

## LWVSC 2021 Book List

### January 21—Moderated by Karen Rust

***Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat.*** By Bee Wilson. Pub: Basic Books October 2013.

Since prehistory, humans have braved sharp knives, fire, and grindstones to transform raw ingredients into something delicious -- or at least edible. But these tools have also transformed *how we* consume, and how we think about, our food. In *Consider the Fork*, award-winning food writer Bee Wilson takes readers on a wonderful and witty tour of the evolution of cooking around the world, revealing the hidden history of objects we often take for granted. Technology in the kitchen does not just mean the Pacojets and sous-vide machines of the modern kitchen, but also the humbler tools of everyday cooking and eating: a wooden spoon and a skillet, chopsticks and forks. Blending history, science, and personal anecdotes, Wilson reveals how our culinary tools and tricks came to be and how their influence has shaped food culture today. The story of how we have tamed fire and ice and wielded whisks, spoons, and graters, all for the sake of putting food in our mouths, *Consider the Fork* is truly a book to savor.

### February 18—Moderated by Mary Fricker

***Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know,*** Ronald Bailey and Marion Tupy, 208 pages, 2020.

Think the world is getting worse? If so, you're wrong. The world is, for the most part, actually getting better. But 58 percent of people in 17 countries who were surveyed in 2016 thought that the world is either getting worse or staying the same. Americans were even more glum: 65 percent thought the world is getting worse and only 6 percent thought it was getting better. The uncontroversial data on major global trends in this book will persuade you that this dark view of the state of humanity and the natural world is, in large part, badly mistaken.

### March 18--Moderated by Sukey Robb-Wilder

***Educated, a Memoir,*** Tara Westover, 334 pages, 2018.

Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover prepared for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with her "head-for-the-hills bag." In the summer she stewed herbs for her mother, a midwife and healer, and in the winter, she salvaged in her father's junkyard. The family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education, and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became violent. The extremity of her upbringing emerges gradually through her telling, which only makes the telling more alluring and harrowing. As a way out, Tara began to educate herself, learning enough mathematics and grammar to be admitted to Brigham Young University, where she graduated magna cum laude and won a Gates Cambridge Scholarship. Her quest for knowledge would transform her, taking her over oceans and across continents, to Cambridge and to Harvard. Only then would she wonder if she'd traveled too far, if there was still a way home. With the acute insight that distinguishes all great writers, Tara Westover has crafted a universal coming-of-age story that gets to the heart of what an education offers: the perspective to see one's life through new eyes, and the will to change it.

**April 15--Moderated by Lee Lipinski**

***The Woman's Hour*, by Elaine Weiss, 404 pages, 2019.**

*The Woman's Hour* by Elaine Weiss is a stunning, multilayered narrative about the key figures (women and men) at the center of the drama during those fraught weeks in Nashville. It's an American story and therefore one about race and power, about the legacy of the Civil War, and about wounds yet unhealed or forgotten in the south; it's a story about a suffrage movement split over tactics and strategy, with one faction playing within accepted boundaries, and another more radical faction tired of waiting for men to do the right thing. Quote from *Santa Barbara Independent Review*. (10/16/19)

**May 20--Moderated by Carole Sunlight**

***The Unspeakable Mind: Stories of Trauma and Healing from the Frontlines of PTSD Science*. By Shaili Jain, M.D. Pub. Harper Books: May 2020.**

*The Unspeakable Mind* is the definitive guide for a trauma-burdened age. Dr. Jain, a practicing psychiatrist and PTSD scientist at the National Center for PTSD shines a light on the PTSD epidemic affecting today's fractured world.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder goes far beyond the horrors of war and is an inescapable part of all our lives. More than six million Americans are suffering with PTSD. Dr. Jain demonstrates the ways this disorder cuts to the heart of life, interfering with one's capacity to love, create, and work—incapacity brought on by a complex interplay between biology, genetics, and environment. Beyond the struggles of individuals, PTSD has a tangible imprint on our cultures and societies around the world.

