

LWVSC 2024 Book List

January 16, 2024: Moderated by Mary Fricker

Inflamed: Abandonment, Heroism, and Outrage in Wine Country's Deadliest Firestorm, by Anne E. Belden and Paul Gullixson, 464 pages, October 31, 2023.

This is the gripping and emotional narrative detailing what happened to the seniors, employees, and rescuers before, during, and after the Tubbs Fire decimated portions of Santa Rosa, including Oakmont Senior Living Villa Capri and part of Varenna at Fountaingrove. Anne Belden and Paul Gullixson are professional journalists and Sonoma County residents who spent three years recording each phase of the disaster in agonizing detail—from the botched evacuation and its excruciating aftermath to the investigations, lawsuits, and breakdowns that followed. (Review from distributor Simon & Schuster.)

February 15, 2024: Moderated by Karen Rust

Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism, by Rachel Maddow, 416 pages, October 2023

Rachel Maddow traces the fight to preserve American democracy back to World War II, when a handful of committed public servants and brave private citizens thwarted far-right plotters trying to steer our nation toward an alliance with the Nazis. At the same time, a handful of extraordinary activists and journalists were tracking the scheme, exposing it even as it was unfolding. In 1941 the U.S. Department of Justice finally made a frontal attack, identifying the key plotters, finding their backers, and prosecuting dozens in federal court. The parallels to today are obvious and chilling.

March 21, 2024: Moderated by Juanita Roland

The Dictionary of Lost Words: A Novel, by [Pip Williams](#) 402 pages, | Apr 6, 2021

“Delightful . . . [a] captivating and slyly subversive fictional paean to the real women whose work on the *Oxford English Dictionary* went largely unheralded.”—*The New York Times Book Review*.

Set during the height of the women’s suffrage movement and with the Great War looming, *The Dictionary of Lost Words* reveals a lost narrative, hidden between the lines of a history written by men. Inspired by actual events, author Pip Williams has delved into the archives of the *Oxford English Dictionary* to tell this highly original story. *The Dictionary of Lost Words* is a delightful, lyrical, and deeply thought-provoking celebration of words and the power of language to shape the world.

April 18, 2024: Moderated by Sukey Robb-Wilder

Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America, by Heather Cox Richardson, 286 pages, September 2023.

Richardson crafts a compelling and original narrative, explaining how, over the decades, a small group of wealthy people have made war on American ideals. By weaponizing language and promoting false history they have led us into authoritarianism -- creating a disaffected population and then promising to recreate an imagined past where those people could feel important again. She argues that taking our country back starts by remembering the elements of the nation's true history that marginalized Americans have always upheld. Their dedication to the principles on which this nation was founded has enabled us to renew and expand our commitment to democracy in the past. Richardson sees this history as a roadmap for the nation's future. Richardson's unique talent is to wrangle our giant, meandering, confusing news feed into a coherent story that singles out what we should pay attention to, what the historical roots and precedents are, and what possible paths lie ahead. Writing in her trademark calm prose, she manages to be both realistic and optimistic about the future of democracy. There are many books that tell us what has happened over the last five years. This book explains how we got to this perilous point, what our history really tells us about ourselves, and what the future of democracy can be.

May 16, 2024: Moderated by Jan Randall

The Blue Machine: How the Ocean Works, by [Helen Czerski](#), 440 pages, October 2023

A scientist's exploration of the "ocean engine"—the physics behind the ocean's systems—and why it matters.

All of Earth's oceans, from the equator to the poles, are a single engine powered by sunlight, driving huge flows of energy, water, life, and raw materials. In *The Blue Machine*, physicist and oceanographer Helen Czerski illustrates the mechanisms behind this defining feature of our planet, voyaging from the depths of the ocean floor to tropical coral reefs, estuaries that feed into shallow coastal seas, and Arctic ice floes.

Most important, however, Czerski reveals that while the ocean engine has sustained us for thousands of years, today it is faced with urgent threats. By understanding how the ocean works, and its essential role in our global system, we can learn how to protect our blue machine. Timely, elegant, and passionately argued, *The Blue Machine* presents a fresh perspective on what it means to be a citizen of an ocean planet.

