

SERC Book Club Recommends

[SERC Book Club](#) is a community resource formed in response to a need for environmental education that 1) centers on the experiences of BIPOC with environmental and social injustices 2) equips us with the bold imagination and optimism necessary to address the crises of our times.

This is our running list of recommended books that we would suggest to any student, faculty, or staff at UC Berkeley. We recognize that books and reading are about more than just knowledge; books are opportunities to learn about ourselves and the world, to know the stories of others, and to experiment with new ways of being. We aim to provide our community with many types of recommendations organized into fluid categories –from academic texts to science fiction to poetry and much more– with a focus on contemporary authors. Happy reading! 🌞



Image of SERC Book Club Facilitators '23-24

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Eco-colonialism

Consumed // The Need for Collective Change: Colonialism, Climate Change, and Consumerism (2021)

By [Aja Barber](#)



A story told in two parts, Barber exposes the endemic injustices in our consumer industries and the uncomfortable history of the textile industry, one which brokered slavery, racism, and today's wealth inequality. Once the layers are peeled back, Barber invites you to participate in unlearning, to understand the truth behind why we consume in the way that we do, to confront the uncomfortable feeling that we are never quite enough and why we fill that void with consumption rather than compassion.

Pollution is Colonialism (2021)

By [Max Liboiron](#)



In *Pollution is Colonialism* Max Liboiron presents a framework for understanding scientific research methods as practices that can align with or against colonialism. They point out that even when researchers are working toward benevolent goals, environmental science and activism are often premised on a colonial worldview and access to land. Focusing on plastic pollution, the book models an anticolonial scientific practice aligned with Indigenous, particularly Métis, concepts of land, ethics, and relations.

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Environmental Warfare in Gaza: Colonial Violence and New Landscapes of Resistance

(2024)

By [Shourideh C. Molavi](#)



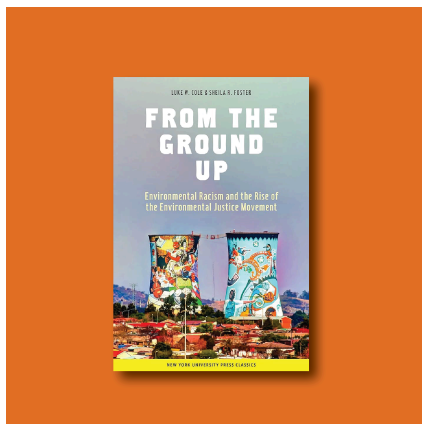
This book is a vivid document of this latest stage of Israeli warfare, including original maps, images and visualisations which deepen our understanding of its environmental and human impact. It collects new documents, original archival materials, stills of drone footage, first-hand testimonies of farmers, organisers and protesters, and documents affected vegetation in Gaza as 'silent witnesses' to Israeli settler-colonial violence.

Environmental Justice

From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement

(2001)

By [Luke Cole](#) & [Sheila Foster](#)



When Bill Clinton signed an Executive Order on Environmental Justice in 1994, the phenomenon of environmental racism—the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards, particularly toxic waste dumps

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and polluting factories, on people of color and low-income communities—gained unprecedented recognition. Behind that momentous signature, however, lies a remarkable tale of grassroots activism and political mobilization.

[Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor](#) (2001)

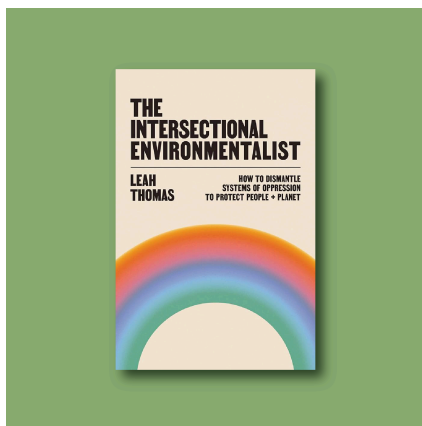
By [Rob Nixon](#)



The violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills, and the environmental aftermath of war takes place gradually and often invisibly. Using the innovative concept of "slow violence" to describe these threats, Rob Nixon focuses on the inattention we have paid to the attritional lethality of many environmental crises, in contrast with the sensational, spectacle-driven messaging that impels public activism today.