Since 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been a huge growth in the science of PTSD. With this new knowledge have come dramatic advances in the effective treatment of this condition. Dr. Jain highlights the myriads of ways PTSD care is being transformed to make it more accessible, acceptable, and available to sufferers via integrated care models, use of peer support programs, and technology. By identifying those among us who are most vulnerable to developing PTSD, cutting edge medical interventions that hold the promise of preventing the onset of PTSD are becoming more of a reality than ever before.

Combining vividly recounted patient stories, interviews with some of the world's top trauma scientists, and her professional expertise from working on the frontlines of PTSD, *The Unspeakable Mind* offers a textured portrait of this invisible illness that is unrivaled in scope and lays bare PTSD's roots, inner workings, and paths to healing. *The Unspeakable Mind* stands as the definitive guide to PTSD and offers lasting hope to sufferers, their loved ones, and health care providers everywhere.

**June 17—Moderated by Jan Randall**

***Midnight in Chernobyl* by Adam Higginbotham, 366 pages, 2019.**

The untold story of the World's greatest nuclear disaster. The definitive, harrowing story of the accident at Chernobyl nuclear power plant and a powerful investigation into how propaganda, secrecy and myth have obscured the truth of one of the twentieth century's greatest disasters. A riveting, deeply reported reconstruction of the event.

**July 15—Moderated by Carrie Anabo**

***The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz*** . Eric Larson, 464 pp. 2020.

“England cannot hold out forever,” writes propaganda minister Goebbels in his diary in the winter of 1940. Churchill’s first year as prime minister is the focus of the book as Hitler ramps up the war and begins the terror-filled days of the Blitz. While Churchill begs President Roosevelt for assistance he pushes back against the Nazis and encourages the British to “stand firm”. Besides historical descriptions of Dunkirk, bombing of London, the German’s response to Churchill’s stubbornness, and how the British responded to the war, Larson tells the personal story of Churchill and his dysfunctional family.

**August 19—Moderated by Nancy Burrington**

***The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South***, Random House Trade Paperback Edition, Bruce Levine, 299 pages (not including notes),2014.

This book is extremely readable and offers an enlightening view of the mindset and culture that allowed the South to cling to its dedication to the institution of slavery. Historian James M. McPherson writes in his notes “This book limns the relationship between slavery and the rise and fall of the Confederacy more clearly and starkly than any other study. General readers and seasoned scholars alike will find new information and insights in this eye-opening account.”

**September 16—Moderated by Linda Allen**

***Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century***, Charles King, 467 pages, 2019

"In *Gods of the Upper Air*, Charles King departs from his field of political science to chronicle the birth of cultural anthropology at the start of the twentieth century, writing about the scientists who “found themselves on the front lines of the greatest moral battle of our time: the struggle to prove that—despite difference of skin color, gender, ability, or custom—humanity is one undivided thing.” While academically informed (the author provides fifty pages of sources), King’s writing is rich, filled with vivid descriptions that contextualize the era....

The concerns of the heroes in *Gods of the Upper Air* have much in keeping with the sociopolitical topics that have driven American discourse since 2016: immigration, nationalism, race relations, and how facts are applied—deduction or induction? Wide in scope and driven by plot, *Gods of the Upper Air* combines creative storytelling with rich historical detail to show the reader that facts contradicting established norms rarely outmatch the willingness of the masses to cling to those norms, leaving the potential for ideological change to the tyranny of time."

*Harvard Review*.

**October 21--Moderated by Joyce MacLaury**

***Imperfect Union*** by Steve Inskeep, 353 pages, 2020.

How Jessie and John Fremont mapped the west, invented celebratory and helped cause the civil war. This book is a masterfully dual biography of how the Fremonts won the American West. Action packed stories about the Mexican War, the Oregon Trail, the California wilderness and the Civil War are bountiful. And the political intrigue surrounding the birth of the Republican Party offered is marvelous

## BOOKS NOT CHOSEN

***The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?***, by Michael J. Sandel, 289 pp., September 15, 2020

These are dangerous times for democracy. We live in an age of winners and losers, where the odds are stacked in favor of the already fortunate. Stalled social mobility and entrenched inequality give the lie to the American credo that "you can make it if you try". The consequence is a brew of anger and frustration that has fueled populist protest and extreme polarization, and led to deep distrust of both government and our fellow citizens--leaving us morally unprepared to face the profound challenges of our time.

