



Interesting Nonfiction Books: the Best of 2022

At the Portland Library

Walter, Barbara

303.64 WAL

How Civil Wars Start

Civil wars are the biggest danger to world peace today - this book shows us why they happen, and how to avoid them. Most of us don't know it, but we are living in the world's greatest era of civil wars. While violence has declined worldwide, civil wars have increased. This is a new phenomenon. With the exception of a handful of cases - the American and English civil wars, the French Revolution - historically it has been rare for people to organize and fight their governments. This has changed. Since 1946, over 250 armed conflicts have broken out around the world, a number that continues to rise. Major civil wars are now being fought in countries including Iraq, Syria and Libya. Smaller civil wars are being fought in Ukraine, India, and Malaysia. Even countries we thought could never experience another civil war - such as the USA, Sweden and Ireland - are showing signs of unrest.

Klosterman, Chuck

306.0973 KLO

The Nineties

The 90s brought about a revolution in the human condition we're still groping to understand. Happily, Chuck Klosterman is more than up to the job. In *The Nineties*, Chuck Klosterman makes a home in all of it: the film, the music, the sports, the TV, the politics, the changes regarding race and class and sexuality, the yin/yang of Oprah and Alan Greenspan. In perhaps no other book ever written would a sentence like, "The video for 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was not more consequential than the reunification of Germany" make complete sense. Chuck Klosterman has written a multi-dimensional masterpiece, a work of synthesis so smart and delightful.

Aikins, Matthieu

325.21 AIK

The Naked Don't Fear the Water: an Underground Journey with Afghan Refugees

In 2016, a young Afghan driver and translator named Omar makes the heart-wrenching choice to flee his war-torn country, saying goodbye to Laila, the love of his life, without knowing when they might be reunited again. He is one of millions of refugees who leave their homes that year. Matthieu Aikins, a journalist living in Kabul, decides to follow his friend. In order to do so, he must leave his own passport and identity behind to go underground on the refugee trail with Omar. Their odyssey across land and sea from Afghanistan to Europe brings them face to face with the people at heart of the migration crisis: smugglers, cops, activists, and the men, women and children fleeing war in search of a better life. As setbacks and dangers mount for the two friends, Matthieu is also drawn into the escape plans of Omar's entire family.

O'Rourke, Meghan

616.044 Oro

Invisible Kingdom: Reimagining Chronic Illness

A silent epidemic of chronic illnesses afflicts tens of millions of Americans: these are diseases that are poorly understood, frequently marginalized, and can go undiagnosed and unrecognized altogether. Renowned writer Meghan O'Rourke delivers a revelatory investigation into this elusive category of "invisible" illness that encompasses autoimmune diseases, post-treatment Lyme disease syndrome, and now long COVID, synthesizing the personal and the universal to help all of us through this new frontier. Drawing on her own medical experiences as well as a decade of interviews with doctors, patients, researchers, and public health experts, O'Rourke traces the history of Western definitions of illness, and reveals how inherited ideas of cause, diagnosis, and treatment have led us to ignore a host of hard-to-understand medical conditions, ones that resist easy description or simple cures.

Khan, Yasmin

641.5956 KHA

Ripe Figs: Recipes & Stories from Turkey, Greece and Cyprus

Recipes inspired by Khan's travels within each country, as well as the people she met and shared meals with along the way, many of them migrants and refugees. Those people and experiences are the subjects of essays interspersed throughout the book's sections, which are organized not by country but by dish type — breakfast, breads and grains, meze, mains, and desserts — underscoring Khan's depiction of the Eastern Mediterranean as a borderless region shaped by migration.

Didion, Joan

814.54 DID

Let Me Tell You What I Mean

Each essay showcases Didion at her very best, spotlighting her sharp-witted reporting, her steely narrative gaze, and her commanding gifts as a prose stylist. Anthologized together in this compact volume, these peerless essays remind us just why Didion looms so large in the pantheon of American literature. Didion touches on topics ranging from newspapers to the fantasy of San Simeon, to not getting into Stanford. In "Why I Write," Didion ponders the act of writing: "I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means these essays are acutely and brilliantly observed. Each piece is classic Didion: incisive, bemused, and stunningly prescient.

Perry, Imani

976 PER

South to America: a Journey below the Mason-Dixon Line to Understand the Soul of a Nation

Imani Perry shows that the meaning of American is inextricably linked with the South, and that our understanding of its history and culture is the key to understanding the nation as a whole.

This is the story of a Black woman and native Alabaman returning to the region she has always called home and considering it with fresh eyes. Her journey is full of detours, deep dives, and surprising encounters with places and people. She renders Southerners from all walks of life with sensitivity and honesty, sharing her thoughts about a troubling history and the ritual humiliations and joys that characterize so much of Southern life. Weaving together stories of immigrant communities, contemporary artists, exploitative opportunists, enslaved peoples, unsung heroes, her own ancestors, and her lived experiences, Imani Perry crafts a tapestry unlike any other.

Bilton, Chrysta

Biog Bilton

Normal Family: On Truth, Love, and How I Met My 35 Siblings

What is a "normal family," and how do you go about making one? Bilton's magnetic, larger-than-life mother, Debra, yearned to have a child, but as a single gay woman in 1980s California, she had few options. Until one day, while getting her hair done in a Beverly Hills salon, she met a man and instantly knew he was the one she'd been looking for. A verbal agreement, a couple of thousand in cash, and a few squirts of a turkey baster later, and Chrysta was conceived. Over the years, Jeffrey would make regular appearances at the family home, which grew to include Chrysta's baby sister. It wasn't until Chrysta was a young adult that she discovered just how much her parents had hidden from their daughters—and each other—including a shocking revelation with far-reaching consequences not only for Debra, Chrysta, and her sister, but for dozens and possibly hundreds of unsuspecting families across the country.

Odenkirk, Bob

Biog Odenkirk

Comedy Comedy Comedy Drama

Bob Odenkirk's career is inexplicable. And yet he will try like hell to explicate it for you. Charting a "Homeric" decades-long "odyssey" from his origins in the seedy comedy clubs of Chicago to a dramatic career full of award nominations—with a side-trip into the action-man world that is baffling to all who know him—it's almost like there are many Bob Odenkirks! But there is just one and one is plenty. Bob embraced a life in comedy after a chance meeting with Second City's legendary Del Close. He somehow made his way to a job as a writer at Saturday Night Live. While surviving that legendary gauntlet by the skin of his gnashing teeth, he stashed away the secrets of comedy writing—eventually employing them in the immortal "Motivational Speaker" sketch for Chris Farley, honing them on The Ben Stiller Show, and perfecting them on Mr. Show with Bob and David. And then on to Hollywood and television star.

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