

## **Marblehead League Book Discussion Group 6/25/19**

Books discussed/ recommended to group:

1. “One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression Is Destroying Our Democracy” by Carol Anderson. The author discusses the many ways the vote has been suppressed, most often the poor, black, or students, beginning with a historical background of
2. disenfranchisement. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 gave the Federal government the right to look at disparities, and made states that have disenfranchised voters get federal approval before changing voting rights laws. In 2015, the Supreme Court in Shelby County VS. Holder case (5-4) partially undid the Voting Rights act. The author asserts that unfortunately what has been learned by those that wish to bend elections is that black and nonwhite voters can be suppressed. They have also learned that they can control the electoral machine. Finally, it seems that lies can be told by officials as long as there is a kernel of truth to it, and that can lead to the acceptance of broad untruths such as 70% of Americans coming to believe that voter fraud is a serious problem, while voter suppression is not. The ACLU has tried to intervene to force adequate voting machines and precincts, but it has not been in time. The take home message is that those who wish a fair vote must continue to keep ahead of the changes and tricks perpetrated by politicians who believe they must win at any cost.
3. “The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World” by Melinda Gates. This book is part memoir by Melinda Gates and part her exploration of how to change the world for the better. She discusses her life choices, her relationship with husband Bill and her current philanthropic work in third- world global communities, first learning about the communities and then finding ways to empower them. She lists the following as crucial to women’s empowerment: ability of women to control when they get pregnant and how often; banning early childhood marriage; giving women in agricultural communities the tools to better agriculture (seeds, better methods, etc.) She found that the cultures can be resistant to change and it can take 3 years to develop trust. She talks about the importance of listening to people with empathy, and being open to changing your mind.
4. “The Fifth Risk” by Michael Lewis. This book begins with the Trump transition, and how the massive trove of essential information from one administration is normally transferred to the incoming team, and what happened with the Trump team. It also is an in-depth dive into the work done in three Federal government departments: Energy, Agriculture, and Commerce. It is a look at the dedicated public servants who make the government work; sometimes the public workers are disparagingly referred to as the deep state. The risks Lewis identifies are : 1) Russia/ China 2) North Korea 3) Iran 4) Energy Grid Safety 5) Project management or mismanagement (referring to the complex US government departments and projects). This is a well-written book, recommended.

5. “Becoming” by Michelle Obama. Autobiography covers Michelle Obama’s life, background in Chicago, Princeton, Harvard, and her life in the White House. An inspiring window into the culture of strong black Chicago families. The importance of grandmothers to the resilience of families was a point remarked upon by several readers. Recommended.
6. “Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge” by Erica Armstrong Dunbar”. This is the story of a slave of Marsha Washington who ran away when she was going to be given to another woman as a wedding present. She made her way to New Hampshire and made a life with a seaman. Although the Washingtons implored her to return, she refused. She told her story and it was recorded.
6. “Sojourner Truth's America” by Margaret Washington. This is the story of Sojourner Truth’s remarkable life set firmly in the history of the 1800s. She was a compelling orator who could neither read nor write, but battled slavery along with Fredrick Douglas and others. She utilized her deep faith and spirituality as a source of inspiration. Highly recommended.
7. “The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate” by Peter Wohlleben. Written by a forester who managed forests in Germany, the book describes his life-long quest to understand the ecologic interactions of trees, based on his observations; it turns out trees interact and communicate in surprising ways. Exciting and wonderful insights into the natural world. We love this book!
8. “The Overstory” highly recommended by several attendees at a previous League book group and recently won a Pulitzer Prize. Great partner to Hidden Life of Trees.
9. “Democracy in Chains Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America by Nancy MacLean. How did America come to be dominated by business and big money in politics? A white political economist named James McGill Buchanan who developed his ideas during Jim Crow South was the originator of the concepts that are now funded by the Koch brothers and others.
10. “The Mueller Report” by The Washington Post and “The Mueller Report: The Final Report of the Special Counsel Investigation of Donald J. Trump” by Robert S. Mueller. Both were surprised to learn from the Report that there were instances where people had intentionally used encrypted communications to hide information and others that destroyed records rather than turn them over to the Mueller team. This is a must-read for those who want to know what happened in 2016, and have the time.

11. “No Time to Spare: Thinking About What Matters” by Ursula Le Guin and Karen Joy Fowler. A wonderful collection of essays on the trials of getting older by a beloved author. Highly recommended.
12. “Home Fire: A Novel” by Kamila Shamsie. An acclaimed work of fiction that follows a British Pakistani family based in London, providing a wonderful inside view of a different culture.
13. “Madame Fourcade’s Secret War: the daring young woman who led France’s largest spy network against Hitler” by Lynne Olson. A fascinating story about a rebellious young woman who finds the courage to fight for her country against Hitler.
14. “Blueprint” “Blueprint: The Evolutionary Origins of a Good Society” by Nicholas A. Christakis. The author works at the Human Nature Lab at Yale. He posits the existence of a ‘social suite’ of human behaviors that are beneficial to humans and have been selected through evolution: love, friendship, cooperation, and decency. This is an optimistic book that sees a positive arc of common humanity. He uses examples such as historical shipwrecks and asks what characteristics of the group allowed them to survive.
15. “Rising Out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist” by Eli Saslow. A home-schooled white nationalist, whose father founded Storm Front, leaves to attend college at New College in Sarasota, Florida, facing for the first time those he has been taught to hate. The book traces the reaction of other students to his reputation and beliefs and the attempts by some to include him in their circle of friends. Dereck Black eventually renounces white nationalism. Excellent, provocative book.
16. “This America: the case for the nation” by Jill Lepore. A review of the history of the struggle for equality in this country based on the ideas that knotted the new country together. Through myriad examples, Lepore shows this is and has always been an ongoing struggle to hold the country to the principles on which it was founded. I was looking for easy answers but this wasn’t that...there are no easy answers because America is the struggle. Highly recommended.
17. “The Pioneers: The Heroic Story of the Settlers Who Brought the American Ideal West” by David McCullough. A very readable book, which has its roots in detailed diaries and troves of historical documents kept in college library collections. What motivated settlers to move from New England to unknown territories? Who stayed? Who left? Highly recommended.