World-renowned philosopher Michael J. Sandel argues that to overcome the crises that are upending our world, we must rethink the attitudes toward success and failure that have accompanied globalization and rising inequality. Sandel shows the hubris a meritocracy generates among the winners and the harsh judgement it imposes on those left behind, and traces the dire consequences across a wide swath of American life. He offers an alternative way of thinking about success--more attentive to the role of luck in human affairs, more conducive to an ethic of humility and solidarity, and more affirming of the dignity of work. *The Tyranny of Merit* points us toward a hopeful vision of a new politics of the common good.

***In Defense of Elitism: Why I'm Better Than You and You are Better Than Someone Who Didn't Buy This Book.*** by Joel Stein , 336 pp., October 22, 2019.

The night Donald Trump won the presidency, our author Joel Stein, Thurber Prize finalist and former staff writer for *Time* Magazine, instantly knew why. The main reason wasn't economic anxiety or racism. It was that he was anti-elitist. Hillary Clinton represented Wall Street, academics, policy papers, Davos, international treaties and the people who think they're better than you. People like Joel Stein. Trump represented something far more appealing, which was beating up people like Joel Stein.

In a full-throated defense of academia, the mainstream press, medium-rare steak, and civility, Joel Stein fights against populism. He fears a new tribal elite is coming to replace him, one that will fend off expertise of all kinds and send the country hurtling backward to a time of wars, economic stagnation and the well-done steaks doused with ketchup that Trump eats.

To find out how this shift happened and what can be done, Stein spends a week in Roberts County, Texas, which had the highest percentage of Trump voters in the country. He goes to the home of Trump-loving Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams; meets people who create fake news; and finds the new elitist organizations merging both right and left to fight the populists. All the while using the biggest words he knows.

***In the Hands of the People: Thomas Jefferson on Equality, Faith, Freedom, Compromise, and the Art of Citizenship***, by Jon Meacham and Annette Gordon-Reed, 128 pp. June 30, 2020

Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Jon Meacham offers a collection of inspiring words about how to be a good citizen, from Thomas Jefferson and others, and reminds us why our country’s founding principles are still so important today.

Thomas Jefferson believed in the covenant between a government and its citizens, in both the government’s responsibilities to its people and also the people’s responsibility to the republic. In this illuminating book, a project of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation at Monticello, the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Jon Meacham presents selections from Jefferson’s writing on the subject, with an afterword by Pulitzer Prize–winning historian Annette Gordon-Reed and comments on Jefferson’s ideas from others, including Colin Powell, Madeleine Albright, Frederick Douglass, Carl Sagan, and American presidents.

This curated collection revitalizes how to see an individual’s role in the world, as it explores such Jeffersonian concepts as religious freedom, the importance of a free press, public education, participation in government, and others.

Meacham writes, “In an hour of twenty-first-century division and partisanship, of declining trust in institutions and of widespread skepticism about the long-term viability of the American experiment, it is instructive to return to first principles. Not, to be sure, as an exercise in nostalgia or as a flight from the reality of our own time, but as an honest effort to see, as Jefferson wrote, what history may be able to tell us about the present and the future.”

***Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Forty-Year Rivalry That Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East***, Kim Gaddis, 368 pages, 2020

Kim Ghattas seamlessly weaves together history, geopolitics, and culture to deliver a gripping read of the largely unexplored story of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, born from the sparks of the 1979 Iranian revolution and fueled by American policy. With vivid storytelling, extensive historical research and on-the-ground reporting, Ghattas dispels accepted truths about a region she calls home. She explores how Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran, once allies and twin pillars of US strategy in the region, became mortal enemies after 1979. She shows how they used and distorted religion in a competition that went well beyond geopolitics. Feeding intolerance, suppressing cultural expression, and encouraging sectarian violence from Egypt to Pakistan, the war for cultural supremacy led to Iran’s fatwa against author Salman Rushdie, the assassination of countless intellectuals, the birth of groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, the September 11th terrorist attacks, and the rise of ISIS.

