

JANUARY MUSINGS

SHARON VIRTS



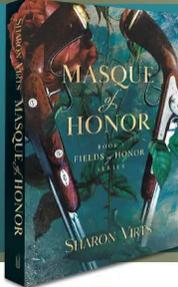
From Blockades to Blockades: Echoes of 1902 in Today's Venezuela

History has a way of reminding us that the world we live in is built on long sheets of precedent. As a writer who loves the layers beneath moment-to-moment headlines, I've been struck by a curious parallel: between the Venezuelan Crisis of 1902–1903 and the unfolding situation involving Venezuela and the United States in 2025–26.

In the winter of 1902, Venezuela found itself at the center of a dramatic international incident. The young republic, under President Cipriano Castro, had fallen behind on debts owed to European creditors and refused to compensate foreign citizens for damage suffered during internal unrest. In response, the navies of Britain, Germany and Italy imposed a naval blockade on Venezuelan ports — stopping ships, cutting trade, and threatening the country's economic lifelines.

Venezuela expected support from the United States, invoking the still-new Monroe Doctrine — first articulated over eighty years earlier to warn European powers off further colonization in the Western Hemisphere... [READ MORE](#)

"History doesn't repeat itself exactly. But it often rhymes."
~ Mark Twain



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From My Writing Desk

I didn't set out to find *Masque of Honor*; I was simply trying to understand a house.

When Scott and I began the restoration of Selma, I approached it the only way I know how, by listening and researching. Old houses speak, if you give them time. To restore Selma properly, I needed to know who had lived there, what they believed, and what they had endured.

That was when I met Armistead Mason.

At first, he was nothing more than a name in a ledger, a thread in the tapestry of Selma's past. But history has a way of tugging when it wants to be seen. The more I researched, the more I learned about his life and legacy. **And then came Jack.**

Their story did not unfold neatly. It surfaced in fragments: newspaper columns, sharp-edged editorials, public rebuttals printed with barely concealed fury. The tone was accusatory, performative, and relentless. Each man responding to the other in print, rallying allies, hardening positions. It reminded me of today's political sparring on social media, where words are weapons and pride rarely retreats.

But this was not a war of tweets. It was a war of honor.

In the world Armistead and Jack inhabited, reputation was currency. A slight, real or perceived, could not be ignored. To remain silent was to concede. What began as disagreements became insults. Insults calcified into public challenges. Each printed word raised the stakes, until there was no room left for retreat...

No Spoilers Here, Click to Pre-order Your Copy of *Masque of Honor*



The worlds of my novels are rooted in moments when history had not yet made up its mind. In this monthly column, I explore the real events and figures who lived in that uncertainty, and whose choices still echo through my stories.

The Monroe Doctrine:

When America First Tested her Voice

For those who might need a little history refresh...

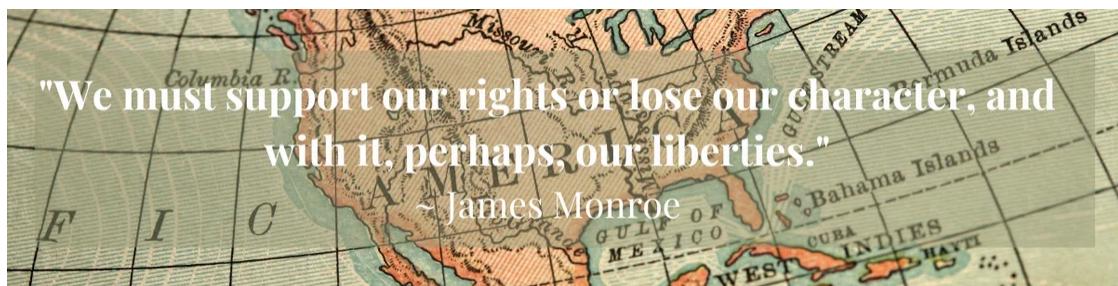
The Monroe Doctrine was not a law or a treaty, but a carefully worded warning delivered by President James Monroe to Congress in December 1823. In it, Monroe declared that the nations of Europe should no longer seek to colonize or interfere in the Western Hemisphere — and that, in return, the United States would stay out of European conflicts.



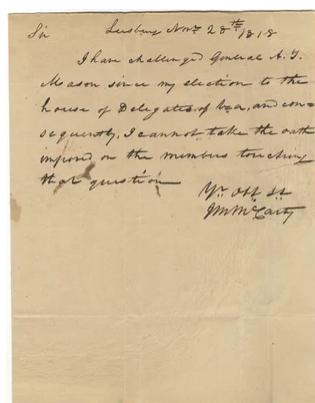
The backdrop was tense. Much of Latin America had recently broken free from Spanish rule, and European monarchies were quietly considering whether those former colonies might be reclaimed. At the same time, Britain — with its powerful navy and commercial interests — supported independence in the region, but on its own terms. The doctrine emerged from this crossroads of American idealism, European ambition, and British self-interest. Congress's role was deliberate but restrained. Monroe consulted with others before speaking, most notably with John Quincy Adams, who shaped the doctrine's tone. Though Congress did not vote on it, Monroe presented the doctrine in his annual message, anchoring it in constitutional legitimacy rather than executive force.

That balance would have mattered to men of the era. Charles Fenton Mercer, a reform-minded nationalist, likely would have approved of the doctrine's moral clarity while questioning whether the young republic had the power to enforce it. A declaration without ships or soldiers behind it was a risky thing. Federalists like Jack and William McCarty, pragmatic and commercially minded, may have been even more cautious. While sympathetic to stability in the hemisphere, they would have worried that such a statement might provoke European powers before the United States was prepared to defend its words.

