

Off the SHELF

The Georgia Library Quarterly reviews books on aspects of life in Georgia and the South, including history, literature, politics, education and genealogy. Materials written by Southern authors or published by regional publishers may also be considered, as well as those on libraries and librarianship.

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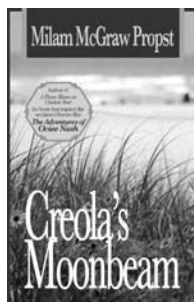
FICTION

Creola's Moonbeam by Milam McGraw Propst (BelleBooks, 2006, ISBN 0-9768760-3-5, \$14.95).

Atlanta author Milam McGraw Propst employs the device of story-within-a-story to paint a portrait of an author at midlife, struggling with writer's block while at the same time looking back at the events of her childhood and her life as a wife and mother.

Having thrown her latest manuscript in the trash, Honey Newberry has retreated to her favorite spot on the Florida coast, vowing to take a vacation from writing. Events conspire against her, however, as the spirit of her beloved nanny Creola seems to be everywhere — even embodied in Beatrice, the free-spirited new friend Honey meets on the beach. Memories come flooding back, and Honey commits them to paper. The present-day narrative moves at a leisurely pace, interspersed with an assortment of domestic vignettes from the past. Honey gradually begins to embrace Beatrice's zest for life and to come to terms with her own life passages, including her relationship to her craft as a writer. The gentle homespun humor and depictions of Southern family life will appeal to readers who enjoy the *Mossy Creek* series and Karin Gillespie's "Bottom Dollar Girl" books. Consider purchasing for public library collections where demand is high for clean, down-home stories about women "of a certain age." ►►

— Reviewed by **Sarah Trowbridge**
Fayette County Public Library



The Meat and Spirit Plan by Selah Saterstrom (Coffee House Press, September 2007, ISBN: 1566892015 ISBN: 978-1566892018, \$14.95).

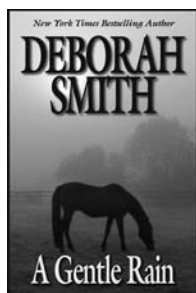
Southern fiction isn't always moonlight and magnolias, as Selah Saterstrom demonstrates in her gut-wrenching novel, *The Meat and Spirit Plan*. Dark humor and sexually explicit paragraphs interspersed with terse surrealistic poetry frame the devastating coming-of-age experiences of a girl from the fictional town of Beau Repose, Mississippi. The young main character, daughter of a drug-addled and mostly absent mother, cannot wait to plunge headfirst into a pathetic cycle of drugs, liquor, sex and more drugs and sex. The dismal underbelly of Beau Repose is the girl's favorite stomping ground as she pursues a path that seems certain to destroy her. She is sent to reform school where she fails to reform, but even so, she earns a scholarship to study, of all things, theology in Scotland. There Saterstrom dangles in front of the reader a glimmer of hope for the anti-heroine of *Meat* in the form of a love affair with an ex-con. Unfortunately the girl discovers that years of self-abuse have ravaged her body. Violently ill, she returns home after receiving more bad news about her mother and is immediately hospitalized. In a near-death state, she looks forward to morphine drips and unusual nocturnal visits from a male nurse who may or may not actually be the janitor. At long last on the mend, she decides, "I don't know what I'm doing. It's liberating and depressing. I could move to Hawaii, but once there, what would I do? I've got to come up with a plan." She



cleans up an old typewriter and sits down to write. Raunchy and relentless, this book is not likely to be a hit with the best-sellers crowd in libraries with small budgets. The right audience for this title from the indie Coffee House Press will be readers who are clamoring for edgy, experimental, no-holds-barred fiction. ►►

—Reviewed by **Teresa Pacheco**
Northeast Georgia Medical Center Library

A Gentle Rain by Deborah Smith
 (BelleBooks, Inc., 2007; ISBN 978-0-9768760-7-6, 16.95).

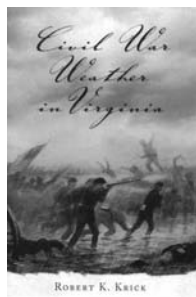


Deborah Smith delivers another heartwarming sophisticated work of romantic fiction in her latest novel, *A Gentle Rain*. The story alternates between the points of view of the two main characters, Kara Whittenbrook and Ben Thocco. Kara, a New England heiress in her early 30s, is struggling with the deaths of her parents. Soon after their deaths, Kara is stunned with the news that she was adopted. On a journey to know her birth parents, Mac and Lily, Kara sets off to the Florida ranch where they now live. When Kara arrives at the ranch, she is surprised to find out that it is a special needs ranch. There she meets the owner of the ranch: single, warm-hearted and self-sacrificing Ben Thocco, who is caring for his own brother, Joey, also mentally challenged. Kara begins to discover love in various ways from all of the characters in this story. The bonds that are created while Kara is at the ranch are a touching account of human kindness at its best. Deborah Smith does a magnificent job of bringing to life both the characters and locations of the novel. Set primarily in northern Florida near Orlando, the places discussed will be familiar to anyone who has ever lived in the South. Deborah Smith's latest novel is very much along the lines of her other books in style and ambiance. *A Gentle Rain* would certainly be a wonderful addition to any wholesome contemporary romance or fiction collection. ►►