***Golden Gates: Fighting for Housing in America***, Conor Dougherty, 288 pages, 2020

A stunning, deeply reported investigation into the housing crisis.

Spacious and affordable homes used to be the hallmark of American prosperity. Today, however, punishing rents and the increasingly prohibitive cost of ownership have turned housing into the foremost symbol of inequality and an economy gone wrong. Nowhere is this more visible than in the San Francisco Bay Area, where fleets of private buses ferry software engineers past the tarp-and-plywood shanties where the homeless make their homes. The adage that California is a glimpse of the nation’s future has become a cautionary tale. Sweeping in scope and intimate in detail, *Golden Gates* captures a vast political realignment during a moment of rapid technological and social change.

***Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism***, Anne Applebaum, 224 pages

Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism is a 2020 book by Anne Applebaum that discusses democratic decline and the rise of right-wing populist politics with authoritarian tendencies, with three main case studies: Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States.

***Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World - and Why Things Are Better Than You Think***, by Hans Rosling, 352 pages, 2018.

Bill Gates loves this book. Rosling's potentially perspective-altering book invites us to adopt one simple rule: only carry opinions for which you have strong supporting facts. This might sound easy and commonsensical enough. But, as the results of the questionnaire demonstrate, most people—whatever their level of education—have a disfigured view of the world. They are not just wrong, they reliably assume that things are far worse than they actually are. Factfulness identifies ten instincts we all share, which tend to over-dramatize the world as we see it. Rosling then offers a series of tools which can help to rid us of these misleading instincts.

***Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism***, by Anne Case and Angus Deaton, 312 pages, 2020.

Princeton University economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton call these “deaths of despair” — the deaths from suicide, drug overdoses and alcoholic liver disease ravaging swaths of the country. The victims, overwhelmingly, are less-educated Americans whose loss of life was preceded by a loss of jobs, community and dignity, and whose deaths, the authors argue, are inextricable from the policies and politics transforming the U.S. economy into an engine of inequality and suffering. “The American economy has shifted away from serving ordinary people and toward serving businesses, their managers, and their owners,” Case and Deaton write in their new work, “Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism.”

***Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America***, John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck, 352 pages, 2018.

The book shows how fundamental characteristics of the nation and its politics—the state of the economy, the Obama presidency, and the demographics of the political parties—combined with the candidates' personalities and rhetoric to produce one of the most unexpected presidencies in history. Identity Crisis reveals how Trump's victory was foreshadowed by changes in the Democratic and Republican coalitions that were driven by people's racial and ethnic identities. The campaign then reinforced and exacerbated those cleavages as it focused on issues related to race, immigration, and religion. The result was an epic battle not just for the White House but about what America is and should be.

***Big Dirty Money. Shocking injustice and unseen cost of white-collar crime***, by Jennifer Taub, 2020, 336 pages. How ordinary Americans suffer when the rich and powerful use tax dodges or break the law to get richer and more powerful—and how we can stop it.

There is an elite crime spree happening in America, and the privileged perps are getting away with it. Selling loose cigarettes on a city sidewalk can lead to a choke-hold arrest, and death, if you are not among the top 1%. But if you're rich and commit mail, wire, or bank fraud, embezzle pension funds, lie in court, obstruct justice, bribe a public official, launder money, or

cheat on your taxes, you're likely to get off scot-free (or even win an election). When caught and convicted, such as for bribing their kids' way into college, high-class criminals make brief stops in minimum security "Club Fed" camps. Operate the scam from the executive suite of a giant corporation, and you can prosper with impunity. Consider Wells Fargo & Co. Pressured by management, employees at the bank opened more than three million bank and credit card accounts without customer consent, and charged late fees and penalties to account holders. When CEO John Stumpf resigned in "shame," the board of directors granted him a \$134 million golden parachute.

