

LWVSC 2020 Book List

January 16--Moderated by Sukey Robb-Wilder

On Fire: The (Burning) Case for a Green New Deal, Naomi Klein, 291 pages, 2019.

These long-form essays, based on her extensive research and reporting, show Klein at her most prophetic and philosophical, investigating the climate crisis not only as a political challenge but as a spiritual and imaginative one as well. Delving into the clash between ecological time and our culture of “perpetual now,” the soaring history of rapid human change in the face of grave threats, rising white supremacy and fortified borders as a form of “climate barbarism,” and more, this is a rousing call to transformation – and a dire warning about what awaits if we fail to act.

The Green New Deal: Why the Fossil Fuel Civilization Will Collapse by 2028, and the Bold Economic Plan to Save Life on Earth, Jeremy Rifkin, 246 pages, 2019.

While the Green New Deal has become a lightning rod in the political sphere, there is a parallel movement emerging within the business community. Key sectors of the economy are fast decoupling from fossil fuels in favor of ever cheaper solar and wind energies and the new business opportunities and employment that accompany them. New studies are sounding the alarm that trillions of dollars in stranded fossil fuel assets could create a carbon bubble likely to burst by 2028, causing the collapse of the fossil fuel civilization. The marketplace is speaking, and governments will need to adapt if they are to survive and prosper. Rifkin delivers an urgent and well-documented plan to confront climate change, transform the American economy, and create a green post-fossil fuel infrastructure and culture, drawing from his 25 years of experience implementing Green New Deal-style transitions in the EU and China.

February 20—Moderated by Nancy Burrington

How To Read The Constitution -- And Why, by Kim Wehle, 352 pages, 2019.

In Publishers Weekly: In this accessible treatise, Wehle, a law professor and commentator for CNN and MSNBC, deplors the state of relationships among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the U.S. government. She argues that the “ingenious” checks and balances the Constitution establishes between the three branches are no longer working, and the executive branch is accumulating too much power.

March 19—Moderated by Mary Fricker

The Myth of Capitalism: Monopolies and the Death of Competition, by Jonathan Tepper, 320 pages, 2018.

The Myth of Capitalism tells the story of how America has gone from an open, competitive marketplace to an economy where a few very powerful companies dominate key industries that affect our daily lives. We have the illusion of choice, but for most critical decisions, we have only one or two companies, when it comes to high speed Internet, health insurance, medical care, mortgage title insurance, social networks, Internet searches, or even consumer goods like toothpaste. The solution is vigorous anti-trust enforcement to return America to a period where competition created higher economic growth, more jobs, higher

wages and a level playing field for all. *The Myth of Capitalism* itackles the big questions of: why is the US becoming a more unequal society, why is economic growth anemic despite trillions of dollars of federal debt and money printing, why the number of start-ups has declined, and why are workers losing out.

April 16—Moderated by Mary Virdeh

The Elephant Whisperer: My Life with the Herd in the African Wild, by Lawrence Anthony and Graham Spence, 381 pages, 2009.

This is a book that is a pleasure to read. In our difficult times I found it heartwarming. This is a vividly personal account offering fascinating insights into the lives of wild elephants in the broader context of Zulu culture in post-Apartheid South Africa. I found the insight that another species could communicate so well with each other and also make emotional connections with humans fascinating.

May 21—Moderated by Carole Sunlight

Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup, by John Carreyou. 352 pages, 2018

The full inside story of the breathtaking rise and shocking collapse of Theranos, the one-time multibillion-dollar biotech startup. In 2014, Theranos founder and CEO Elizabeth Holmes was widely seen as the female Steve Jobs: a brilliant Stanford dropout whose startup “unicorn” promised to revolutionize the medical industry with a machine that would make blood testing significantly faster and easier. Backed by investors such as Larry Ellison and Tim Draper, Theranos sold shares in a fundraising round that valued the company at more than \$9 billion, putting Holmes’s worth at an estimated \$4.7 billion. There was just one problem: The technology didn’t work.

June 18—Moderated by Karen Rust

Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life, by Dr. Louise Aronson, 464 pages, 2019.

For more than 5,000 years, "old" has been defined as beginning between the ages of 60 and 70. That means most people alive today will spend more years in elderhood than in childhood, and many will be elders for 40 years or more. Yet at the very moment that humans are living longer than ever before, we’ve made old age into a disease, a condition to be dreaded, denigrated, neglected, and denied. Harvard-trained geriatrician Aronson uses stories from her quarter century of caring for patients, and draws from history, science, literature, popular culture, to weave a vision of old age that’s neither nightmare nor utopian fantasy--a vision full of joy, wonder, frustration, outrage, and hope about aging, medicine, and humanity itself.

