

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS – DEC. 2023 THRU MARCH 2024

Demon Copperhead, by Barbara Kingsolver (2022 – 548 pg)

Set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, the story of a boy born to a teenaged single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets beyond his dead father's good looks and copper-colored hair, a caustic wit, and a fierce talent for survival. In a plot that never pauses for breath, relayed in his own unsparing voice, he braves the modern perils of foster care, child labor, derelict schools, athletic success, addiction, disastrous loves, and crushing losses. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favor of cities.

Vanishing Half, by Brit Bennett (2020 – 343 pages)

The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Ten years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters' storylines intersect? Weaving together multiple strands and generations of this family, from the Deep South to California, from the 1950s to the 1990s,

The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek, by Kim Richardson (2019 – 308 pages)

"Cussy Mary Carter is the last of her kind, her skin the color of a blue damselfly in these dusty hills. But that doesn't mean she's got nothing to offer. As a member of the Pack Horse Library Project, Cussy delivers books to the hill folk of Troublesome, hoping to spread learning in these desperate times. But not everyone is so keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and the hardscrabble Kentuckians are quick to blame a Blue for any trouble in their small town. The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's determination to bring a little bit of hope to the darkly hollers"--

Libra, by Don DeLillo (1988 – 456 pages)

Did Lee Harvey Oswald act alone in assassinating President John F. Kennedy? In his ninth novel, American Book Award winner DeLillo (for *White Noise*, LJ 2/1/85) addresses this question, skillfully weaving together fact and fiction to create an engrossing tale. It is a measure of his success that while reading, one must keep reminding oneself that this is, indeed, a novel making ``no claim to literal truth." DeLillo's vision is not of a single, perfectly working scheme but rather of ``a rambling affair that succeeded in short term mainly due to chance." The cast, both real and fictional, ranges from scheming CIA agents to Mafia dons, but what haunts the reader most is the image of Oswald as a confused young man searching for an identity and accidentally caught up in something bigger than himself.

Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, by Gabrielle Zevin (2022 – 401 pg)

On a bitter-cold day, in the December of his junior year at Harvard, Sam Masur exits a subway car and sees, amid the hordes of people waiting on the platform, Sadie Green. He calls her name. For a moment, she pretends she hasn't heard him, but then, she turns, and a game begins: a legendary collaboration that will launch them to stardom. These friends, intimates since childhood, borrow money, beg favors, and, before even graduating college, they have created their first blockbuster, *Ichigo*. Overnight, the world is theirs. Not even twenty-five years old, Sam and Sadie are brilliant, successful, and rich, but these qualities won't protect them from their own creative ambitions or the betrayals of their hearts. Spanning thirty years, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Venice Beach, California, and lands in between and far beyond, Gabrielle Zevin's *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* is a dazzling and intricately imagined novel that examines the multifarious nature of identity, disability, failure, the redemptive possibilities in play, and above all, our need to connect: to be loved and to love. Yes, it is a love story, but it is not one you have read before.

THE HEAVEN and EARTH GROCERY STORE, by James McBride (2023 – 385 pg)

"In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new development, the last thing they expected to find was a skeleton at the

bottom of a well. Who the skeleton was and how it got there were two of the long-held secrets kept by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side and shared ambitions and sorrows. Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Moshe integrated his theater and where Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. When the state came looking for a deaf boy to institutionalize him, it was Chona and Nate Timblin, the Black janitor at Moshe's theater and the unofficial leader of the Black community on Chicken Hill, who worked together to keep the boy safe. As these characters' stories overlap and deepen, it becomes clear how much the people who live on the margins of white, Christian America struggle and what they must do to survive.

HISTORY of LOVE, by Nicloe Krauss (2005 - 272 pg)

A boy in Poland falls in love and writes a book when World War II arrives, and both the love and the book are lost. Leo Gursky, now in his eighties and living in New York City, struggles to be noticed each day so that people will know he has not yet died. Meanwhile, 14-year-old Alma Singer wants her brother to be normal and her mother to be happy again after the death of Alma's father. In a quest for the story behind her name, Alma and Leo find each other, and Leo learns that the book he wrote so long ago has not been lost. Krauss (*Man Walks into a Room*) develops the story beautifully, incrementally revealing details to expose more and more of the mystery behind Leo's book, *The History of Love*.

LIES MY TEACHER TOLD ME, by James Loewen (2018 - 470 pg)

Everything your American History Textbook got Wrong

Loewen (sociology, Univ. of Vermont; *Mississippi: Conflict and Change*), whose interest lies in looking for "weapons of mass instruction" in American history textbooks, first shared his findings over ten years ago in the best-selling first edition of this book. Here he presents his updated assessments, starting with an introduction that "re-caps" and "pre-caps" what the book covers, and explains his concept of the failings of 12 American history textbooks. He finds, for example, that Woodrow Wilson is still given hero status although he was almost single-

handedly responsible for forcing the removal of any one who was not a WASP from all levels of government. He also notes that we are spending more time on the War of 1812 than on our longest war: Vietnam.

THE POSTCARD, by Anne Berest (2021 – 455 pg)

"January, 2003. Together with the usual holiday cards, an anonymous postcard is delivered to the Berest family home. On the front, a photo of the Opéra Garnier in Paris. On the back, the names of Anne Berest's maternal great-grandparents, Ephraïm and Emma, and their children, Noémie and Jacques--all killed at Auschwitz. Fifteen years after the postcard is delivered, Anne, the heroine of this novel, is moved to discover who sent it and why. Aided by her chain-smoking mother, family members, friends, associates, a private detective, a graphologist, and many others, she embarks on a journey to discover the fate of the Rabinovitch family:

THE WORST HARD TIME , by Timothy Egan (2005 - 350 pg)

Egan tells an extraordinary tale in this visceral account of how America's great, grassy plains turned to dust, and how the ferocious plains winds stirred up an endless series of "black blizzards" that were like a biblical plague: "Dust clouds boiled up, ten thousand feet or more in the sky, and rolled like moving mountains" in what became known as the Dust Bowl. But the plague was man-made, as Egan shows: the plains weren't suited to farming, and plowing up the grass to plant wheat, along with a confluence of economic disaster-the Depression-and natural disaster-eight years of drought-resulted in an ecological and human catastrophe that Egan details with stunning specificity. He grounds his tale in portraits of the people who settled the plains: hardy Americans and immigrants desperate for a piece of land to call their own and lured by the lies of promoters who said the ground was arable.

A QUIET FLAME , by Philip Kerr (2009 – 360 pg)

A Bernie Gunther novel

At the start of Kerr's stellar fifth Bernie Gunther novel (after *The One from the Other*), the former Berlin homicide detective seeks exile in Argentina in 1950, along with others connected to the Nazi past (one of his fellow ship passengers is Adolf Eichmann). A few weeks after Gunther arrives in Buenos Aires, a local policeman, Colonel Montalban, asks his help in solving the savage murder of 15-year-old Grete Wohlauf. Montalban has noticed similarities between this crime and two unsolved murders Gunther investigated in 1932 Germany. Another teenage girl's disappearance heightens the urgency of the inquiry. In exchange for free medical treatment for his just diagnosed thyroid cancer, Gunther agrees to subtly grill members of the large German community. A secret he stumbles on soon places his life in jeopardy. Kerr, who's demonstrated his versatility with high-quality entries in other genres, cleverly and plausibly grafts history onto a fast-paced thriller plot.