This is not victimless crime. *Big Dirty Money* details the scandalously common and concrete ways that ordinary Americans suffer when the well-heeled use white collar crime to gain and sustain wealth, social status, and political influence. Profiteers caused the mortgage meltdown and the prescription opioid crisis, they've evaded taxes and deprived communities of public funds for education, public health, and infrastructure. Taub goes beyond the headlines (of which there is no shortage) to track how we got here (essentially a post-Enron failure of prosecutorial muscle, the growth of "too big to jail" syndrome, and a developing implicit immunity of the upper class) and pose solutions that can help catch and convict offenders.

***You Never Forget Your First. Biography of George Washington***, by Alexis Coe, 2020, 261pages

A breezy bon bon of a bio. But beneath there is a lot of info and questions. GW had smallpox, malaria (6 times), diphtheria, TB, dysentery, pneumonia in a time when blood letting was the treatment for just about everything and his false teeth were made of various materials including the teeth of his slaves. Coe delves into many things that "serious male" historians overlook or under emphasize. She gives insight into the time by looking more at daily life and not military history. And the details of the lives of his slaves was wrenching, giving the names and families of the people who are so often just described as a mass. Coe is a research librarian at the New York Public Library and goes to primary sources to give another look at an iconic figure.

***Caste: Origins of our discontent***, by Isabel Wilkerson, 2020, 497 pages

In this brilliant book, Isabel Wilkerson gives us a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America as she explores, through an immersive, deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings.

Beyond race, class, or other factors, there is a powerful caste system that influences people's lives and behavior and the nation's fate. Linking the caste systems of America, India, and Nazi Germany, Wilkerson explores eight pillars that underlie caste systems across civilizations, including divine will, bloodlines, stigma, and more. Using riveting stories about people—including Martin Luther King, Jr., baseball's Satchel Paige, a single father and his toddler son, Wilkerson herself, and many others—she shows the ways that the insidious undertow of caste is experienced every day. She documents how the Nazis studied the racial systems in America to plan their out-cast of the Jews; she discusses why the cruel logic of caste requires that there be a bottom rung for those in the middle to measure themselves against; she writes about the surprising health costs of caste, in depression and life expectancy, and the effects of this hierarchy on our culture and politics. Finally, she points forward to ways America

can move beyond the artificial and destructive separations of human divisions, toward hope in our common humanity.

***Lyndon B Johnson Portrait: of a President***, Robert Dallek, 377 pages, 2004.

An abridgement of Dallek's two-volume series on LBJ, this book is extremely faithful to the full series, except for the missing notes and bibliography. It packs nearly all the punch of the two volumes, but in just one-third the space. Like the series, "Portrait of a President" is more a political than personal biography. Readers will finish this book with an *excellent* understanding of LBJ's inherent contradictions and complexity – and a keen appreciation for his larger-than-life persona. The *public* LBJ (the power-hungry and pugnacious politician) is on full display, although the *private* LBJ (the husband, the father of two daughters and the man from modest means always looking over his shoulder) remains largely inaccessible. "Portrait of a President" is at its best when describing his twelve years in the Senate. This is where his political skills were honed and then successfully deployed. LBJ's Vice Presidency – a miserable time in his life by any standard – is also quite well-documented. Readers lacking the time or tenacity to navigate Dallek's two-volume series will find this book contains significant "bang for the buck."

***The Purpose of Power: How to Build Movements for the 21st Century***, Alicia Garza, 312 pages, 2020.

An essential guide to building transformative movements to address the challenges of our time, from one of the country's leading organizers and a co-creator of Black Lives Matter in 2013. Long before #BlackLivesMatter became a rallying cry for this generation, Garza had spent the better part of two decades learning and unlearning some hard lessons about organizing. The lessons she offers are different from the "rules for radicals" that animated earlier generations of activists, and diverge from the charismatic, patriarchal model of the American civil rights movement. She reflects instead on how making room amongst the woke for those who are still awakening can inspire and activate more people to fight for the world we all deserve. This is the story of one woman's lessons through years of bringing people together to create change. Most of all, it is a new paradigm for change for a new generation of changemakers, from the mind and heart behind one of the most important movements of our time.

***When they call you a terrorist : a Black Lives Matter memoir***, Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, 257 pages, 2020.