July 16—Moderated by Carrie Anabo

American Prison. by Shane Bauer, 290 pages, 2018.

In 2014, award winning journalist Shane Bauer went undercover as an entry level guard at a private prison in Winfield, Louisiana. After four months he quit and wrote an expose article for Mother Jones magazine that won a National Magazine Award and became the most read

feature in the history of the magazine. But he felt more needed to be said so he wrote this book which expands on his experience and weaves in a history of for-profit prisons in America and the true face of justice in America. One of Barack Obama's favorite books of 2018.

August 20—Moderated by Jan Randall

The World in a Grain, by Vince Beiser, 304 pages, 2018.

This is the compelling true story of sand, the hugely important and diminishing natural resource that grows more essential every day, and of the people who mine it, sell it, build with it—and sometimes, even kill for it. It's also a provocative examination of the serious human and environmental costs incurred by our dependence on sand, which has received little public attention. Award-winning journalist Vince Beiser delves deep into this world, taking readers on a journey across the globe, from the United States to remote corners of India, China, and Dubai to explain why sand is so crucial to modern life. Along the way, readers encounter world-changing innovators, island-building entrepreneurs, desert fighters, and murderous sand pirates. The result is an entertaining and eye-opening work, one that is both unexpected and involving, rippling with fascinating detail and filled with surprising characters.

September 17—Moderated by Juanita Roland

Good Economics for Hard Times, by Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, 417 pages, 2019.

The winners of the Nobel Prize show how economics, when done right, can help us solve the thorniest social and political problems of our day. Figuring out how to deal with today's critical economic problems is perhaps the great challenge of our time. Much greater than space travel or perhaps even the next revolutionary medical breakthrough, what is at stake is the whole idea of the good life as we have known it. In this revolutionary book, renowned MIT economists Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo take on this challenge, building on cutting-edge research in economics explained with lucidity and grace. Original, provocative, and urgent, *Good Economics for Hard Times* makes a persuasive case for an intelligent interventionism and a society built on compassion and respect. It is an extraordinary achievement, one that shines a light to help us appreciate and understand our precariously balanced world.

October 15—Moderated by Judie Coleman

The Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community and War, by Nathaniel Philbrick, 492 pages, 2006.

Note: 2020 is the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower. What makes Philbrick's book so fascinating and accessible—the way he turns the Pilgrim legend on its head and shakes out fresh insights from the crusty old mythology we all absorbed in grade school—is present in full force Such leading figures as William Bradford, Benjamin Church and Miles Standish of the so-called Plymouth Colony ... emerge from the pages of history as understandable if not always admirable figures, and Guidall's evocations of the sadly depleted (by European diseases) Wampanoag Indians and their chief, Massasoit, are equally believable. ” Judie's comments: Extremely readable book. Very difficult emotionally in some places because some of what went down was brutal. The traditional myth did (sort of) happen -- only that wasn't the end of the

story. On the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower, we owe it to ourselves to know the true story, the good and the bad.

November 19—Select Books for 2020

December – No meeting.

Interesting Books That Were Not Selected

Proposed by Nancy Burrington

How to Be An Antiracist, by Ibram X. Kendi, 300 pp. 2019

“Kendi is on a mission to push those of us who believe we are not racists to become something else: antiracists, who support ideas and policies affirming that ‘the racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences — that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group.’ For Kendi, the founding director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, there are no nonracists; there are only racists — people who allow racist ideas to proliferate without opposition — and antiracists, those who expose and eradicate such ideas wherever they encounter them.”

The Vegetarian by Han Kang, translated by Deborah Smith, 188 pp. 2016

“All the trigger warnings on earth cannot prepare a reader for the traumas of this Korean author’s translated debut in the Anglophone world. At first, you might eye the title and scan the first innocuous sentence — “Before my wife turned vegetarian, I thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way” — and think that the biggest risk here might be converting to vegetarianism. (I myself converted, again; we’ll see if it lasts.) But there is no end to the horrors that rattle in and out of this ferocious, magnificently death-affirming novel.” Man Booker Prize International Winner

Let The People Pick the President: The Case for Abolishing the Electoral College, by Jesse Wegman, 304 pp., coming March 17, 2020

New York Times editorial board member Jesse Wegman makes a powerful case for abolishing the antiquated and antidemocratic Electoral College, and choosing presidents based on a national popular vote. He uncovers the Electoral College's controversial origins, profiles the many attempts to reform it over the years, and explains why it is now essential for us to remove this obsolete system and finally make every citizen's vote matter.

