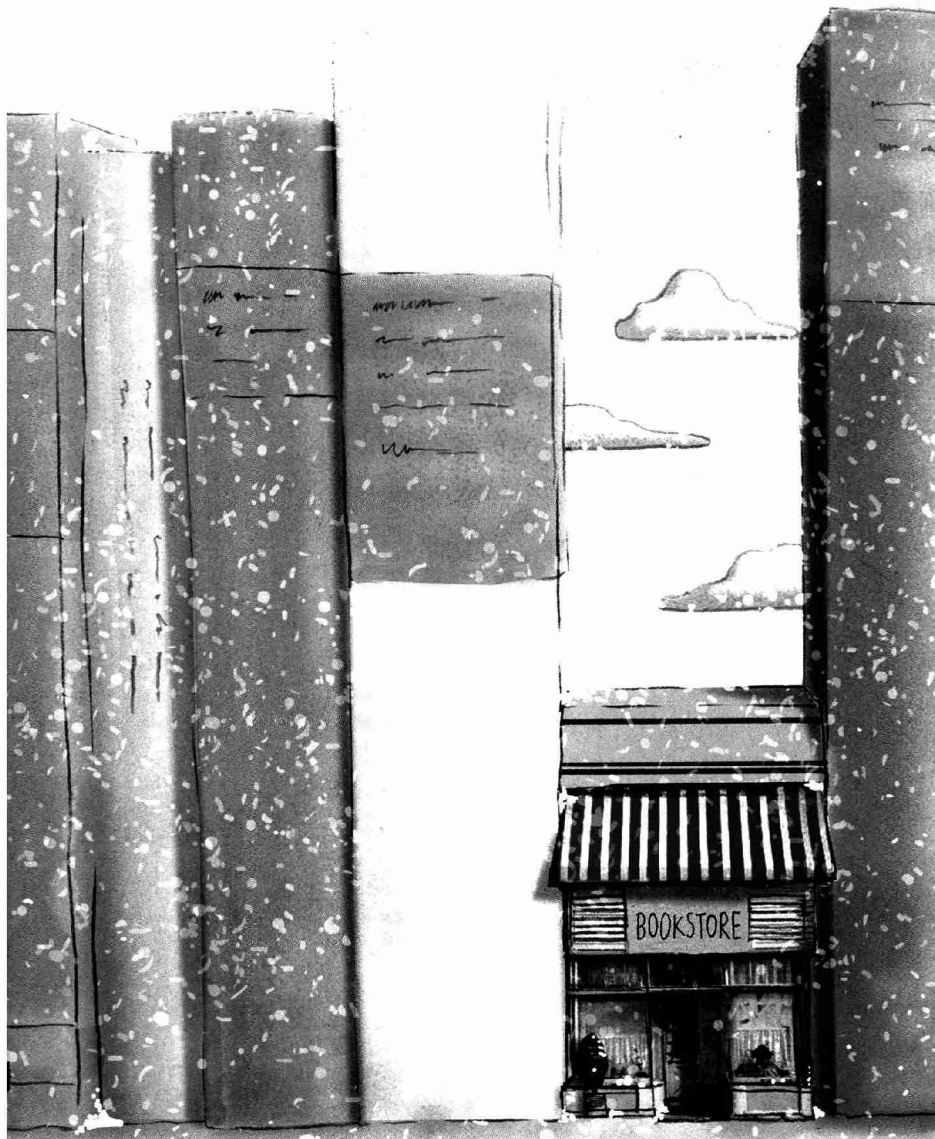
George Mendonsa says he was unaware of the Times Square photograph for 35 years. In 1980 Life Magazine reunited the kissing couple in Times Square.

