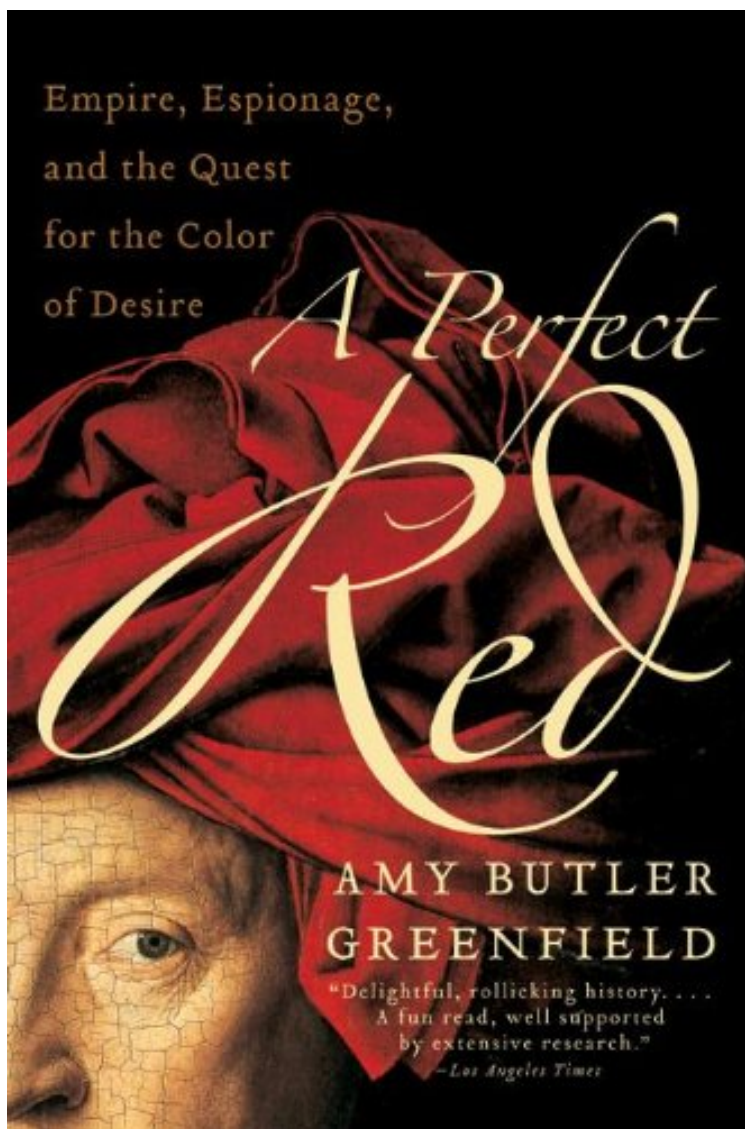


## A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire

Amy Butler Greenfield  
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**Amy Butler Greenfield : A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Perfect Red: Empire, Espionage, and the Quest for the Color of Desire:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Read the book, skip the kindle edition. By Literary Mom Beware Kindle Readers! This e-book, for which you will pay \$3 more than the print edition and second day shipping for a Prime member, has none of the illustrations referred to in the text. The notes are unwieldy to operate and the complete

lack of part of the book (yes, plates and figures referred to and marked by the author are actually part of the book) is extremely frustrating. For this price, I expected not only the plates but live links to them. Aside from this, do buy the actual book and read this. Fascinating breakdown of the cultural and social history surrounding the economics and aesthetics of Red and so much more. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. History Intertwined with Color: FascinatingBy SpringleringThis was a thoroughly fascinating book, and incredibly well researched. (Check the nearly endless bibliography at the back of the book if you have any doubt!) In a nutshell, color, particularly in textiles, was rare and valuable until the early parts of the last century. Amazing that what we now take for granted was beyond our great-great grandparents' wildest imaginations. The masses dressed in dull vegetable dyes of beige, muddy yellows, and greys. Only the wealthiest could afford brilliant colors, and wearing it was the ideal way to flaunt their wealth and status. This book takes us from the discovery in "New Spain" (Mexico) of cochineal, a crushed insect dye which yielded a never before seen brilliant red color. Spain built an empire on cochineal, and went through great lengths to keep the origin of the dye a secret. Ms. Greenfield explores the far reaching effects of cochineal on history: empire building, piracy, espionage, scientific advancements (and infighting), the connotations of red through history, even exploring perceived racism and class distinctions based on lack of color, and later, when the tables turned, a surfeit of color. Who would have ever thought that something as simple as "red" would inextricably tangle itself in history in such a way? Red. Red? Red! An excellent read for anyone with an interest in history, fashion, textiles, or science. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Strange Uses for A Tiny BugBy Connie K. PooreIn addition to being the definitive document on the red dye, cochineal; this incredibly well-researched book on organic red dye also includes a basic history of the colonies of New Spain, particularly Mexico, and their crucial importance to the dyed color red as craved by European royals. Although this is an historical treatise on a type of dye, it reads almost like a novel, never boring the reader as (s)he is led through the discovery of a superb red-dye bearing insect in New Spain and its subsequent huge commercial import on the then known world, leading even to the hijacking of ships bearing tons of the precious cargo by pirates sanctioned by the British crown. The reader will not be bored by this historical tale of a hugely useful, expensive bug.

