

The Midtown Scholar Bookstore's Top 10 Holiday Gift Books – 2020

+ 3 children's/teen's and 2 local interest

HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY

1 JFK: Coming of Age in the American Century, 1917-1956 by Fredrik Logevall

Fabulous new history by a Pulitzer-Prize winning historian, and a recent WITF Pick of the Month (Nov. 2020). We're excited to be hosting the author on Zoom for a free book talk this Tuesday night December 1st. He'll be interviewed by Prof. Michael Neiberg, Chair of War Studies at the U.S. Army War College.

Harvard University Professor Fredrik Logevall has spent much of the last decade searching for the “real” JFK. The result of this prodigious effort is a sweeping two-volume biography that properly contextualizes Kennedy amidst the roiling American Century. This volume spans the first thirty-nine years of JFK's life—from birth through his decision to run for president—to reveal his early relationships, his formative experiences during World War II, his ideas, his writings, his political aspirations. In examining these pre-White House years, Logevall shows us a more serious, independently minded Kennedy than we've previously known, whose distinct international sensibility would prepare him to enter national politics at a critical moment in modern U.S. history.

2 Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson

The Pulitzer-Prize winning, bestselling author of The Warmth of Other Suns examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions.

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. 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.

3 Sometimes You Have to Lie: The Life and Times of Louise Fitzhugh, Renegade Author of Harriet the Spy, by Leslie Brody

An inspiring biography of Harriet the Spy author Louise Fitzhugh, the woman behind one of literature's most beloved heroines. Harriet the Spy, first published in 1964, has mesmerized generations of readers and launched a million diarists. Its beloved antiheroine, Harriet, is erratic, unsentimental, and endearing -- very much like the woman who created her.

Born in 1928, Fitzhugh was raised in segregated Memphis, but she soon escaped her cloistered world and headed for New York, where her expanded milieu stretched from the lesbian bars of Greenwich Village to the art world of postwar Europe, and her circle of friends included members of the avant-garde like Maurice Sendak and Lorraine Hansberry. Fitzhugh's novels,

written in an era of political defiance, are full of resistance: to authority, to conformity, and even -- radically, for a children's author -- to make-believe.

As a children's author and a lesbian, Fitzhugh was often pressured to disguise her true nature. Brody's acclaimed new biography tells the story of Fitzhugh's hidden life and of the creation of her masterpiece, which remains long after her death as a testament to the complicated relationship between truth, secrecy, and individualism.

4 The Splendid and the Vile, by Erik Larson

An intimate chronicle of Winston Churchill and London during the Blitz, and an inspiring portrait of courage and leadership in a time of unprecedented crisis, by the noted award-winning author of The Devil in the White City and other best-selling books.

A video recording of our Virtual Author Talk from April 2020 with Larson, interviewed by Scott LaMar, is available on our bookstore's website and youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66lbAFOQNN0>

On Winston Churchill's first day as prime minister, Adolf Hitler invaded Holland and Belgium. Poland and Czechoslovakia had already fallen, and the Dunkirk evacuation was just two weeks away. For the next twelve months, Hitler would wage a relentless bombing campaign, killing 45,000 Britons. It was up to Churchill to hold his country together and persuade President Franklin Roosevelt that Britain was a worthy ally—and willing to fight to the end. Larson's biography takes readers out of today's political dysfunction and back to a time of true leadership, when, in the face of unrelenting horror, Churchill's eloquence, courage, and perseverance bound a country, and a family, together.

POETRY

5 What Kind of Woman, by Kate Baer

A breakout star! Kate Baer is a Harrisburg poet whose new book was an instant #1 New York Times bestseller last month. Signed copies available from the Midtown Scholar.

A video recording of our Virtual Book-Release event and author talk with Baer in November is available on the Midtown Scholar's facebook page: https://fb.watch/259b_5qd1O/

A stunning and honest debut poetry collection about the beauty and hardships of being a woman in the world today, and the many roles we play - mother, partner, and friend. "When life throws you a bag of sorrow, hold out your hands/Little by little, mountains are climbed." So ends Baer's remarkable poem "Things My Girlfriends Teach Me." In "Nothing Tastes as Good as Skinny Feels" she challenges her reader to consider their grandmother's cake, the taste of the sea, the cool swirl of freedom. In her poem "Deliverance" about her son's birth she writes "What is the word for when the light leaves the body?/What is the word for when it/at last, returns?"

Through poems that are as unforgettably beautiful as they are accessible, Baer proves herself to truly be an exemplary voice in modern poetry. Her words make women feel seen in their own bodies, in their own marriages, and in their own lives. Her poems are those you share with your mother, your daughter, your sister, and your friends.