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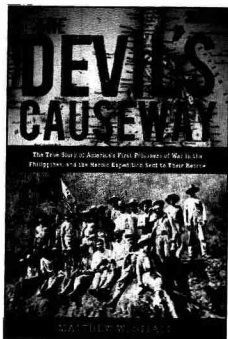
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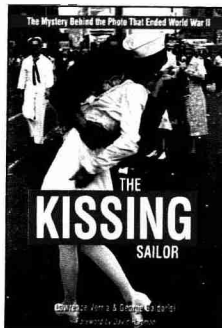
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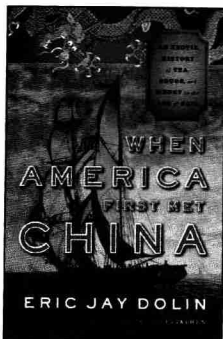


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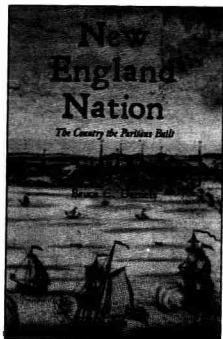
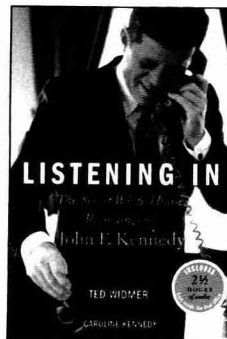


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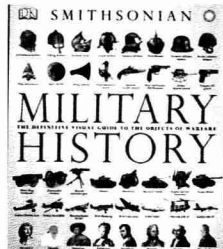
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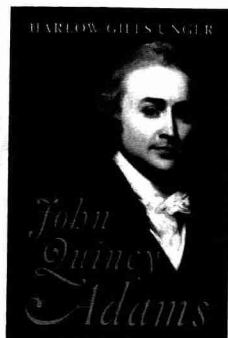


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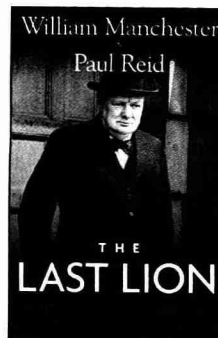


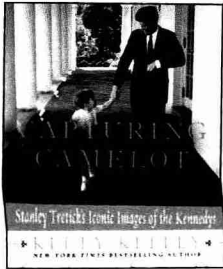
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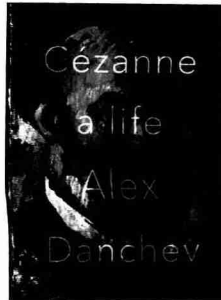
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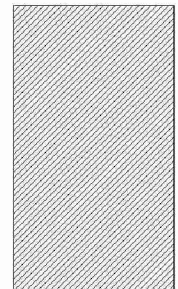
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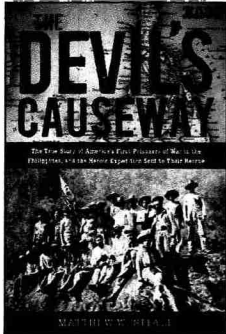
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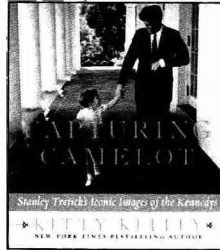
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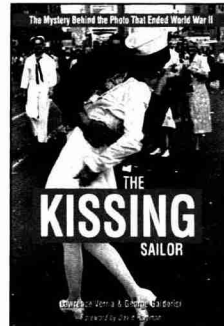
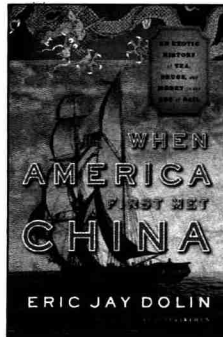


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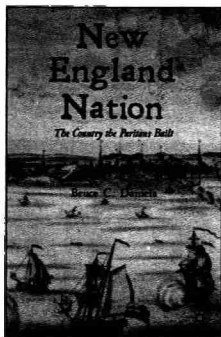


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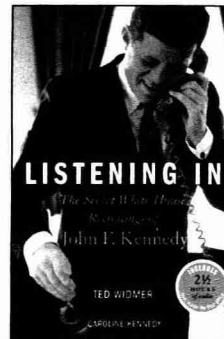


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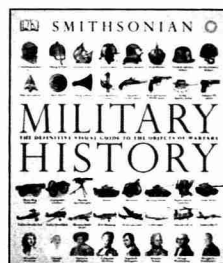
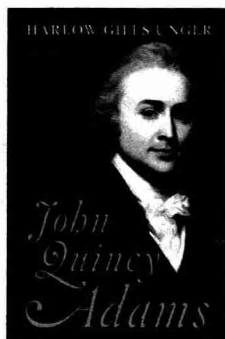


