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Book Marks

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BOOK MARKS

Featuring summaries of books written by Furman faculty and alumni, as well as reviews of books recommended by faculty and staff as “good reads.”

RECOMMENDED

Barbara Strauch, *The Primal Teen: What the New Discoveries About the Teenage Brain Tell Us About Our Kids* (Doubleday, 2003). Why do teenagers sleep until noon, slam doors, engage in shouting matches, forget to call home and take chances with their health? I used to think it was largely due to fluctuating hormones, but this book explores the growing body of research suggesting that teen behavior may be affected more by profound biological changes taking place in their brains. Until recently scientists believed that brain growth and development were largely completed by the end of early childhood, but recent research suggests that much is happening to the teenage brain. While selected synoptic connections are radically pruning, others are strengthened. This rewiring helps to explain their mood changes, responses and behaviors — so while fluctuating hormones and the social environment may be major players in the teen drama, the brain is directing the show. All readers, and especially those who work with adolescents, will find this book a valuable resource.

— Lorraine DeJong,
Education

Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair That Changed America* (Crown Publishing Group, 2003). This is “the spellbinding true story of two men, an architect and a serial killer, whose fates were linked by the greatest fair in American history: the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, nicknamed ‘The White City.’” The author paints a wonderfully complex picture of 1890s Chicago, where despite oppressive economic and social conditions, not to mention the weather, the citizens managed to bring an incredible event to the

world. As you read the book, you’ll meet a remarkable cast of characters and be amazed by the architects’ ability to complete the fair and, in the process, to “out Eiffel [as in Tower] Eiffel.” A fun read.

— Nancy Sloan,
Assistant Librarian

James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews* (Houghton Mifflin, 2001). This award-winning book traces the history of the relationship of the church to the Jews, from Christian origins to the period of post-Holocaust dialogue. While the author focuses specifically on the Catholic tradition, the book is more a chronicle of Western — rather than solely Catholic — anti-Semitism. In addition to documenting this history, Carroll poses theological and philosophical arguments about the radical change of direction the Church must take in view of its past complicity in Jew hatred. He adeptly places the writing of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ death within the tragic context of Roman-Jewish colonial relations and also makes clear the import of the “Christ-killing” charge, which has served as justification for violent actions against Jews throughout history. For those wondering why controversy already abounds concerning Mel Gibson’s movie on the Passion, this book will provide important historical context.

— Shelly Matthews, Religion

Simone de Beauvoir, *A Very Easy Death* (originally published in France, 1964; English translation, Pantheon Books, 1965). This book chronicles both the death of the author’s mother and also her own reactions to what she called her mother’s “vain tenaciousness” as she clung to the unrealistic hope that she would recover. Beauvoir writes of this bedside vigil in a Paris nursing home with candor and pity. After an adult life in which

she was estranged emotionally from her mother, Beauvoir says that as they “talked in the half darkness” she “assuaged an old unhappiness; I was renewing the dialogue that had been broken off during my adolescence . . . the early tenderness that I had thought dead forever came to life again, since it had become possible for it to slip into words and actions.” This is a powerful, moving account of brief suffering and death, and of an adult child’s complicated grief.

— Janis Crowe, English

Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (Harper San Francisco, 2002). The paperback edition of this book, released a year after its original publication on the first anniversary of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, signals the need we still have to understand what motivated those horrifying actions. More than that, though, this book is a passionate call to all persons of religious conviction to examine their own faith so as to avoid the creation of such destructive attitudes. The author is a scholar of Islam, a Baptist minister and a former Furman religion professor who now is chair of the religion department at Wake Forest University. He contends that all well-established religions “converge in teaching both an orientation toward God or the transcendent and compassionate, constructive relationships with others in this world.” But he also argues that religious practitioners may, at times, depart from their true vision, and as a result, their religion becomes evil. The five warning signs of religion gone wrong and Kimball’s appeal to find “an inclusive faith rooted in a tradition” are well worth consideration.

— Helen Lee Turner, Religion

FROM ALUMNI

Gary E. Parker ’76, *Highland Grace* (Bethany House, 2003). A Crossings Book Club main selection, this is the third and concluding book in the Blue Ridge Legacy series, following Christy Award nominee *Highland Hopes* and *Highland Mercies*. *Highland Grace* completes the 100-year saga of Abigail Porter Holston and her family by taking the reader — and Abigail’s children and grandchildren — through the second half of the

20th century. *Library Journal* says, “Parker combines well-rounded characters and a compelling plot with a strong sense of place and mountain traditions. Fans of the other two books and readers who loved *Christy*, Catherine Marshall’s classic tale about Appalachia, will enjoy.” Parker is senior minister at First Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga.

Donny Wilder ’54, *Editor’s Notebook* (Palmetto Conservation Foundation Press, 2003). The author, a veteran of more than 40 years in the newspaper business, has compiled this collection of columns from his 20 years as editor of *The Chronicle* in Clinton, S.C., where he was born and reared. As the publisher states, “From politics to puppy paternity, government to goats, famous to the infamous, Donny Wilder has seen, experienced and written about nearly every facet of small-town living. His characters and stories range from poignant to peculiar to downright hilarious, [and] his social commentaries offer an uplifting outlook on life [while capturing] the heart, humor and hopes of Wilder’s community.”

FROM FACULTY

T. Lloyd Benson, *The Caning of Senator Sumner* (Wadsworth Publishing, 2003). In May of 1856, when South Carolina Congressman Preston S. Brooks caned Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner on the Senate floor, he shocked the nation and shattered the fragile truce that had existed between North and South. This book introduces students to a key turning point in the coming of the Civil War. Because the story incorporates so many of the era’s key issues (slavery, abolition, personal liberty laws, state’s rights, territorial expansion, ideals of gender and manhood, and others), the book provides an excellent window into the mind of a nation on the brink of conflict. The narrative is complemented by a number of graphics, including images of the incident and maps showing the politics and intellectual geography of the era and how they were affected by the incident.

The author is the Walter Kenneth Mattison Professor of History at Furman.