[The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People and Planet](#) (2022)

By [Leah Thomas](#)



The Intersectional Environmentalist examines the inextricable link between environmentalism, racism, and privilege, and promotes awareness of the fundamental truth that we cannot save the planet without uplifting the voices of its people—especially those most often unheard. Written by Leah Thomas, a prominent voice in

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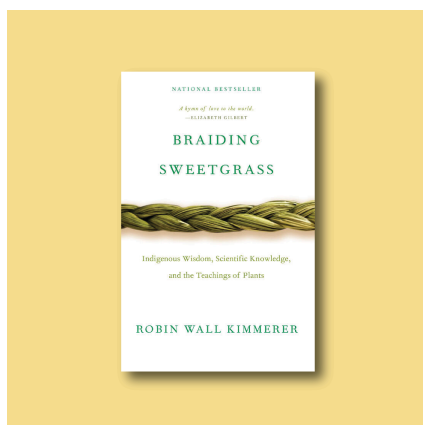
the field and the activist who coined the term "Intersectional Environmentalism," this book is simultaneously a call to action, a guide to instigating change for all, and a pledge to work towards the empowerment of all people and the betterment of the planet.

***For more EJ Books, please visit [SERC's EJ Toolkit](#).

Indigenous Worldviews

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (2015)

By [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)



Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, a mother, and a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. In a rich braid of reflections that range from the creation of Turtle Island to the forces that threaten its flourishing today, she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of a wider ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world.

Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes Through Indigenous Science (2022)

By [Jessica Hernandez](#)

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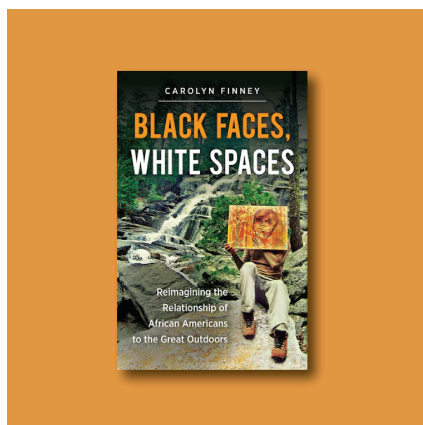


Jessica Hernandez—Maya Ch'orti' and Zapotec environmental scientist and founder of environmental agency Piña Soul—introduces and contextualizes Indigenous environmental knowledge and proposes a vision of land stewardship that heals rather than displaces, that generates rather than destroys. She breaks down the failures of western-defined conservatism and shares alternatives, citing the restoration work of urban Indigenous people in Seattle; her family's fight against ecoterrorism in Latin America; and holistic land management approaches of Indigenous groups across the continent.

Black Ecologies

Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors (2014)

By [Carolyn Finney](#)



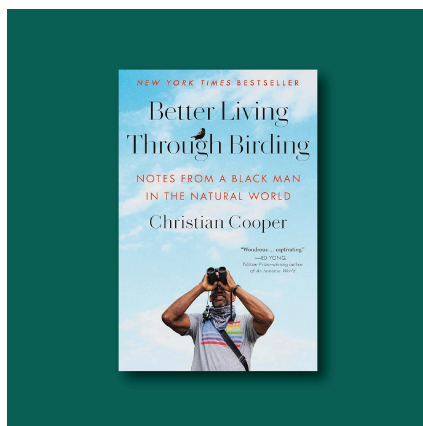
In this thought-provoking study, Carolyn Finney looks beyond the discourse of the environmental justice movement to examine how the natural environment has been understood, commodified, and represented by both white and black Americans. Bridging the fields of environmental history, cultural studies, critical race studies, and geography, Finney argues that the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and racial violence have shaped

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cultural understandings of the "great outdoors" and determined who should and can have access to natural spaces.

Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the Natural World (2024)

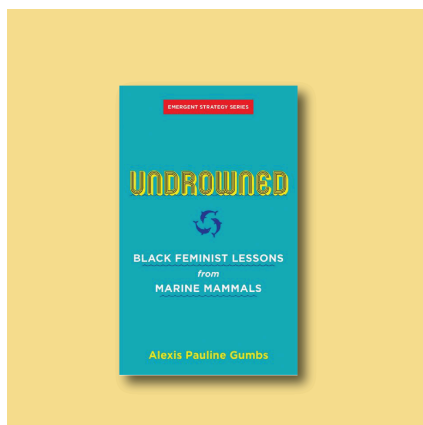
By [Christian Cooper](#)



In *Better Living Through Birding*, Cooper tells the story of his extraordinary life leading up to the now-infamous incident in Central Park and shows how a life spent looking up at the birds prepared him, in the most uncanny of ways, to be a gay, Black man in America today. From sharpened senses that work just as well at a protest as in a park to what a bird like the Common Grackle can teach us about self-acceptance, *Better Living Through Birding* exults in the pleasures of a life lived in pursuit of the natural world and invites you to discover them yourself.

Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Animals (2020)

By [Alexis Pauline Gumbs](#)



**SERC Book Club 2020 pick.*

Undrowned is a book-length meditation for the entire human species, based on the subversive and transformative lessons of marine mammals. Alexis Pauline Gumbs has spent hundreds of hours watching our aquatic cousins. She has found them to be queer, fierce, protective of each other, complex, shaped by conflict,

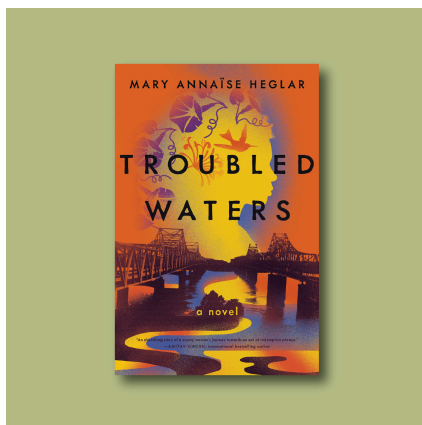
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and struggling to survive the extractive and militarized conditions humans have imposed on the ocean. Employing a brilliant mix of poetic sensibility, naturalist observation, and Black feminist insights, she translates their submerged wisdom to reveal what they might teach us.

[Troubled Waters](#) (2024)

By [Mary Annaïse Heglar](#)

The world is burning, and Corinne will do anything to put out the flames. After her brother died aboard an oil boat on the Mississippi River in 2013, Corrine awakened to the realities of climate change and its perpetrators. Now, a year later, she finds herself trapped in a lonely cycle of mourning both her brother and the very planet she stands on. She's convinced that in order to save her future, she has to make sure that her brother's life meant something. But in the act of honoring her brother's spirit, she resurrects family ghosts she knows little about—ghosts her grandmother Cora knows intimately. In heartfelt, lyrical prose, celebrated author Mary Annaïse Heglar weaves an unforgettable, distinctly Southern story of the enduring power of family, Black resistance, and the rising climate crisis.

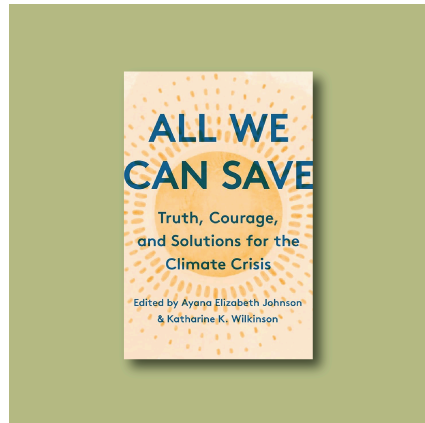


Feminist Environmentalism

[All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis](#) (2020)

Edited by [Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#) and [Katharine Wilkinson](#)

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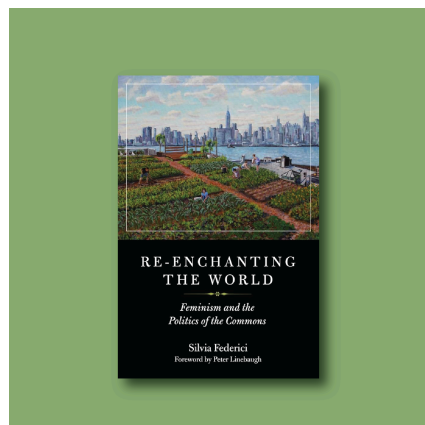


**A SERC Book Club "Feminist Ecopoetry" pick, Spring 2024.*

Intermixing essays with poetry and art, this book is both a balm and a guide for knowing and holding what has been done to the world, while bolstering our resolve never to give up on each other or our collective future. We must summon truth, courage, and solutions, to turn away from the brink and toward life-giving possibility. Curated by two climate leaders, this book is a collection and celebration of visionaries who are leading us on a path toward all we can save.

[Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons](#) (2018)

By [Silvia Federici](#)



Drawing on rich historical research, [Federici] maps the connections between the previous forms of enclosure that occurred with the birth of capitalism and the destruction of the commons and the "new enclosures" at the heart of the present phase of global capitalist accumulation. Considering the commons from a feminist perspective, this collection centers on women and reproductive work as crucial to both our economic survival and the construction of a world free from the hierarchies and divisions capital has planted in the body of the world proletariat.

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[The Story is in Our Bones: How Worldviews and Climate Justice Can Remake a World in Crisis](#) (2024)

By [Osprey Orielle Lake](#)



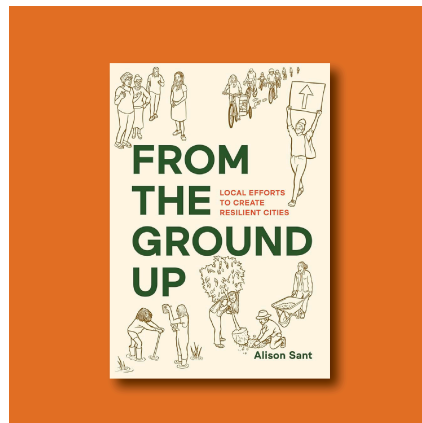
Author, activist, and changemaker Osprey Orielle Lake weaves together ecological, mythical, political, and cultural understandings and shares her experiences working with global leaders, climate justice activists, Indigenous Peoples, and systems-thinkers. She seeks to summon a new way of being and thinking in the Anthropocene, which includes transforming the interlocking crises of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, capitalism, and ecocide, to build thriving Earth communities for all.

***See especially Part II “Dismantling Patriarchy, Racism, and the Myth of Whiteness: Ancient Mother and Women Rising”

Cities

[From the Ground Up: Local Efforts to Create Resilient Cities](#) (2022)

By [Alison Sant](#)

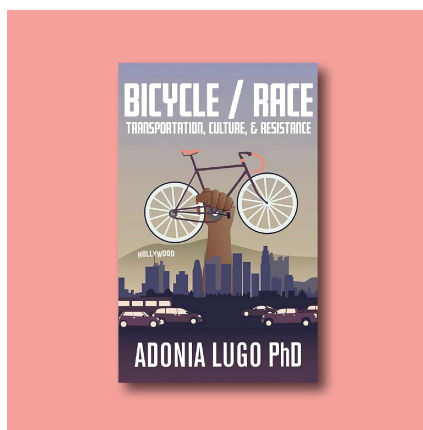


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For decades, American cities have experimented with ways to remake themselves in response to climate change. These efforts, often driven by grassroots activism, offer valuable lessons for transforming the places we live. In her new book Alison Sant focuses on the unique ways in which US cities are working to mitigate and adapt to climate change while creating equitable and livable communities. She shows how, from the ground up, we are raising the bar to make cities places in which we don't just survive, but where all people have the opportunity to thrive.

Bicycle/Race: Transportation, Culture, & Resistance (2018)

By [Adonia E. Lugo](#)



Bicycle/Race paints an unforgettable picture of Los Angeles—and the United States—from the perspective of two wheels. This is a book of borderlands and intersections, a cautionary tale about the dangers of putting infrastructure before culture, and a coming-of-age story about power and identity. The colonial history of southern California is interwoven through Adonia Lugo's story of growing up Chicana in Orange County, becoming a bicycle anthropologist, and co-founding Los Angeles's hallmark open streets cycling event, CicLAvia, along the way.

Activism

Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds (2017)

By [Adrienne Maree Brown](#)

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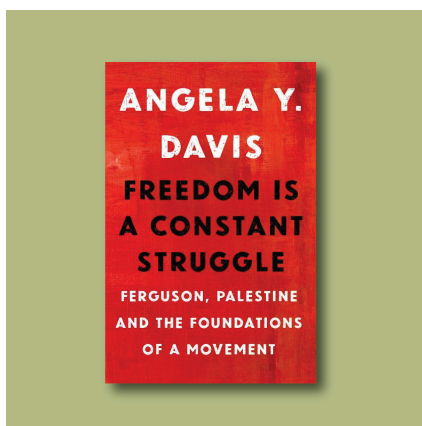


**SERC's Senior Book pick, 2019.*

Inspired by Octavia Butler's explorations of our human relationship to change, *Emergent Strategy* is radical self-help, society-help, and planet-help designed to shape the futures we want to live. Change is constant. The world is in a continual state of flux. It is a stream of ever-mutating, emergent patterns. Rather than steel ourselves against such change, this book invites us to feel, map, assess, and learn from the swirling patterns around us in order to better understand and influence them as they happen.

Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement (2016)

By [Angela Y. Davis](#)



In these newly collected essays, interviews, and speeches, world-renowned activist and scholar Angela Y. Davis illuminates the connections between struggles against state violence and oppression throughout history and around the world. Reflecting on the importance of Black feminism, intersectionality, and prison abolitionism for today's struggles, Davis discusses the legacies of previous liberation struggles—from the Black freedom movement to the South African antiapartheid movement.

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Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good (2019)

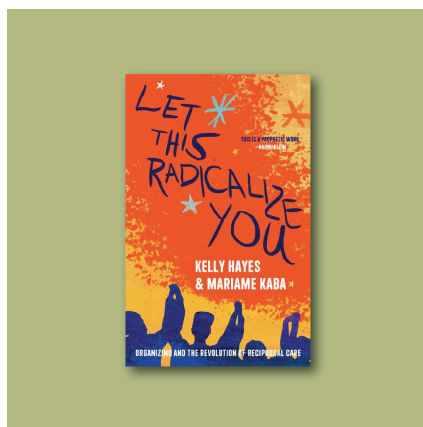
By [Adrienne Maree Brown](#)



How do we make social justice the most pleasurable human experience? How can we awaken within ourselves desires that make it impossible to settle for anything less than a fulfilling life? Author and editor adrienne maree brown finds the answer in something she calls “pleasure activism,” a politics of healing and happiness that explodes the dour myth that changing the world is just another form of work. Drawing on the black feminist tradition, she challenges us to rethink the ground rules of activism.

Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care (2023)

By [Kelly Hayes](#) and [Mariame Kaba](#)



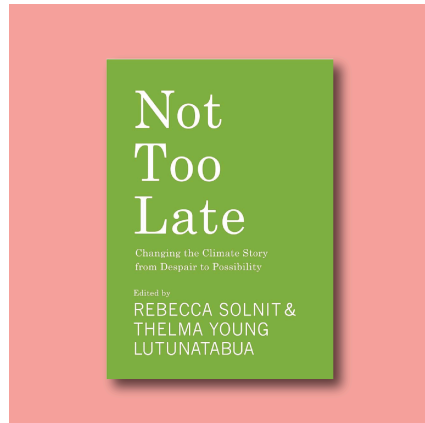
Longtime organizers and movement educators Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes examine some of the political lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the convergence of mass protest and mass formations of mutual aid, and consider what this confluence of power can teach us about a future that will require mass acts of care, rescue and defense, in the face of both state violence and environmental disaster.

Not Too Late: Changing the Climate Story from Despair to Possibility (2023)

Edited by [Rebecca Solnit](#) and [Thelma Young Lutunatabua](#)

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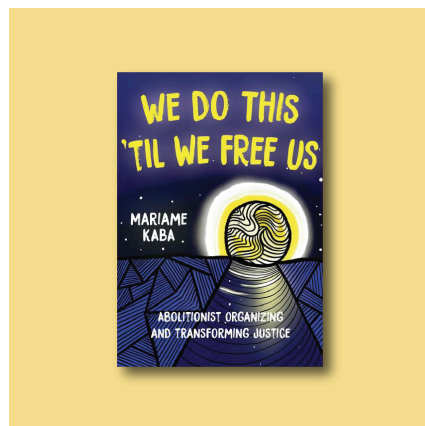
Not Too Late is the book for anyone who is despondent, defeatist, or unsure about climate change and seeking answers. As the contributors to this volume make clear, the future will be decided by whether we act in the present—and we must act to counter institutional inertia, fossil fuel interests, and political obduracy.



Deep Justice & Abolition

[We Do This Til We Free US: Abolitionist Organizing and Transforming Justice](#) (2021)

By [Mariame Kaba](#)



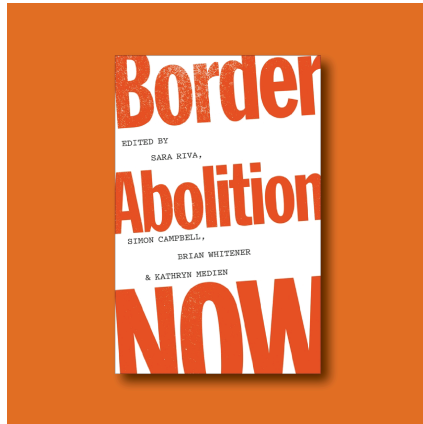
**SERC's Senior Book pick, 2022.*

What if social transformation and liberation isn't about waiting for someone else to come along and save us? What if ordinary people have the power to collectively free ourselves? In this timely collection of essays and interviews, Mariame Kaba reflects on the deep work of abolition and transformative political struggle.