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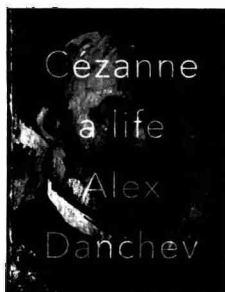
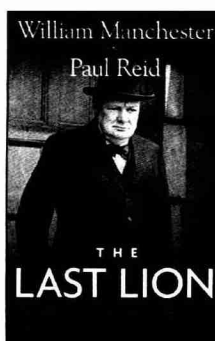


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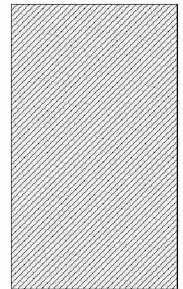
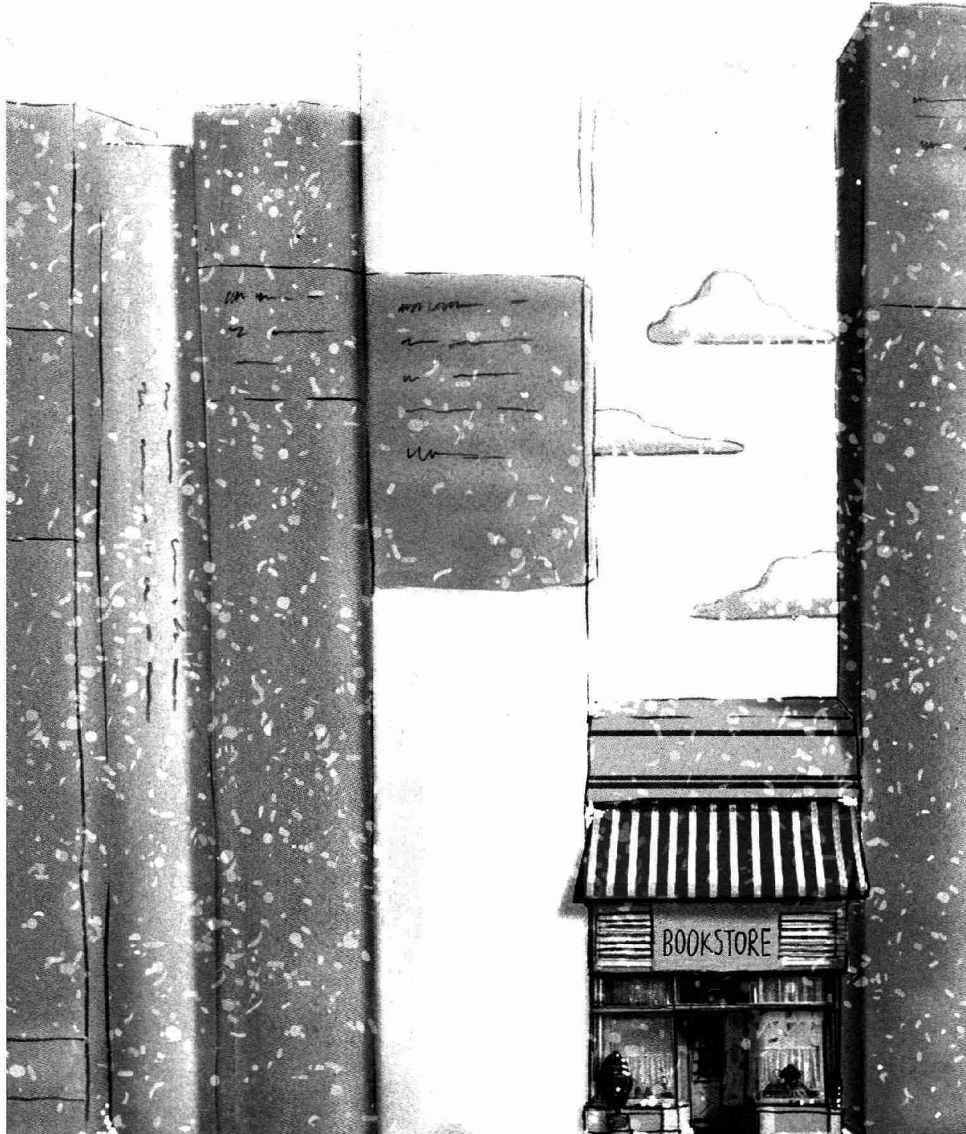
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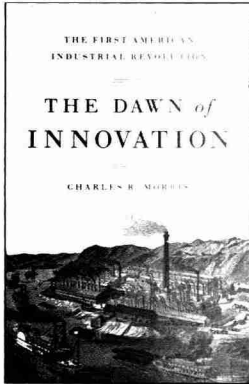
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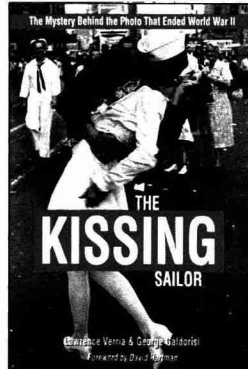
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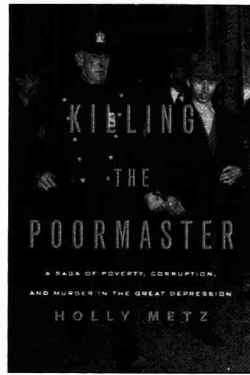