A Perfect Red recounts the colorful history of cochineal, a legendary red dye that was once one of the world's most precious commodities. Treasured by the ancient Mexicans, cochineal was sold in the great Aztec marketplaces, where it attracted the attention of the Spanish conquistadors in 1519. Shipped to Europe, the dye created a sensation, producing the brightest, strongest red the world had ever seen. Soon Spain's cochineal monopoly was worth a fortune. Desperate to find their own sources of the elusive dye, the English, French, Dutch, and other Europeans tried to crack the enigma of cochineal. Did it come from a worm, a berry, a seed? Could it be stolen from Mexico and transplanted to their own colonies? Pirates, explorers, alchemists, scientists, and spies -- all joined the chase for cochineal, a chase that lasted more than three centuries. A Perfect Red tells their stories -- true-life tales of mystery, empire, and adventure, in pursuit of the most desirable color on earth.

From Publishers Weekly"Elusive, expensive and invested with powerful symbolism, red cloth became the prize possession of the wealthy and well-born," Greenfield writes in her intricate, fully researched and stylishly written history of Europe's centuries-long clamor for cochineal, a dye capable of producing the "brightest, strongest red the Old World had ever seen." Discovered by Spanish conquistadors in Mexico in 1519, cochineal became one of Spain's top colonial commodities. Striving to maintain a trade monopoly, Spain fiercely guarded the secrets of cochineal cultivation in Mexico and only after centuries of speculation (was the red powder derived from plant or animal?) did 18th-century microscopes bring the mystery to light. Greenfield recounts the wild, clandestine attempts by adventurer naturalists to cultivate both the cochineal insect and its host plant, nopal, beyond their native Mexico, acts of folly driven by the desire for scientific fame and commercial profit. Greenfield's narrative culminates in the 19th-century discovery of synthetic dyes that, for a period, eclipsed cochineal. However, as she explains, owing to its safety, cochineal is back to stay as a cosmetics and food dye. Greenfield's absorbing account encompasses the history of European dyers' guilds, the use of pigments by artists such as Rembrandt and Turner, and the changing associations of the color red, from the luxurious robes of kings and cardinals to its latter-day incarnation as the garb of the "scarlet woman." 8 pages of color illus. not seen by PW. Agent, Tina Bennett. (May 2) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From BooklistPirates! Kings! Beautiful ladies! Daring spies! Elements essential for a page-turning action/adventure thriller, yes, but who would think they'd turn up in a scholarly examination of a little-known substance called cochineal? It is responsible for producing that elusive shade of red deemed vital for dyeing royalty's robes, and the quest for this coveted resource involved some of history's most infamous episodes and ignoble scoundrels. Native to Mexico, the scale insect cochineal was first harvested as a dyestuff by the ancient Aztecs, and once its properties were discovered by European conquistadors, it became the quarry in an international race to obtain a monopoly on its production. As first Spain, and then England, France, and Holland entered the race to procure this precious commodity, nothing less than the way in which the New World was conquered and the Old World prospered was at stake. The granddaughter and great-granddaughter of dyers, Greenfield

combines the investigative prowess of a detective with the intellectual reasoning of an academician to create an eminently entertaining and educational read. Carol HaggasCopyright copy; American Library Association. All rights reserved ldquo;With A PERFECT RED, she does for [red] what Mark Kurlansky in SALT did for that common commodity.rdquo;