Proposed by Juanita Roland

It's Up to Us: Ten Little Ways We Can Bring About Big Change, by John Kasich, 240 pages, 2019.

A Little Book about Big Change: We all want the same things. We want to live a life of purpose and meaning. We want to leave a legacy for our children and grandchildren. We want to leave the world a better place. And yet we spend so much time wringing our hands over what’s wrong and not nearly enough time fixing those things within our control.

Songs of America: Patriotism, Protest, and the Music That Made a Nation, by Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw, 320 pages, 2019.

New York Times Bestseller: A celebration of American history through the music that helped to shape a nation. Through all the years of strife and triumph, America has been shaped not just by our elected leaders and our formal politics but also by our music—by the lyrics, performers, and instrumentals that have helped to carry us through the dark days and to celebrate the bright ones. “Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw form an irresistible duo—connecting us to music as an unsung force in our nation's history.”—Doris Kearns Goodwin
Proposed by Juanita Roland.

How We Win, by Farah Pandith, 400 pages, 2019. (Recent speaker at World Affairs Council.)

“Drawing on her decades of experience, Pandith unweaves the tangled web of extremism and demonstrates how government officials, tech CEOs, and concerned citizens alike can do their part to defeat it.” – Former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. Despite the billions of dollars spent since 9/11 trying to defeat terrorist organizations, the so-called Islamic State, Al Qaeda, and other groups remain a terrifying geopolitical threat. In some ways the threat has grown worse: The 9/11 hijackers came from far away; the danger today can come from anywhere—from the other side of the world to across the street. Unable to stem recruitment, we seem doomed to a worsening struggle with a constantly evolving enemy that remains several steps ahead of us. Unfortunately, current policies seem almost guaranteed not to reduce extremist violence but instead to make it easier for terrorists to spread their hateful ideas, recruit new members, and carry out attacks.

Proposed by Judie Colman

Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time, by Brigid Schulte, 368 pages, 2014.

Journalist Schulte manages to take a fairly pedestrian topic, the value of leisure in modern American society, and turn it into a compelling narrative on work, play, and personal achievement. Her discussions with a wide range of experts clarify her concerns and open her mind to the manufactured madness of a competitive culture and the false promise of the ruthlessly dedicated “ideal worker.” Schulte follows every lead to uncover why Americans are so determined to exhaust themselves for work and what has been lost in the process. Next Review: *Overwhelmed* is a time management book that's not just about how to be more productive and effective--it's about the broad and fascinating role time plays in our emotional satisfaction, our physical health, and even our notions of gender equality. Jude's comment: Reading this book changed how I live my life. Made me aware of self-imposed stresses I had taken for granted which grew out of our America's current worldview – but which were not contributing in any positive way to my overall happiness and life.

Proposed by Karen Rust

Talking to Strangers. What We Should Know About the People We Don't Know.
by Malcolm Gladwell, 400 pages, 2019.

Gladwell explores the many ways we fail to communicate with often disastrous consequences. He starts with the tragic death of Sandra Bland begun with a traffic stop and goes

on to why we can't spot liars, how diplomats totally misread Hitler, why Madoff was not spotted and why we are inclined towards trust. The audio book has recordings of the people involved.

Confederates in the Attic. Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War, by Tony Horowitz, 432 pages, 1999.

The past is never dead. It's not even past. These words of Southerner Faulkner are never truer than in the continuing influence of the Civil War (or the War of Northern Aggression as it is sometimes known) on our country. Horowitz visits battlefields and gets to know reenactors who feel they are the keepers of history. The unresolved tensions and grievances are seen today in ballot boxes, racial violence and white nationalist group.

Proposed by Mary Fricker

The Space Barons: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, and the Quest to Colonize the Cosmos, by Christian Davenport, 308 pages, 2018.

The extreme challenge of space travel is the backdrop for Christian Davenport's new book. Davenport is a staff writer at the Washington Post, where he covers the space and defense industries. His book documents the emergence of a commercial space industry in the past 15 years. ...The adversary in Davenport's story is the military-industrial complex.

Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth, by Sarah Smarsh, 290 pages, 2018.

A deeply humane memoir with crackles of clarifying insight, "Heartland" is one of a growing number of important works that together merit their own section in nonfiction aisles across the country: America's postindustrial decline. Or, perhaps, simply: class. With deft primers on the Homestead Act, the farming crisis of the '80s and Reaganomics, Smarsh shows how the false promise of the "American dream" was used to subjugate the poor. It's a powerful mantra.