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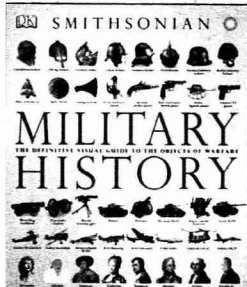
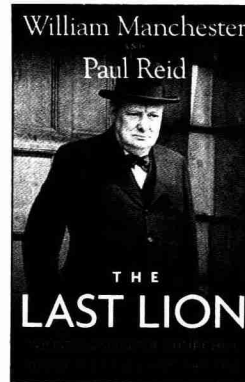


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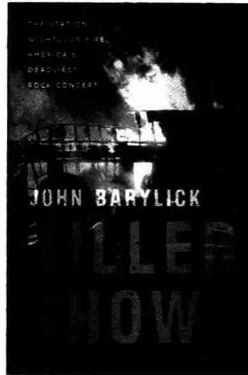
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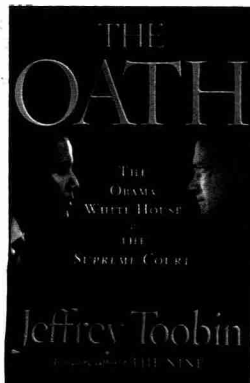


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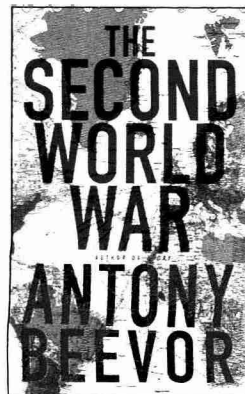