And that tension — between ambition and ability — is what makes the Monroe Doctrine so compelling. It was born not of certainty, but of caution, debate, and hope. Like so many decisions made in Monroe's time, it was a line drawn in words — one that history would later harden into doctrine.



Worth Keeping: Holding on to fragments from the Past



A Letter Found: Jack McCarty's 1818 resignation note—written without argument after violating Virginia's anti-dueling laws—rests on a now-unfamiliar premise: that public servants were expected to put honor before office.

A News Clipping: In an 1821 Alexandria Gazette meditation on winter, a writer reminds readers that even the season of storms and barrenness reveals beauty, balance, and the quiet wisdom of the natural order.

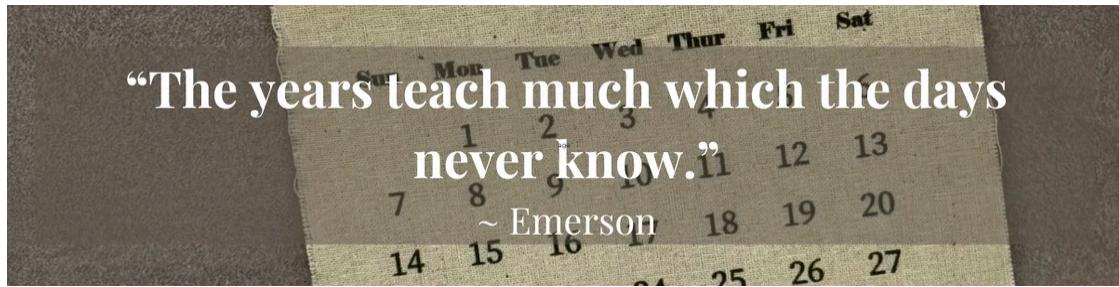
*"Now January o'er the northern world, His fickle reign displays. A
ravage train, His steps pursue, as o'er the harassed fields he stalks;
Benumbing frost, chill sleet and hail. Hurling the stony shower and
sweeping storm."*

*The Naturalist's Diary for January.
FROM "TIME'S TELESCOPE."*
Now January o'er the northern world
His fickle reign displays. A savage train
His steps pursue, as o'er the harassed fields
He stalks; benumbing frost, chill sleet and
hail,
Hurling the stony shower and sweeping
storm.
Winter, to an inattentive eye, presents
nothing, as it were, but the creation in dis-
tress; the orchards are stripped of their gold-
en fruit, & harmony is extinct in the groves,
now bending with the snow, "their beauty
withered, and their verdure lost." Yet,
when we explore these dreary scenes, the
mind is amply gratified in the contemplation
of the various phenomena peculiar to this
inclement season. Winter, ushered into ex-
istence by the howling of storms and the
rushing of torrents, manifests, not less than
the more pleasing seasons of the year, the
wisdom and goodness of the great Creator.
Were there no winter, neither the spring, nor
summer, nor autumn, would display such a
variety of beauties; for the earth itself would
lose those rich stores of nourishment and fer-
tility to which even the winter so copiously
contributes.



A Painting from the Past: This circa-1820 painting captures the American Regency ideal—high waists, flowing silks, and classical restraint—where fashion favored elegance, intimacy, and movement over ornament and excess.

In *Masque of Honor* (March 2026) and *Bargains of Fate* (June 2026) I often detail the characters beautiful clothing, accessories and jewelry. I love American Regency style!

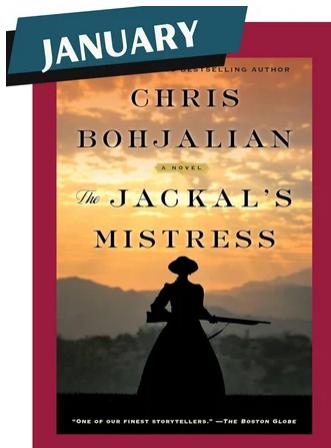


#ReadWithSharon

Historical Fiction Book Club

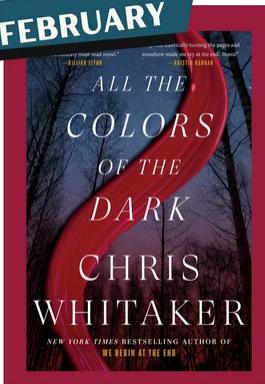
Get ready for an awesome 2026 line up in my [#ReadWithSharon](#) book club!

To start off the new year on Thursday, January 22nd at 7pm eastern, we will discuss, *The Jackal's Mistress* by Chris Bohjalian. Get ready for a great discussion.

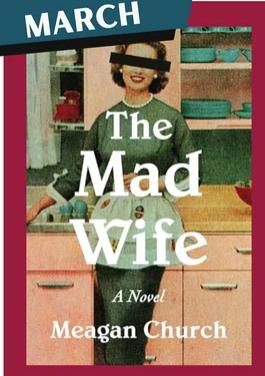


The #ReadWithSharon book club only reads current release historical fiction, and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the pick. Most months, the author joins us via zoom and you are able to ask questions during the discussion. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm EST. You can sign up for free [HERE](#)

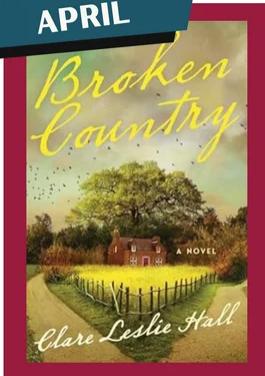
FEBRUARY



MARCH



APRIL



How often do we mistake repetition in history for inevitability rather than unresolved choice?

Click here to send me your thoughts.
I'll share them in next month's newsletter.



P.S. I wrote this surrounded by open books and half-finished notes—the best reminder that history, like writing, is always provisional.



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