

Marblehead League Book Discussion Group 4/28/2023

League members and others (7) offered analysis of the following books at our April 2023 book group.

1. **“Dinners with Ruth: a memoir on the power of friendships”** (2022) by Nina Totenberg The journalist describes her start in Washington, the support of fellow women journalists and her friend Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Poignant, insightful and a reminder of the role of friendship in getting through life’s vicissitudes.
2. **“The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations On Cotton And Slavery In The American Slave States, 1853-1861”** (2019) by Frederick Law Olmsted. Before he became Americas great landscape architect, Olmsted was a journalist for a predecessor of the NY Times. He wrote a detailed journal of his travels in slave holding south from 1853-61 beginning in Maryland and Virginia, through the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. This is a well written travelogue of several trips and commentary on the culture and economy of the south. He captures dialects and accents in the conversations of whites and slaves. He observes the huge differences between north and south and how slaves are treated, are bought and sold, but are not as productive as free labor.
3. **“Spying on the South: An Odyssey Across the American Divide”** by Tony Horwitz (2020) The author follows in Olmsted’s footsteps,(see previous book) to see what’s changed and what remains in the American South. Our reader was fascinated by the German immigrants who came to this country to escape after failed revolutions in Germany. They were liberal free-thinkers, and socialists.
4. **“The Soul of America: the battle for our better angels”** by Jon Meecham (2019) This nonfiction book looks at post-civil war presidencies and how many times our country faced challenges to civil rights, with examples of bravery by presidents when all seems dark. These were imperfect people but at the right moment saw a wrong and sought to repair it. Uplifting.
5. **“Gender Queer”** by Maia Kobabe (2022) Two of our reviewers highly recommended this book to expand understanding of the fluidity of gender. It is autobiographical and illustrates non-conforming gender roles.

Books on Trauma mentioned:

6. **“The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma”** (2015) (previously reviewed and recommended).
7. **“Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--from Domestic Abuse to Politics Terror”** by Judith Herman (2015) The classic book on recovery from trauma of sexual abuse. Herman has a new book coming out **“Truth and Repair: how trauma survivors envision justice”** by Judith Herman (2023)
8. **“The Nazi Conspiracy: The Secret Plot to Kill Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill”** by Brad Meltzer and Josh Mensch (2023) This work of nonfiction reads like a novel and is a great read. A good reminder of the horrors of Nazism.

9. Banned Book: “**To Kill a Mockingbird**” by Harper Lee (1960} Pulitzer Prize winning book is about life in a small town of Maycomb Alabama during the Depression through the eyes of children watching their father defend a black man accused of rape, and the firestorm of emotion that erupted.
10. Banned Book “**The Bluest Eye**” by Toni Morrison (1970) In this fictional book, Morrison delves deep into the lives of poor blacks in Lorain Ohio in the 1940s. Our reader found it an unforgettable rendering of the bitter fruits of slavery in black communities, a fitting pairing with To Kill a Mockingbird. Brilliant, brilliant author!
11. Banned Book “**Brave New World**” by Aldous Huxley Written in 1931, before WW!!, Huxley describes a dark version of Utopia built on the concept that stability as the primary need of any civilization. He envisions pre-determined castes for embryos grown in artificial wombs, highly controlled lives with endless entertainments plus a drug called Soma for times when emotions begin to surface. Book and history are not needed, since everyone lives in the present moment and the world is perfect. This book is still relevant today!
12. Banned Book “**Animal Farm**” by George Orwell (1946)Orwell fought in Spain in 1937 and saw the horrors of Soviet pogroms where many of his friends died. When the Soviet Union became an ally to the United Kingdom during WWII, he saw the uncritical embrace of the Soviets and felt obligated to challenge it, though it was unpopular. He began writing it in 1943, published in 1946. Animal Farm is a fairy tale about animals that revolt against the cruel drunken farmer and take over the farm to run it on their own. At first all goes well in their egalitarian society, but gradually change comes as some animals assume leadership and some are more equal than others; ultimately they end up worse off than before but it is the gradual unchallenged descent back into darkness that is fascinating. It i