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Border Abolition Now (2024)

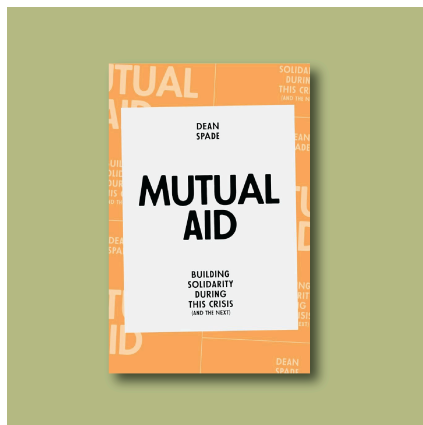
Edited by [Sara Riva](#), [Simon Campbell](#), [Brian Whitener](#), and [Kathryn Medien](#)



The book's contributors argue that what the abolitionist tradition brings to border studies is a way to contextualise the spread of carceral and policing apparatuses across a long historical arc; an understanding that undoing police and carceral regimes requires the fundamental transformation of all existing social institutions; and a political commitment to building new worlds beyond police, prisons and the border regime.

Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) (2020)

By [Dean Spade](#)

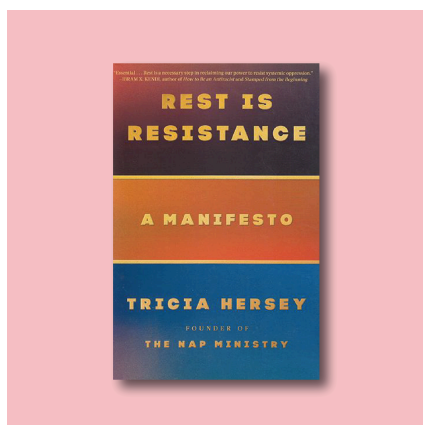


This book is about mutual aid: why it is so important, what it looks like, and how to do it. It provides a grassroots theory of mutual aid, describes how mutual aid has been a part of all larger, powerful social movements, and offers concrete tools for organizing, such as how to work in groups, decision-making process, how to prevent and address conflict, and how to deal with burnout.

Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto (2022)

By [Tricia Hersey](#)

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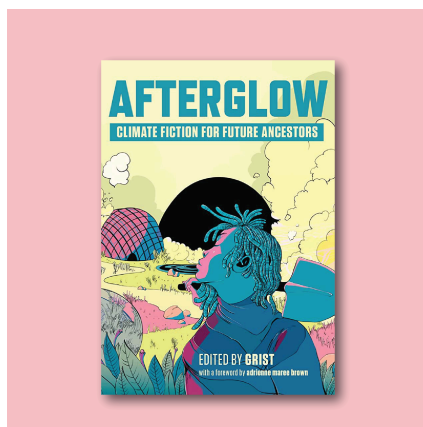
**SERC's Senior Book pick, 2023.*

In *Rest Is Resistance*, Tricia Hersey, aka the Nap Bishop, casts an illuminating light on our troubled relationship with rest and how to imagine and dream our way to a future where rest is exalted. Our worth does not reside in how much we produce, especially not for a system that exploits and dehumanizes us. Rest, in its simplest form, becomes an act of resistance and a reclaiming of power because it asserts our most basic humanity. We are enough. The systems cannot have us.

