

The Reading List

"After graduation, what should I read next?" I get this question a lot. And I do love to put books into readers' hands. For those of you who want more on intellectuals, histories of memories and/or historical fiction, this is for you -- thanks to Kacey Q for inspiring the list. Updated 3/24.

Local Antiracism and Monument Removal

Jane Hill, *The Everyday Language of White Racism* (2008). Univ. of Arizona Regents Professor of Linguistics uses examples from the *Daily Wildcat* and campus life, among many others, to illuminate the insidious culture of white racism and explains how folk theory can help Whites see what we have erased.

Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (1998). Many of you have already encountered this gem in Dr. Hemphill's or other courses. Horwitz's book remains relevant to ongoing discussions about monument removal and erasure. He visited every former Confederate state and talked to local people about how they engage with memories of the Confederacy.

Clint Smith, *How the Word is Passed* (2021). Black poet Smith visits sites of memory of slavery in Louisiana, New York and Texas, in a prison and on Wall Street. He finds repetitions of the exculpatory rhetoric and erasures witnessed by Horwitz 25 years earlier but also the recovery of enslaved identities at the Whitney Plantation. A sensitive exploration of layered and scarred terrain.

Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil* (2019). As I was reading her highly engaging discussion of meeting with activists who were calling for changes to the Mississippi flag, it happened. An American Jew from the South who has spent most of her life and raised her family in Germany, this philosopher is uniquely positioned to contemplate connections between collective memories of the Holocaust, modern American white supremacy and the Confederacy.

Historical Fiction By and About Intellectuals

Jack London, *Martin Eden* (1909). A full-throated portrait of the intellectual as a striving working class writer who becomes disillusioned with fame, idealism, socialism, individualism and 'isms in general, written before Joyce's modern classic (*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916). Too much Spencer and Nietzsche brings him down, but not before he shows unusual sympathy for women of his class. Pietro Marcello's 2019 movie adaptation moves the action from Oakland, CA to Italy very effectively.

Rebecca West, *The Fountain Overflows* (1956) and *The Birds Fall Down* (1966), both reissued by Virago in the '80s. Early 20th C British feminist who became famous for her analysis of Balkan politics in *Black Lamb, Grey Falcon* (1941), West draws on her own eccentric family life in London for the first and creates a thriller about a train trip into revolutionary Russia in the second.

Ursula Le Guin, *Malafrena* (1979; reissued after the author's death by Library of America along with the *Orsinian Tales*). You may know her for sci fi, but here she imagines a central European nation a lot like Hungary as it goes through something a lot like the revolutions of 1848, through the eyes of a young, idealistic student activist. A writer's writer.

Dara Horn, *All Other Nights* (2009). Jewish spies and magicians from across the gender spectrum compete on both sides of the American Civil War. Horn's PhD in comp lit and skills as a researcher get put to good use in this taut thriller.

The Work of Public Intellectuals; or, Why is it that when I ask students to identify a living public intellectual they always only come up with white men?

Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (2014). History students should pay attention to his four-part re-division of American history and the revised narrative it creates as a foundation for social justice activism.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015). Check out how he uses family photographs to invoke histories of memories and personal experience as grounds for challenging American myths about identity and race that erase the historical vulnerability of black bodies.

Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979); both recently reissued. As a fellow native Californian, I resisted Didion for too long and no good reason, then discovered what I'd been missing: razor-sharp insights into the 60s, LA, and living amidst the chaos of uncertain times -- not unlike now.

Rebecca Solnit, *Paradise Built in Hell* (2009). Why is it that people often remember the aftermath of disasters positively? Because they found an opportunity to connect and face the meaningful challenge of revival together: forming mutual aid communities after earthquakes, hurricanes, 9/11 and more. Solnit is another proud product of California's public education system.

How to Look at Historical Photographs

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019). I've been raving about this one ever since Marya McQuirter put me onto it. Hartman reads historical photographs of young black women from the turn of the last century against the archival grain of meanings imposed on them by social workers, police and officials, recovering these women's autonomy amidst restricted, yet personal choices. The narrative mixes voices from diverse documents into imagined lives. Utterly original.

Maria Stepanova, *In Memory of Memories* (2020). There's only one photograph reproduced in this work of "fiction" (so the publisher labels it...but do we believe them?). Is it the photo discussed on p.48-9? Let the debates begin. Poet Stepanova's gorgeous language draws you in, while she name-drops every theorist of photography and history you ever cared about, as if they were family.

Janet Malcom, *Still Pictures: On Photography and Memory* (2023): "The past is a country that issues no visas. We can only enter it illegally."

Doing Nothing: Fiction

Madeleine Thien, *Do Not Say We Have Nothing* (2016). Yes I picked it up because it had Nothing in the title, but I read it because it was a powerful story about the Cultural Revolution in China and how that has been remembered across generations in a diaspora. Her observations on the meaning of zero as a limit case and on remembering the daily experience of encountering propaganda are insightful.

Historiography by Non-Historians

John D'Agata and Jim Fingal, *The Lifespan of a Fact* (2012). I assigned this in HIST 301 and it caused much consternation: you either love it or hate it, depending on how you feel about relativism. Creative non-fiction writer D'Agata spars with righteous copyeditor Fingal about the definition of a "fact". It was transformed into a [play starring Daniel Radcliffe](#).