June 20 2024: Moderated by Dorcas Walton

A Woman of No Importance: the Untold Story of the America Spy who Helped to Win World War II by Sonia Purnell 368 pages, 2019

People tell me that this is a spellbinding, can't-put-it-down true story of this America spy. Based on new and extensive research, Sonia Purnell has for the first time uncovered the full secret life of Virginia Hall--an astounding and inspiring story of heroism, spycraft, resistance, and personal triumph over shocking adversity. *A Woman of No Importance* is the breathtaking story of how one woman's fierce persistence helped win the war.

July 18, 2024: Moderated by Gwen Kinney

Differ We Must: How Lincoln Succeeded in a Divided America. by [Steve Inskeep](#), 351 pages, Oct 3, 2023

A compelling and nuanced exploration of Abraham Lincoln's political acumen, illuminating a great politician's strategy in a country divided—and lessons for our own disorderly present. In 1855, with the United States at odds over slavery, the lawyer Abraham Lincoln wrote a note to his best friend, the son of a Kentucky slaveowner. Lincoln rebuked his friend for failing to oppose slavery. But he added: "If for this you and I must differ, differ we must," and said they would be friends forever. Throughout his life and political career, Lincoln often agreed to disagree. Democracy demanded it, since even an adversary had a vote. **The man who went on to become America's sixteenth president has assumed many roles in our historical consciousness, but most notable is that he was, unapologetically, a politician.** And as Steve Inskeep argues, it was *because* he was willing to engage in politics—meeting with critics, sometimes working with them and other times outwitting them—that he was able to lead a social revolution.

August 15, 2024: Moderated by Judie Colemoa

A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them by [Timothy Egan](#), 2023, 404 pp.

This historical thriller tells the riveting story of the Klan's rise to power in the 1920s, not in the old Confederacy, but in the Heartland and the West, including California. The powerful Klan took radical steps to suppress Blacks, Jews, Catholics and immigrants. A cunning con man drove that rise in power, and it took a woman to stop him and bring down the Klan. This book contributes to a greater understanding of our own age.

September 19, 2024: Moderated by Marie McKinney

The River of Doubt by [Candice Millard](#), 416 pages, 2005.

A Kirkus Review: The 26th U.S. president, failing re-election, at age 55 has an adventure that nearly kills him. Historian Millard records Theodore Roosevelt's exploration of a hitherto uncharted part of the Amazon. With devoted son Kermit and truly intrepid Brazilian co-commander Cândido Rondon, along with a band of hardy recruits, the party plunged into the fierce, fecund jungle and its unknown dangers. (It's an exploit that standard TR biographies generally treat lightly, if at all). Millard tells the story wonderfully, marshaling ecology, geography, human and natural history to tell the tale of the jungle primeval, of bravery and privation, determination and murder in the ranks as cowboy Roosevelt survived the Indians of the Amazon.

October 17, 2024: Moderated by Carrie Anobo

The Man Without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin by Masha Gessen. 315 pages, 2012

The Man Without a Face is the chilling account of how a low-level, small-minded KGB operative ascended to the Russian presidency and, in an astonishingly short time, destroyed years

of progress and made his country once more a threat to his own people and to the world. Handpicked as a successor by the "family" surrounding an ailing and increasingly unpopular Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin seemed like a perfect choice for the oligarchy to shape according to its own designs. Suddenly the boy who had stood in the shadows, dreaming of ruling the world, was a public figure, and his popularity soared. Russia and an infatuated West were determined to see the progressive leader of their dreams, even as he seized control of media, sent political rivals and critics into exile or to the grave, and smashed the country's fragile electoral system, concentrating power in the hands of his cronies.

November 21, 2024: Plan for 2025

Other Books That Were Suggested

Suggested by Mary Fricker:

A Pilgrimage to Eternity, from Canterbury to Rome in Search of Faith by Timothy Egan, 384 pages, 2019.

A Kirkus Review: A joy and a privilege to read, this is a pilgrimage to find religion—or truth, or the way—that pleasingly blends memoir, travelogue, and history. In a fascinating page-turner, the author chronicles his travels, mostly via foot but also via car and train, along the Via Francigena, a 1,200-mile medieval route that runs from Canterbury to Rome. ... Egan traversed this route in search of God or some type of significant spiritual experience. A skeptic by nature and Catholic by baptism, he realized that he needed to decide what he believes or admit what he does not.... Finding people and places warm and welcoming in each village and city, allowing himself to be amazed, lingering to rest blistered feet, and discovering soul-stirring spots—all this kept him pushing on, and readers will be thankful for his determination.