Proposed by Jan Randall

Dopesick: Dealers, Doctors and the Drug Company that Addicted America, by Beth Macy, 375 pages, 2018

Macy charts the opioid crisis in America. The book covers the whole spectrum from victims and their communities, first responders, to the medical culture that allowed the epidemic to happen. Suggested reviews of the book:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/heartbreaking-stories-of-young-lives-lost-and-families-crushed-in-the-opioid-epidemic/2018/09/28/8e6858b8-af36-11e8-9a6a-565d92a3585d_story.html

Endurance: A Year in Space, A Lifetime of Discovery, 387 pages, 2017

Kelly makes going to space educational as well as interesting. He writes about his own life and what motivated him to become an astronaut mixed in with his experience of spending a year in space with the Russians on the space shuttle. If you think you want to go to space think again. His reentry into life on the ground was both mentally and physically painful.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/07/books/review/endurance-scott-kelly.html>

The Dreamt Land: Chasing Water and Dust Across California, by Mark Arax, 562 pages, 2019

Yes, this book is long but it is a must read for understanding the water situation in California historically and today. The New York Times calls the book half environmental nightmare and half remarkable story in a deeply exhausting, remarkable account. Arax writes that when it comes to water in California: “The resources are finite. The greed isn’t.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/books/review/the-dreamt-land-mark-arax.html>

The Overstory, by Richard Powers, 502 pages, 2018, W.W. Norton & Company.

The book focuses on the energy and life of trees as linked via stories about the fictional lives of humans. Below are two links with more information. (I usually do not read fiction but two friends have recommended this book to me and it has received wonderful reviews. The book is also rather long, however, my friends say it is such a beautiful read that the length is no problem. It is also a winner of the Pulitzer Prize.)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/09/books/review/overstory-richard-powers.html>

<https://www.indiebound.org/book/9780393635522?aff=NYT>

The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey, by Rinker Buck, 440 pages, 2015

I loved this uplifting, humorous, adventure story and recommended it last year. Rinker and his brother, both characters, travel across the U.S. on the old Oregon Trail in a covered wagon. Crammed with history that filters into the consciousness in the most delightful way I found it an uplifting read and a breath of fresh air after reading some of the heavier political books.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/24/books/review-in-the-oregon-trail-two-brothers-take-an-1800s-style-road-trip.html>

The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee, by David Treuer, 512 pages, 2019.

Treuer examines recent generations of American Indian history. Through memoir, interviews and extensive reading, Treuer counters the familiar narratives of invisibility that have so readily frozen America’s indigenous peoples. Interweaving stories from family members, the voices of policymakers and assessments of contemporary youth culture, the book introduces alternative visions of American history. The result is an informed, moving and kaleidoscopic portrait of “Indian survival, resilience, adaptability, pride and place in modern life.” Rarely has a single volume in Native American history attempted such comprehensiveness.

Proposed by Sukey Robb-Wilde

Harvest of Empire, a History of Latinos in America, Juan Gonzalez, 311 pages, 2011.

This book lays out an eye-opening alternative history, the extraordinary saga of the Latinos in North America, brilliantly and compactly told. This excellent history is fair-minded, extremely well-documented, and filled with the sort of details that explain rather than inflame. A profound book with an equally profound message about the origins of Latino migration, domination, and colonization, and historical lessons not found in many American textbooks. Offers an insider’s view of the rich and varied fabric of the people soon to be the largest minority group in the US. The history is often brutal, the experiences of the people caught up in the process wrenching. But Gonzalez paints a canvas that is in the end profoundly

optimistic, for in the Latinization of the United States he sees the possibility of a renaissance of American democracy.

Proposed by Carole Sunlight

A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death, by Dr, B.J. Miller & Shoshana Berger, 544 Pages, July 16, 2019.

“There is nothing wrong with you for dying,” hospice physician B.J. Miller and journalist Shoshana Berger write “Our ultimate purpose here isn’t so much to help you die as it is to free up as much life as possible until you do.” Theirs is a clear-eyed and big-hearted action plan for approaching the end of life, written to help readers feel more in control of an experience that so often seems anything but controllable. Their book offers everything from step-by-step instructions for how to do your paperwork and navigate the healthcare system to answers to questions you might be afraid to ask your doctor. Get advice for how to break the news to your employer, whether to share old secrets with your family, how to face friends who might not be as empathetic as you’d hoped, and how to talk to your children about your will. There are lessons for survivors, like how to shut down a loved one’s social media accounts, clean out the house, and write a great eulogy.