— Reviewed by **Carolann Lee Curry**
Mercer University Medical Library

NONFICTION

Civil War Weather in Virginia by Robert K. Krick (The University of Alabama Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0-8173-1577-1, \$39.95).



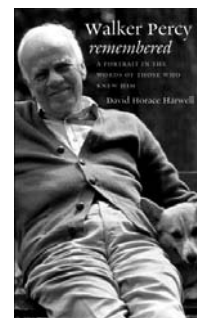
Inspired by Douglas Southall Freeman's exhortation for Civil War historians to provide a meteorological register of the War Between the

States, Robert K. Krick, himself a prolific Civil War historian (and former chief historian of the battlefield parks of Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania), provides a rich reference source on the weather conditions experienced by armies engaged in the tumultuous Northern Virginia theater of war. Union and Confederate armies sought and menaced each others' capitals, Richmond and Washington, D.C., on this ground. Krick draws up weather charts from October 1860 through June 1865. Prior to the establishment of the National Weather Service by a resolution signed by President U. S. Grant in 1870, historians have long relied on soldiers' diaries, memoirs and letters to describe actual battlefield meteorological conditions, the significance of which can hardly be underestimated in 19th century combat. A heavy rainstorm or even hot, dry, dusty weather could be just as potent as field artillery in determining the outcome of a battle. Krick's great reference coup is his transcription of the meticulous meteorological recordings of the Reverend C. K. Mackee of Georgetown, D.C., into monthly charts that include daily temperature and precipitation readings at 7 a.m., 2 p.m. and 9 p.m. The charts, juxtaposed with local newspaper and soldiers' observations (e.g., "it was very hot," "a tremendous storm moved in," "today's been cold and miserable," "muddy roads ... The weather was cold with much snow and rain") make for surprisingly interesting reading. The book is a unique reference source for Civil War buffs and professional historians. ►►

— Reviewed by **James Taylor**
Atlanta-Fulton Public Library

Walker Percy Remembered: A Portrait in the Words of Those Who Knew Him

by David Horace Harwell (University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 978-0-8078-3039-0, \$24.95).



Southern novelist Walker Percy's early years were marked by tragedy. Both his grandfather and father committed suicide, and his mother died in a car accident, which some think may have been a third suicide. It isn't surprising, then, that Percy's protagonists always seemed to be on a search for the meaning of life. He didn't begin his career as a writer, however. At the urging of his uncle, Percy went to medical school, but when he contracted tuberculosis at the age of 26, his medical career was cut short, and he spent the next two years in a sanatorium. During this time of recuperation, Walker began to read the works of philosophers and novelists, which began his lifelong quest to make sense out of the strange, tragic events of his life. Shortly

thereafter, he established himself as a writer, winning the National Book Award for his first published novel, *The Moviegoer*, in 1961. Using an oral history technique, author David Harwell provides a glimpse into the parts of Percy's character not otherwise covered in previous biographies. Through his extensive interviews with 13 individuals who knew Walker Percy, including Percy's brothers, his housekeeper, former teachers, community members and his lifelong friend author Shelby Foote, rich tapestry is woven. We learn of his involvement in civil rights, his role in his community, his conversion to Catholicism, his spirituality, his struggles with depression and his unwavering quest for meaning in life. He was a quiet, private person, not seeking the limelight, who was often surprised when his literary accomplishments were acknowledged publicly. Because Harwell allowed the narrators to talk about themselves as well as their relationship with Percy, some interviews tend to wander from the focus of the subject; however, the final result is a collection of remembrances that serve as an important complement to the longer, more comprehensive biographies of Walker Percy. The book is recommended for academic libraries and especially for Percy fans. »»

— Reviewed by **Pat Borck**
Macon State College Library

Blood & Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1927 by Sarah E. Gardner (University of North Carolina Press, 2004; ISBN 978-0-8078-5767-0, \$19.95).