Black people are subjected to unjustifiable racial profiling and police brutality. In 2013, when Trayvon Martin's killer went free, Patrisse's outrage led her to co-found Black Lives Matter with Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi. Condemned as terrorists and as a threat to America, these loving women founded a hashtag that birthed the movement to demand accountability from the authorities who continually turn a blind eye to the injustices inflicted upon people of Black and Brown skin. Championing human rights in the face of violent racism, Patrisse transformed her personal pain into political power, giving voice to a people suffering inequality and a movement fueled by her strength and love, to tell the country--and the world--that Black Lives Matter. This book is an empowering account of survival, strength and resilience and a call to action to change the culture that declares innocent Black life expendable

***An American Marriage***, by Tayari Jones, 306 pages, 2018.



Tayari Jones' brilliant and heartbreaking novel *An American Marriage* (Algonquin, 306 pp., ★★★★★ out of four) — a selection of [Oprah's Book Club](#) — exposes the intimate toll of an American shame: the unjust imprisonment of black men. *Marriage* uncovers the truths that are revealed in the nearly invisible cracks that emerge in relationships, and the devastating harm in secrets of omission. With spare and shimmering prose that can strike with the shock of a shiv, Jones captures the life-altering losses Roy and Celestial endure in this unforgettable American marriage. Quote from *USA Today* (2/6/18)

***Disturbance: Surviving Charlie Hebdo***, Philippe Lancon, Translated from the French by Steven Rendall, Europa Editions, 473 pages, 2018.

This is one of the most riveting books I have read in years. It was sent to me by a neurologist email friend of mine or I never would have discovered it. Philippe Lancon was a contributing journalist to Charlie Hebdo in Paris who was shot in the terrorist attack on the office but survived. This book follows his long recovery, the dedication of the surgeons and nurses who restored his face and the evolution of the relationships with the people who supported his transition. As the booknotes say: “*Disturbance* is a book about survival, resilience, and reconstruction, about transformation, about one man’s shifting relationships to time, to writing and journalism, to truth, and to his own body.”Extremely well written and translated.

***The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago And How We Can Do It Again***. By Robert D. Putnam & Shaylyn Garrett. Pub: Simon & Schuster, October, 2020

Putnam & Garrett offer insights to demonstrate how we have gone from an individualistic “I” society to a more communitarian “we” society and then back again, and how we can learn from that experience to become a stronger, more unified nation. Deep and accelerating inequality, unprecedented polarization, a fraying social fabric, public and private narcissism—Americans today seem to agree on only one thing. This is the worst of times.

But we’ve been here before. During the Gilded Age of the late 1800s, America was highly individualistic, starkly unequal, fiercely polarized, and deeply fragmented, just as it is today. However as the twentieth century opened, America became—slowly, unevenly, but steadily—more egalitarian, more cooperative, more generous; a society on the upswing, more focused on our responsibilities to one another and less focused on our narrower self-interest. Sometime during the 1960s, however, these trends reversed, leaving us in today’s disarray.

In a sweeping overview of more than a century of history, drawing on his inimitable combination of statistical analysis and storytelling, Robert Putnam analyzes a remarkable confluence of trends that brought us from an “I” society to a “We” society and then back again. He draws inspiring lessons for our time from an earlier era, when a dedicated group of reformers righted the ship, putting us on a path to becoming a society once again based on community. Engaging, revelatory, and timely, this is Putnam’s most ambitious work yet, a fitting capstone to a brilliant career.

***Pharma: Greed, Lies, and the Poisoning of America***, Gerald Posner, 557 pages, 2020

This carefully researched book is a definitive history and a wealth of knowledge about the trillion-dollar-a-year pharmaceutical industry that helped to turn the U.S. into a medicated society. Posner details how life improved with pharmaceutical discoveries ranging from antibiotic wonder drugs to vaccines while the drug companies flourished with little regulation

and massive profits as drug prices soared and opioid addictions took over user's lives. Much of the book centers around the Sackler family, whose aggressive marketing techniques led to much of the overprescribing and overpricing of drugs. The family became wealthy with the success of Oxycotin, the blockbuster narcotic that became the center of the opioid crisis.