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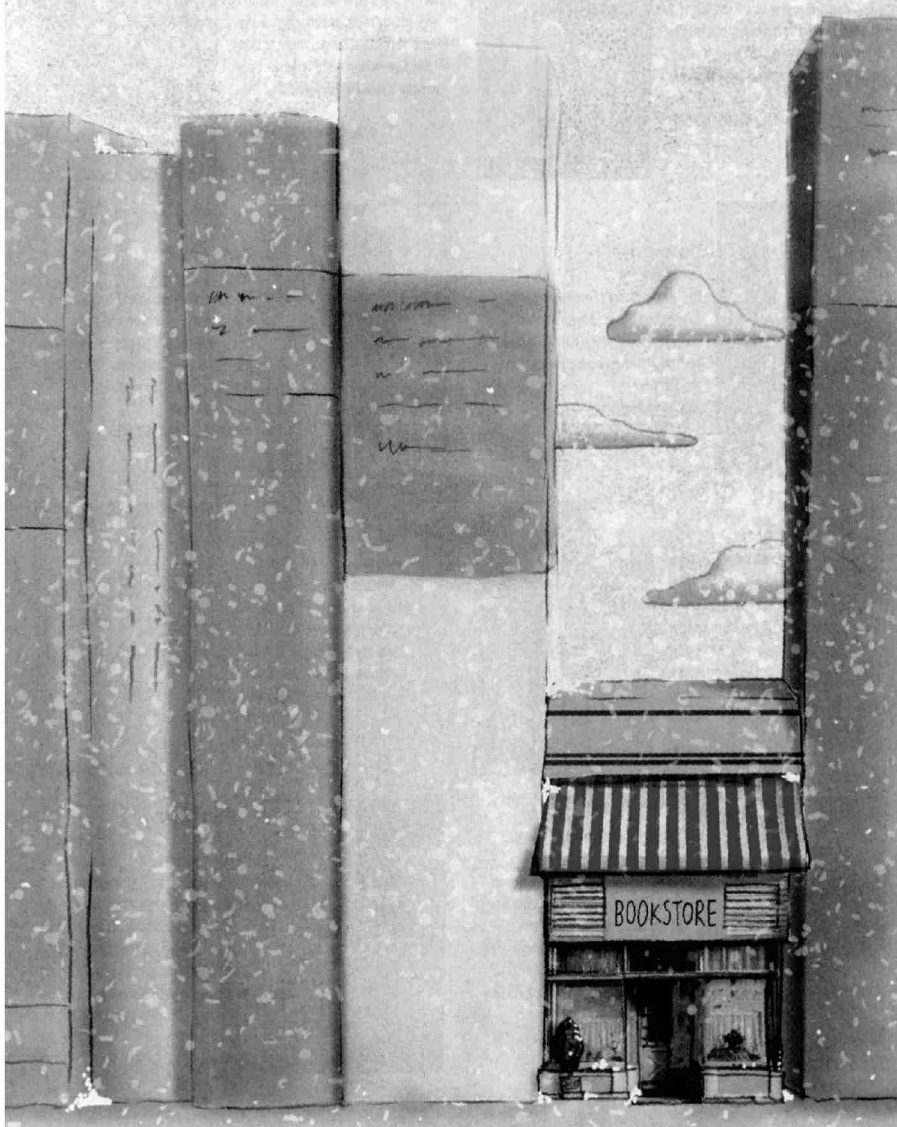


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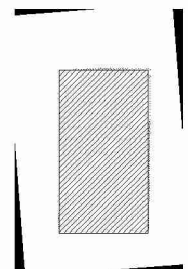


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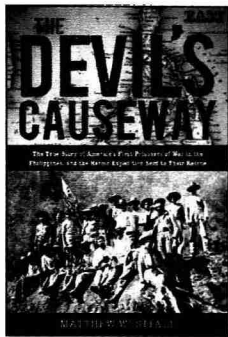
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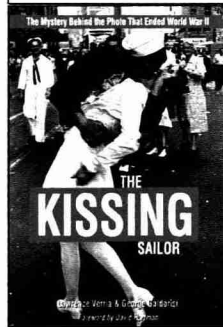
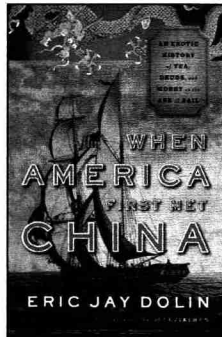


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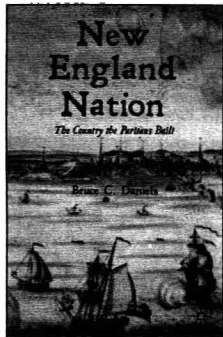


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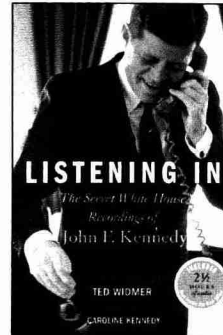


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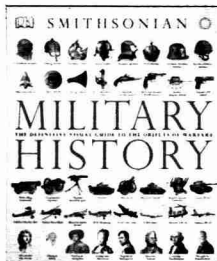
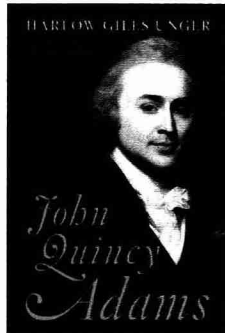


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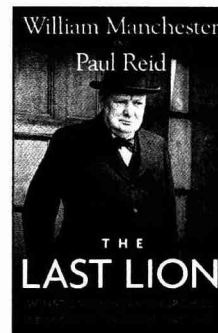


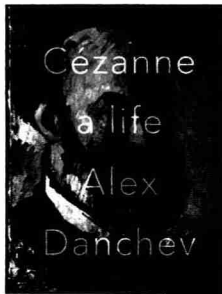
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