The Pioneers, The Heroic Story of The Settlers Who Brought The American Ideal West by David McCullough, 352 pages, 2019.

A Kirkus Review: A lively history of the Ohio River region in the years between the Revolution and the Civil War that students of American History will find captivating. “Ohio fever” spread throughout a New England crippled, after the war, by economic depression, but Southerners also moved west, fomenting the conditions that would, at the end of McCullough’s vivid narrative, end in regional war three generations later. His narrative abounds with well-recognized figures in American history—John Quincy Adams, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Johnny Appleseed. His account of Aaron Burr—who conspired to overthrow the government of Mexico (and, later, his own country) after killing Alexander Hamilton, recruiting confederates in the Ohio River country—is alone worth the price of admission.

The Return of George Washington 1783-1789 by Edward J. Larson, 400 pages, 2014.

A Kirkus Review: Illuminating history of an overlooked period in the life of our first president. Profound, even affectionate, scholarship infuses every graceful sentence. During the years between the end of the American Revolution and the commencement of his first term as the first president, George Washington remained a busy farmer, slave owner, behind-the-scenes political figure and national hero. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Larson shows us a Washington who craved being home, a man who only reluctantly allowed politics or necessity to draw him away. In the central chapters, the author deals with the Constitutional Convention, with Washington’s quiet though essential role.

Suggested by Karen Rust

Revisionist History Season 9 Guns, by Malcolm Gladwell, 6 episodes of about 40 minutes each, 2023

This is kind of different, a podcast. But Gladwell's exploration of gun culture is riveting. He brought up so many things that were fascinating to me. Bizarre Supreme Court recordings, the lasting cultural effects of westerns, how medical advances have altered our perception of "the murder rate", what treating trauma does to doctors. From a Canadian to whom the gun culture is alien.

Suggested by Carrie Anabo.

Master Slave Husband Wife, by Ilyon Woo. 334 pages, 2023.

This is one of those great American stories that no one ever heard of...until now. In December, 1848, a young enslaved couple named Ellen and William Craft set out on a journey of self emancipation like no other. They traveled openly by rail, coach and steam ship from Macon, Georgia to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They could do this because Ellen, who passed as white, disguised herself as a wealthy, disabled man with William as "his" slave. The boldness of their carefully planned escape from slavery would be exceeded by its brilliant execution. Their experiences along the way reveal so much about life in that period. A fascinating tale.

Diary of a Misfit, by Casey Parks. 350 pages, 2022

A beautifully written and deeply reported epic about what it means to be small town Southern, what it means to be queer and what it means to belong to a family. It is the story of Casey Parks ten year journey to unravel the mystery of Roy Hudgins, the small town country singer from her grandmother's youth. Raw and deeply empathetic, Parks gives us an unforgettable account of finding oneself through someone else's story and forging connections across the gulfs that divide us. A lovely read.

Suggested by Jan Randall

And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle by Jon Meacham, 2022, 623 pp (There are 202 pages of notes and index.)

This portrait of a very human Lincoln follows his life from birth on the Kentucky frontier in 1809 to his leadership during the Civil War to his assassination in 1865. He had to confront secession, threats to democracy and slavery as a moral evil. The contrast of an 18th century America with the 21st century America is illuminating and illustrates that the same issues of racism and democracy that confronted Lincoln are still confronting America today.

Brave the Wild River: The Untold Story of Two Women Who Mapped the Botany of the Grand Canyon, by Melissa L. Sevogny, 2023, 290 pp.

"... when Elzada Clover received her Ph.D. in botany from the University of Michigan in 1935, she was unable to find a job. One of her professors, Harley H. Bartlett, who recognized her intelligence and admired her grit, wrote unhappily in his diary, "Elzada isn't wanted because she is a woman." What to do when no one will hire you? Of course, float down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon to catalog the plants growing there. A thriller and a bit of science, this beautifully written book is a biography that introduces us to a pair of kick-ass women who did not allow sexism to limit them.

Suggested by Sukey Robb-Wilder

Asylum a Memoir & Manifesto, by Edafe Okporo, 209 pages, June 2022.