CONTEMPORARY FICTION

6 Transcendent Kingdom, by Yaa Gyasi (pronounced YAH JESSIE)

This stunning follow-up to Gyasi's acclaimed national best seller Homegoing is a powerful, raw, intimate, deeply layered novel about a Ghanaian family in Alabama.

A video recording of our Virtual Author Talk with Gyasi this September is available on the Midtown Scholar's facebook page: <https://fb.watch/259hexgcZu/>

Gifty is a sixth-year PhD candidate in neuroscience at the Stanford University School of Medicine studying reward-seeking behavior in mice and the neural circuits of depression and addiction. Her brother, Nana, was a gifted high school athlete who died of a heroin overdose after an ankle injury left him hooked on OxyContin. Her suicidal mother is living in her bed. Gifty is determined to discover the scientific basis for the suffering she sees all around her. But even as she turns to the hard sciences to unlock the mystery of her family's loss, she finds herself hungering for her childhood faith and grappling with the evangelical church in which she was raised, whose promise of salvation remains as tantalizing as it is elusive. Transcendent Kingdom is a deeply moving portrait of a family of Ghanaian immigrants ravaged by depression and addiction and grief--a novel about faith, science, religion, love. Exquisitely written, emotionally searing, this is an exceptionally powerful follow-up to Gyasi's phenomenal debut.

7 Anxious People, by Fredrik Backman

Signed copies available from the Midtown Scholar. The latest work by this acclaimed Swedish novelist, author of the bestselling A Man from Ove. Anxious People is a charming, poignant novel about a crime that never took place, a would-be bank robber who disappears into thin air, and eight extremely anxious strangers who find they have more in common than they ever imagined.

Looking at real estate isn't usually a life-or-death situation, but an apartment open house becomes just that when a failed bank robber bursts in and takes a group of strangers hostage. The captives include a recently retired couple who relentlessly hunt down fixer-uppers to avoid the painful truth that they can't fix their own marriage. There's a wealthy bank director who has been too busy to care about anyone else and a young couple who are about to have their first child but can't seem to agree on anything, from where they want to live to how they met in the first place. Add to the mix an eighty-seven-year-old woman who has lived long enough not to be afraid of someone waving a gun in her face, a flustered but still-ready-to-make-a-deal real estate agent, and a mystery man who has locked himself in the apartment's only bathroom, and you've got the worst group of hostages in the world.

COFFEE-TABLE BOOK

8 Humans, by Brandon Stanton

December 2020's WITF Pick of the Month. A new photographic collection from the author-photographer behind Humans of New York. Signed copies available from the Midtown Scholar.

Brandon Stanton created *Humans of New York* in 2010. What began as a photographic census of life in New York City, soon evolved into a storytelling phenomenon. A global audience of millions began following HONY daily. Over the next several years, Stanton broadened his lens to include people from across the world.

Traveling to more than forty countries, he conducted interviews across continents, borders, and language barriers. *Humans* is the definitive catalogue of these travels. The faces and locations will vary from page to page, but the stories will feel deeply familiar. Told with candor and intimacy, *Humans* will resonate with readers across the globe—providing a portrait of our shared experience.

HISTORICAL FICTION

9 Dark Tides: The Fairmile Series (Book 2), by Philippa Gregory

A new historical novel that tracks the rise of Gregory's Tidelands family in London, Venice, and New England. The Midtown Scholar is honored to be welcoming the author for a ticketed livestream, virtual book-release event this Wednesday evening, December 2nd.

Midsummer Eve 1670. Two unexpected visitors arrive at a shabby warehouse on the south side of the River Thames. The first is a wealthy man hoping to find the lover he deserted twenty-one years before. James Avery has everything to offer, including the favour of the newly restored King Charles II, and he believes that the warehouse's poor owner Alinor has the one thing his money cannot buy—his son and heir.

The second visitor is a beautiful widow from Venice in deepest mourning. She claims Alinor as her mother-in-law and has come to tell Alinor that her son Rob has drowned in the dark tides of the Venice lagoon.

Alinor writes to her brother Ned, newly arrived in faraway New England and trying to make a life between the worlds of the English newcomers and the American Indians as they move toward inevitable war. Alinor tells him that she knows—without doubt—that her son is alive and the widow is an imposter.

Set in the poverty and glamour of Restoration London, in the golden streets of Venice, and on the tensely contested frontier of early America, this is a novel of greed and desire: for love, for wealth, for a child, and for home

10 The Duke and I, Bridgerton Series (Book 1), by Julia Quinn

A romance set in early 19th-century Regency England, by a #1 New York Times bestselling author of dozens of romances, coming this month to a screen near you. The Netflix series adaptation releases on December 25th, by showrunner Shonda Rhimes. With Julie Andrews cast as the voice of the inimitable Lady Whistledown, and fabulous color-blind casting. Read the first book, if not all eight, before you watch!