Science Fiction & Fantasy

[Afterglow: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors](#) (2023)

Edited by [Grist](#)



**SERC Book Club 2023 pick.*

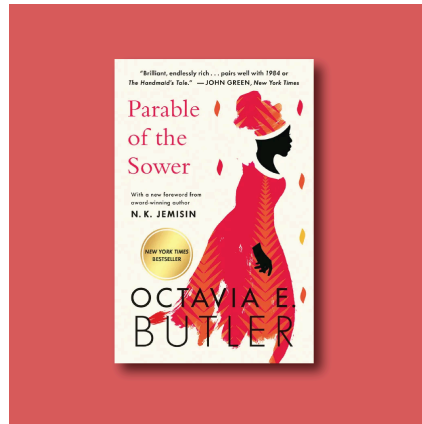
Inspired by cutting-edge literary movements, such as Afrofuturism, hopepunk, and solarpunk, *Afterglow* imagines intersectional worlds in which no one is left behind—where humanity prioritizes equitable climate solutions and continued service to one's community. Whether through abundance or adaptation, reform, or a

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new understanding of survival, these stories offer flickers of hope, even joy, as they provide a springboard for exploring how fiction can help create a better reality.

[Parable of the Sower](#) (1993)

By [Octavia E. Butler](#)



When global climate change and economic crises lead to social chaos in the early 2020s, California becomes full of dangers, from pervasive water shortage to masses of vagabonds who will do anything to live to see another day. Fifteen-year-old Lauren Olamina lives inside a gated community with her preacher father, family, and neighbors, sheltered from the surrounding anarchy. In a society where any vulnerability is a risk, she suffers from hyperempathy, a debilitating sensitivity to others' emotions. Precocious and clear-eyed, Lauren must make her voice heard in order to protect her loved ones from the imminent disasters her small community stubbornly ignores. But what begins as a fight for survival soon leads to something much more: the birth of a new faith . . . and a startling vision of human destiny.

[The Fifth Season](#) (2015)

By [N.K. Jemisin](#)



This is the way the world ends...for the last time. A season of endings has begun. It starts with the great red rift across the heart of the world's sole continent, spewing ash that blots out the sun. It starts with death, with a

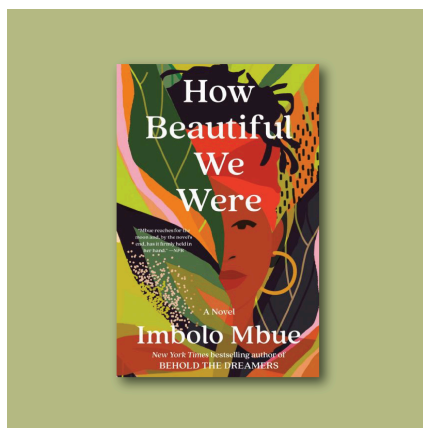
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murdered son and a missing daughter. It starts with betrayal, and long-dormant wounds rising up to fester. This is the Stillness, a land long familiar with catastrophe, where the power of the earth is wielded as a weapon. And where there is no mercy.

Literary Fiction

[How Beautiful We Were](#) (2021)

By [Imbolo Mbue](#)

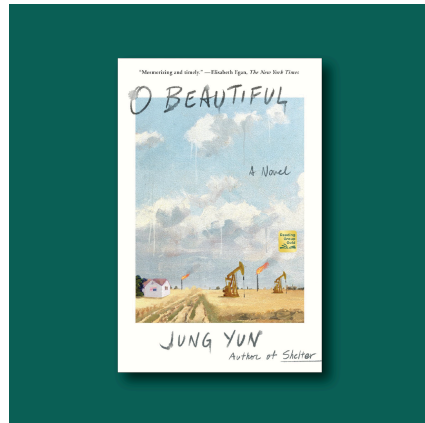


We should have known the end was near. So begins Imbolo Mbue's powerful second novel, *How Beautiful We Were*. Set in the fictional African village of Kosawa, it tells of a people living in fear amid environmental degradation wrought by an American oil company. Pipeline spills have rendered farmlands infertile. Children are dying from drinking toxic water. Promises of cleanup and financial reparations to the villagers are made—and ignored. The country's government, led by a brazen dictator, exists to serve its own interests. Left with few choices, the people of Kosawa decide to fight back. Their struggle will last for decades and come at a steep price.