This is a moving and eye-opening story. Edafe documents his experiences growing up gay in Nigeria, fleeing to America, navigating the immigration system, and making a life for himself as a Black, gay immigrant. After navigating the confusing, often draconian, US immigration and legal system, he was finally granted asylum. But he soon realizes that America is exceptionally good at keeping people locked up but is seriously lacking in integrating freed refugees into society. Alongside his personal story is a call to action — for immigration reform and for a just immigration system for refugees everywhere. The book imagines a future where immigrants and asylees are treated with fairness, transparency, and compassion. It aims to help us understand that home is not just where you feel safe and welcome but also how you can make it feel safe and welcome for others.

The Ghost Forest: Racists, Radicals, and Real Estate in the California Redwoods, by Greg King, 407 pages (+Appendix & Bibliography), June 2023.

Deeply researched and compellingly written, this is a definitive story of the California redwoods, their discovery and their exploitation, as told by an activist who fought to protect their existence against those determined to cut them all down. Following the near-death experiences of two fellow activists, journalist and famed redwood activist Greg King, who grew up in west Sonoma County, felt the true story of redwood logging needed to be told. The author's strong passion and dedication to the cause can be felt throughout the text. His haunting, sometimes inspiring narrative is sure to move anyone interested in trees and nature. King examines how investors and a growing U.S. economy drove the timber industry to cut down all but 4 percent of the original two-million-acre redwood ecosystem. His dogged research turns up the closed-door deals and nefarious legal schemes that led to the destruction of the redwood forests, providing a disturbing chronicle of how lumber companies flouted laws and came out on top. The author focuses much of his ire on the Save the Redwoods League, formed in 1918 by prominent eugenicists as an ostensible conservation group that instead covertly worked to further industry interests, constituting the nation's first and most successful example of greenwashing. While King succeeds in his quest to preserve the record and to honor the countless individuals who, for more than a century, have dedicated their lives to protecting redwoods, his book provides a sobering accounting of the forces environmentalists are up against.

Suggested by Dorcas Walton

The Undying: Pain, Vulnerability, Mortality, Medicine, Art, Times, Dreams, Data, Exhaustion, Cancer, and Care, by [Anne Boyer](#), 320 pages, September 2019. This author was the Winner of 2020 Pulitzer Prize. *The Undying...* is partly a memoir of Boyer's severe illness of breast cancer that diagnosed when she was 41 years old and a single mother. It is also a description about health, illness, language, science, mortality, and death. She terms it 'the ideological regime of cancer'. Her book is an unforgettable narrative about the brutality of illness and the capitalism of cancer care in America.

Suggested by Juanita Roland

Dinners With Ruth: A Memoir on the Power of Friendships, by [Nina Totenberg](#), 320 pages, September 2022.

Celebrated NPR correspondent Nina Totenberg delivers an extraordinary memoir of her personal successes, struggles, and life-affirming relationships, including her beautiful friendship of nearly fifty years with Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. While the course of their lives intersected with many important historical events, the focus is the power of relationships, especially friendships between women.

Suggested by Judie Coleman

The Storm is Upon Us: How QAnon Became A Movement, a Cult and a Conspiracy Theory of Everything by Mike Rothschild 319 pages, 2021

A little terrifying but amazing true story of QAnon. The author takes readers from the background conspiracies and cults that fed the Q phenomenon, to its embrace by right-wing media and Donald Trump, through the rending of families as loved ones became addicted to Q's increasingly violent rhetoric, to the storming of the Capitol, and on. And as the phenomenon shows no sign of calming despite Trump's loss of the presidency—with everyone from Baby Boomers to Millennial moms proving susceptible to its messaging—and politicians starting to openly espouse its ideology, Rothschild makes a compelling case that mocking the seeming madness of QAnon will get us nowhere. Rather, his impassioned reportage makes clear it's time to figure out what QAnon really is — because QAnon and its relentlessly dark theory of everything isn't done yet.

The Outlaw Ocean by Ian Urbina 513 pages, 2019

This book is fascinating yet horrifying at times about what really happens in the open oceans where there are no laws. There are few remaining frontiers on our planet. But perhaps the wildest, and least understood, are the world's oceans: too big to police, and under no clear international authority, these immense regions of treacherous water play host to rampant criminality and exploitation. Both a gripping adventure story and a stunning exposé, this unique work of reportage brings fully into view for the first time the disturbing reality of a floating world that connects us all, a place where anyone can do anything because no one is watching.