Can there be any greater challenge to London's Ambitious Mamas than an unmarried duke?—*Lady Whistledown's Society Papers, April 1813*

By all accounts, Simon Basset is on the verge of proposing to his best friend's sister—the lovely and almost-on-the-shelf—Daphne Bridgerton. But the two of them know the truth—it's all an elaborate ruse to keep Simon free from marriage-minded society mothers. And as for Daphne, surely she will attract some worthy suitors now that it seems a duke has declared her desirable.

But as Daphne waltzes across ballroom after ballroom with Simon, it's hard to remember that their courtship is a sham. Maybe it's his devilish smile, certainly it's the way his eyes seem to burn every time he looks at her . . . but somehow Daphne is falling for the dashing duke . . . for real! And now she must do the impossible and convince the handsome rogue that their clever little scheme deserves a slight alteration, and that nothing makes quite as much sense as falling in lov

FOR KIDS AND TEENS

1 CHILDREN'S - Our Friend Hedgehog: A Story of Us, by Lauren Castillo

A lovely early-reader book for kids by this Caldecott honor-winning author-illustrator, a local author! Signed copies available from the Midtown Scholar.

Reviewers call it a modern-day Winnie-the-Pooh! A charming story about finding your friends and sticking together through thick and thin. First in a new series.

2 PRE-TEENS - The Deep End, by Jeff Kinney

The latest release (#15) in the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series. Signed copies available from the Midtown Scholar.

3 YOUNG ADULT - Punching the Air, by Iby Zobi and Yusef Salaam

Award-winning novel in verse about a boy who was wrongly incarcerated. One of our favorite authors, Iby Zobi, collaborated with prison reform activist Yusef Salaam of the Exonerated Five.

Suddenly, at just sixteen years old, Amal's bright future is upended: he is convicted of a crime he didn't commit and sent to prison. Despair and rage almost sink him until he turns to the refuge of his words, his art. This never should have been his story. But can he change it?

With spellbinding lyricism, the co-authors tell a moving and deeply profound story about how one boy is able to maintain his humanity and fight for the truth, in a system designed to strip him of both.

LOCAL HISTORY

1 One Hundred Voices: Harrisburg's Historic African American Community, 1850-1920, edited by Calobe Jackson, Jr., Katie Wingert McArdle, and David Pettegrew

In 2020, a coalition of citizens, organizers, legislators, and educators came together to commemorate the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments by establishing a new monument in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This memorial is dedicated to the capital city's significant African American community and its historic struggle for the vote. The Commonwealth Monument, located on the Irvis Equality Circle on the South Lawn of Pennsylvania's State Capitol Grounds, features a bronze pedestal inscribed with one hundred names of change agents who pursued the power of suffrage and citizenship between 1850 and 1920.

This book is a companion to the monument and tells the stories of those one hundred freedom seekers, abolitionists, activists, suffragists, moralists, policemen, masons, doctors, lawyers, musicians, poets, publishers, teachers, preachers, housekeepers, janitors, and business leaders, among many others. In their committed advocacy for freedom, equality, and justice, these inspiring men and women made unique and lasting contributions to the standing and life of African Americans—and, indeed, the political power of all Americans—within their local communities and across the country.

One Hundred Voices is a product of the Commonwealth Monument Project, an initiative of the International Institute for Peace through Tourism – Harrisburg Peace Promenade, and supported by the Foundation for Enhancing Communities.

2 Out in Central Pennsylvania: The History of an LGBTQ Community, by William Burton with Barry Loveland

A video recording of LGBT Center of Central PA's Virtual Book Release event is available on our bookstore's website and youtube channel: <https://youtu.be/jVFoHyXr7K8>

Outside of major metropolitan areas, the fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights has had its own unique and rich history—one that is quite different from the national narrative set in New York and California. Out in Central Pennsylvania highlights one facet of this lesser-known but equally important story, immersing readers in the LGBTQ community building and social networking that has taken place in the small cities and towns in the heart of Pennsylvania from the 1960s to the present day.

Drawing from oral histories and the archives of the LGBT Center of Central PA History Project, this book recounts the innovative ways that LGBTQ central Pennsylvanians organized to demand civil rights and to improve their quality of life in a region that often rejected them. Full of compelling stories of individuals seeking community and grappling with inequity, harassment, and discrimination, and featuring a distinctive trove of historical photographs, Out in Central Pennsylvania is a local story with national implications. It brings rural and small-town queer life out into the open and explores how LGBTQ identity and social advocacy networks can form outside of a large urban environment.