[O Beautiful](#) (2021)

By [Jung Yun](#)

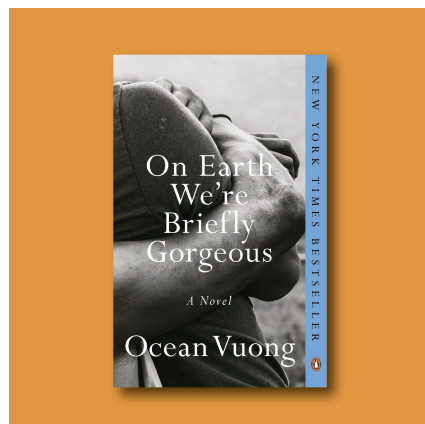
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"A wondrous, compelling, and insightful portrait of a North Dakota town as it struggles through a present-day oil boom. We may tire of hearing we live in an America of complicated times, but Jung Yun's grand novel has something special and powerful to add, something that splendidly rises above the din. Her novel is a grand and stunning piece of work, at times humorous, sad, and breathtaking." — Edward P. Jones, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Known World*

On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous (2019)

By [Ocean Vuong](#)



**A SERC Book Club "Queer Ecologies" pick, Spring 2024 + SERC Senior Book pick 2024.*

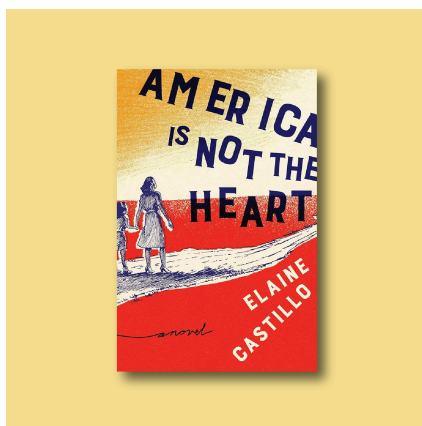
Written when the speaker, Little Dog, is in his late twenties, the letter unearths a family's history that began before he was born — a history whose epicenter is rooted in Vietnam — and serves as a doorway into parts of his life his mother has never known, all of it leading to an unforgettable revelation...Asking questions central to our American moment, immersed as we are in addiction, violence, and trauma, but undergirded by compassion and tenderness, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* is as much about the power of telling one's own story as it is about the obliterating silence of not being heard.

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[America Is Not the Heart](#) (2018)

By [Elaine Castillo](#)

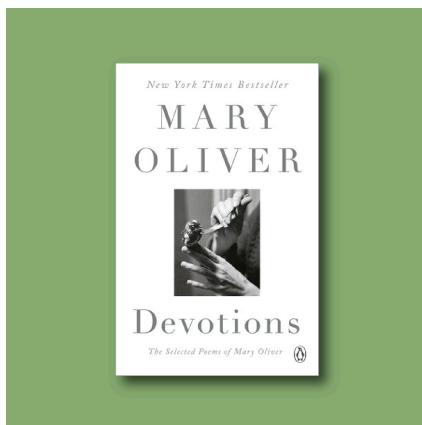
How many lives fit in a lifetime? When Hero de Vera arrives in America—haunted by the political upheaval in the Philippines and disowned by her parents—she’s already on her third. Her uncle gives her a fresh start in the Bay Area, and he doesn’t ask about her past. His younger wife knows enough about the might and secret of the De Vera family to keep her head down. But their daughter—the first American-born daughter in the family—can’t resist asking Hero about her damaged hands. Told with startling lucidity, humor, and an uncanny ear for the intimacies and shorthand of family ritual, *America Is Not the Heart* is a sprawling, soulful debut about three generations of women struggling to balance the promise of the American dream and the unshakable grip of history.



Ecopoetry

[Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver](#) (2020)

By [Mary Oliver](#)



*A SERC Book Club "Feminist Ecopoetry" pick, Spring 2024.

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"No matter where one starts reading, *Devotions* offers much to love, from Oliver's exuberant dog poems to selections from the Pulitzer Prize-winning *American Primitive*, and *Dream Work*, one of her exceptional collections. Perhaps more important, the luminous writing provides respite from our crazy world and demonstrates how mindfulness can define and transform a life, moment by moment, poem by poem." —*The Washington Post*

[Queer Nature: A Poetry Anthology](#) (2022)

Edited by [Michael Walsh](#)



This anthology amplifies and centers LGBTQIA+ voices and perspectives in a collection of contemporary nature poetry. Showcasing over two hundred queer writers from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, *Queer Nature* offers a new context for and expands upon the canon of nature poetry while also offering new lenses through which to view queerness and the natural world. See table of contents [here](#).

If you would like to submit a recommendation, please email serc@berkeley.edu with [SERC Book Club Rec] in the subject line and 2-3 sentences about it. Or, let us know what other eco-topics you would like recommendations on!

Compiled by SERC Book Club Facilitator, Jacqueline Canchola-Martinez '25 with help, recommendations, and direction from SERC Staffers :)