
Notable Books

The 2009 Selection of Titles

RUSA Notable Books Council

Notable Books, 2009, committee

members: Patricia L. Gregory, chair, Saint Louis University; Alicia Ahlvers, vice chair, Kansas City Public Library; Susie Brown, Shaker Heights Public Library; A. Issac Pulver, Saratoga Springs Public Library; Andrea Slonosky, Sandra Ballasch, University of Iowa Libraries; Malynda Dalton, Texas A&M International University; Julie Elliott, Indiana University South Bend; Nancy Pearl; Nonny Schlotzhauer, The Pennsylvania State University; Lise Snyder, UCLA College Library; Valerie Morgan Taylor, Lewisville Community Library; and Booklist consultant Brad Hooper.

This list has been compiled for use by the general reader and by librarians who work with adults. RUSA's Notable Books Council has selected the titles for their significant contributions to the expansion of knowledge or for the pleasure they can provide to adult readers. Titles were selected from books published from November 2007 through November 2008.

NONFICTION

Steve Coll. *The Bin Ladens: An Arabian Family in the American Century*. Penguin, \$35 (978-1-59420-164-6).

An intimate look at this large, influential Saudi family of which Osama is but one member reveals the complexity of the modern Arab world.

Drew Gilpin Faust. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. Knopf, \$27.95 (978-0-375-40404-7).

A unique explication from many perspectives illuminates the profound social and political consequences of the unprecedented number of soldiers who died during the American Civil War.

Dexter Filkins. *The Forever War*. Knopf, \$25 (978-0-307-26639-2).

Eyewitness reporting of military engagements and civilian life in war-torn Afghanistan and Iraq is visceral yet measured, avoiding simplistic conclusions.

Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore. *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950*. Norton, \$39.95 (978-0-393-06244-1).

This groundbreaking history follows an early-twentieth-century movement for social justice in the South that evolved into the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

Annette Gordon-Reed. *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. Norton, \$35 (978-0-393-06477-3).

A comprehensive history of a family and their owners, including Thomas Jefferson, reveals the complex nature of slave relations in America.

Mark Harris. *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood*. Penguin, \$27.95 (978-1-59420-152-3).

The 1967 best-picture nominees provide a framework for examining pivotal changes in the film industry reflecting radical shifts in American society.

FROM COMMITTEES OF RUSA

Tony Horwitz. *A Voyage Long and Strange: Rediscovering the New World*. Holt, \$27.50 (978-0-8050-7603-5).

What starts as a fact-finding travelogue transforms into a diverting romp through the history and mythology surrounding the early explorers of the Americas.

Jane Mayer. *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*. Doubleday, \$27.50 (978-0-385-52639-5).

This harrowing account of post–September 11 counterterrorism is an indictment of the Bush administration's endorsement of torture as a legitimate interrogation tool.

Michael Pollan. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. Penguin, \$21.95 (978-1-59420-145-5).

This extended essay considers generations of human experience and research to explicate a simple mantra: Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.

Nick Taylor. *American Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work*. Bantam, \$27 (978-0-553-80235-1).

A monumental appraisal of the Works Progress Administration recounts how the program permanently changed U.S. social policies and its physical and cultural landscape.

Tom Vanderbilt. *Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says about Us)*. Knopf, \$24.95 (978-0-307-26478-7).

Balancing meticulous research with an approachable style, this captivating and enlightening read lends new insight into a nearly universal activity.

Joan Wickersham. *The Suicide Index: Putting My Father's Death in Order*. Houghton, \$25 (978-0-15-101490-3).

Brave and unflinching in its honesty, this memoir examines the effects of suicide on those left behind.

FICTION

Rabin Alameddine. *The Hakawati*. Knopf, \$25.95 (978-0-307-26679-8).

Interweaving memory and fable, this dazzling epic tale of a modern Lebanese family's vigil for a dying patriarch unveils the magical power of storytelling.

Richard Bausch. *Peace*. Knopf, \$19.95 (978-0-307-26833-4).

This taut, stark novel in which three GIs confront the moral dilemmas of combat renders a powerful meditation on the themes of trust, war, and redemption.

David Benioff. *City of Thieves*. Viking, \$24.95 (978-0-670-01870-3).

In this darkly comedic novel, set during the siege of Leningrad, two young prisoners are sent on an absurd errand by a Russian colonel.

Louise Erdrich. *The Plague of Doves*. HarperCollins, \$25.95 (978-0-06-051512-6).

Ojibwe and white characters narrate a tense, complex story of murder, love, and shared history in a dying North Dakota town.

Rivka Galchen. *Atmospheric Disturbances*. Farrar, \$24 (978-0-374-20011-4).

Love and meteorology converge as Dr. Leo Lieberstein searches for his wife, unaccountably replaced by a simulacrum, or so he believes.

Jhumpa Lahiri. *Unaccustomed Earth*. Knopf, \$25. (978-0-307-26573-9).

These luminous stories give the reader a glimpse of the lives, loves, and malaise of Bengali Americans.

Stephen Millhauser. *Dangerous Laughter: Thirteen Stories*. Knopf, \$24 (978-0-307-26756-6).

These inventive and fantastic stories range in subject from counting fir-tree needles to teenage laughter parties to building a tower to heaven.

Aslam Nadeem. *The Wasted Vigil*. Knopf, \$25 (978-0-307-26842-6).

This haunting, poetic novel weaves a paradoxically beautiful tale of love, loss, hope, and despair in Afghanistan.

Owen Sheers. *Resistance*. Doubleday/Nan A. Talese, \$39 (978-0-385-52210-6).

In this haunting, alternative history, after the men disappear from a remote Welsh village, the women variously respond to invading German soldiers.

Elizabeth Strout. *Olive Kitteridge*. Random, \$25 (978-1-4000-6208-9).

Interlinked stories of life in a small coastal town focus on retired schoolteacher Olive Kitteridge's difficult nature, ultimately revealing her humanity despite her imperfections.

Jeff Talarigo. *The Ginseng Hunter*. Doubleday/Nan A. Talese, \$21.95 (978-0-385-51739-3).

Refugees fleeing political oppression and famine disrupt a Chinese man's solitude in this spare, tender portrait of life on the North Korean border.

POETRY

Edward Hirsch. *Special Orders*. Knopf, \$25 (978-0-307-26681-1).

An unflinchingly honest and unsentimental examination of a man's lifetime of disappointment strikes an unexpectedly hopeful note in this slim volume of finely wrought poems.

James Tate. *The Ghost Soldiers*. Ecco, \$22 (978-0-06-143694-9).

The varied narrators in these one hundred poems relate tales of, among others, alien kidnapers, navels, and houseflies, all delightfully off-kilter and frequently chuckleworthy.