

# Fireside Book Chats: Winter 2018



## *Karen's List: American Perspectives (Fiction and Non-Fiction)*

**Alexie, Sherman.** *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*, (2017). When his mother passed away at the age of 78, Sherman Alexie responded with this memoir featuring 78 poems, 78 essays and intimate family photographs. Alexie shares raw, angry, funny, profane, tender memories of a childhood few can imagine--growing up dirt-poor on an Indian reservation. (Adapted from the Publisher).

**Erdrich, Louise.** *The Future Home of the Living God*, (2017). When evolution stops as mysteriously as it began, pregnancy and childbearing become matters of national security. For Cedar, a 26-year-old Ojibwe woman, the crackdown becomes personal, because she is four months pregnant. Told in the first person, this is a beautiful story of family, self-determination, and what it means to be a woman.

**Gruenewald, Mary Matsuda.** *Looking Like the Enemy*, (2005). A memoir from an 80-year-old woman who, at 16, was placed with her family in Japanese internment camp during WWII. This is a work that has been compared in its power to *The Diary of Anne Frank* and is written in a similarly accessible style, but unlike Anne Frank, the reader also benefits from the author's wisdom and perspective gained in the lifetime she lived after the Nissei's traumatic experience.

**Gyasi, Yaa.** *Homegoing*, (2016). This historical novel traces the parallel lives of, and ensuing generations following two 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Ghanaian women, one married to a wealthy Englishman and remaining in Ghana and the other taken to America by the slave trade. The publisher calls it, "[e]xtraordinary for its exquisite language, its implacable sorrow, its soaring beauty, and for its monumental portrait of the forces that shape families and nations."

**Isenberg, Nancy.** *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*, (2016). Surveying political rhetoric and policy, popular literature and scientific theories over four hundred years, Isenberg upends assumptions about America's supposedly class-free society. A hard-hitting look at the landless poor in the U.S. Read this alongside *Hillbilly Elegy* for another perspective.

**Mbue, Imbolo.** *Behold the Dreamers*, (2016). A beautifully written story about the interwoven lives of a Cameroonian immigrant family and the wealthy New York family who employ them. Important perspectives on the universality of human aspirations, great characters, and a well-paced storyline make for a satisfying read.

**Nguyen, Viet Thanh.** *The Sympathizer*, (2016). Winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize. With the pace and suspense of a thriller and prose that has been compared to Graham Greene and Saul Bellow, *The Sympathizer* tells the story of a communist double agent who comes to America after the fall of Saigon. Gripping story of espionage, identity, love and friendship.

**Thomas, Angie.** *The Hate U Give*, (2017). When Starr Carter witnesses the shooting of her childhood friend, Kahlil, by a police officer, the uneasy balance between the worlds she straddles is upended. Eminently readable with great pace and character, this timely YA novel is highly



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recommended to any adult for a great perspective not only on American society's ills, but on teenagers generally, and for Thomas' take on the modern, black American family.

**Vance, J.D. *Hillbilly Elegy*, (2016).** From a former Marine and Yale Law School Graduate, a poignant account of growing up in a poor Appalachian town, that offers a broader, probing look at the struggles of America's white working class. Part memoir, part historical and social analysis, this is a fascinating consideration of class, culture, and the American dream.

**Zoboi, Ibi. *American Street*, (2017).** Fabiola Toussaint, a young Haitian woman coming to Detroit, believes she will finally find a good life, but when her mother is detained and she meets her loud American cousins, her picture of American life changes dramatically. Full of heart and great characters, this is an immigrant's tale of love, family, and the harsh realities of life in modern urban America, and you'll even find a little magic in the mix!

