

In yesterday's post I talked about how books for a general audience — trade books — get their titles. I've decided that I want to say something more broadly about the nature of trade books, and I'm going to do so in a rather circuitous way, by talking about why most scholars don't (and can't) write them. It's not at all a bad thing that they don't, in my opinion. We only need so many books for non-specialists on the Big Bang, the Civil War, and the historical Jesus. All told, we probably have more than enough.

Moreover - and this will be the point of this post and probably a few more to come — trade books are not what scholars are trained to produce. Scholars are trained to write serious research for other scholars. And that's what they spend their lives doing: advancing scholarship for experts in their fields. That's not only what most scholars want to do. In many ways, it is the only thing they are actually trained to do.

My graduate school training in many ways was typical, so maybe I'll explain roughly how the training worked.

Every semester ...

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