Historical perspectives on the Civil War and its aftermath were reflected in and shaped by the writings of Southern white women. Sarah E. Gardner traces the progression of women's themes from journals and letters written during the war through postwar histories and biographies. She covers the efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to influence women's writing and shows how idealistic "Lost Cause" accounts gave way over time to less romantic views. Gardner examines in detail Margaret Mitchell's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Gone With the Wind* (1936) as a landmark work with national appeal and Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back* (1937) as an early attempt at a Civil War epic. Gardner places women's writings in the context of national cultural and political movements as well as in seminal works by male authors and brings to life the personalities of the women who helped fashion postwar Southern culture. Scholarly in depth, *Blood & Irony* is also engaging, good-humored and highly readable. Includes bibliography and illustrations. Highly recommended for



academic libraries and collections focusing on the Civil War, Southern history or Southern women. »»

— Reviewed by **Maureen Puffer-Rothenberg**
Valdosta State University

Community Journalism: Relentlessly Local, 3rd ed. by Jock Lauterer (University of North Carolina Press, 2006; ISBN 978-0-5629-1, \$29.95).

Lost in the world of megamedia emphasizing "the culture" and international events is the fact that most of us still have a need for local news. Lauterer's book is a combination of passionate hymn and textbook on that subject. He is a former small-town publisher in North Carolina, now teaching at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Journalism. Twenty-four chapters divide the territory into smaller segments: news, sports, graphics, ethics, "speed bumps and troubleshooting" among them. Lauterer defines "community journalism" as those publications under 50,000 circulation within a definable area. These dominate the American landscape: 9,104 out of 9,321 newspapers fit that definition. Smaller newspapers are more likely to be locally owned, and there are many more small newspapers than large ones in every state. Most offer their news and ads on a Web site. The dynamics of facing and serving those you cover is at the heart of all this. Lauterer is in love with editors who cover things that the metro dailies don't have time for: Little League, Boy Scouts, biggest pumpkin in the county, fundraisers and government. There is a special tension, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, between readers and editors at that level. This is primarily a textbook, though anyone will find it useful and enlightening. His chattiness and informal writing style were exasperating at times, and the photos make every small town look like the set of "Mayberry RFD." But it is heartening to know that there are still many devoted to serving the news needs of smaller communities where many of us live. »»

— Reviewed by **Wallace B. Eberhard**
University of Georgia (Emeritus)



Georgia Quilts: Piecing Together a History edited by Anita Zaleski Weinraub (University of Georgia Press, 2006; ISBN 0-8203-2850-2, \$34.95).

In 1990, the Georgia Quilt Project (GQP) set out to create a written and photographic history of Georgia quilts. Over the span



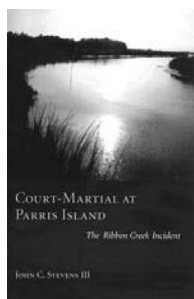
of three years, the GQP held 76 Quilt History Days, where a core group of 90 volunteers were able to document and photograph more than 10,000 quilts. Georgians from all walks of life participated in the project, many of them sharing stories about the quilts and the quiltmakers. The book opens with an introduction outlining the methodology the GQP used to document the quilts. The next chapter provides a historical background, giving the reader a general overview of local and national events to show how they influenced quilting in the state. In the next few chapters, the editor and others delved deeper into specific topics mentioned in the historical background chapter. Beginning with early quilts, defined as quilts made prior to 1861, the book continues with essays discussing quilts made by Civil War survivors, the history and role of King Cotton and textiles in Georgia quilting, and African-American quilting. Also included is an essay on the quilts of Harriet Powers, a former slave whose quilts are now in the Smithsonian Museum of American History and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Though many quilts were made as gifts or for special occasions, some were created out of need and were used daily. These quilts were made using whatever was available, even feed, cotton and flour sacks. An essay on Georgia Quilting guilds serves as a great resource for anyone interested in joining one, and, lastly, an essay on the Olympic Gift Quilts illustrates how the project, which began as a simple idea, became an international celebration and recognition of Georgia quilting. Rich and vibrant illustrations fill the pages of this well-written, well-researched book. Appendices providing a statistical summary of the documented quilts and a listing of the Quilt History Days are included. *Georgia Quilts* not only serves as a history of Georgia quilts, it also presents an all-inclusive examination of the lives of the quiltmakers. Quilters, historians and genealogists alike will enjoy this book. Recommended for all libraries. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Tamika Maddox Strong**
DeKalb County Public Library

Court-Martial at Parris Island: The Ribbon Creek Incident by John C. Stevens III

(The University of South Carolina Press, 2007; ISBN 978-1-57003-703-0, \$19.95).

Traditional Marine Corps discipline turned to tragedy in the swamps of Parris Island, South Carolina, on the night of April 8, 1956, when Staff Sergeant Matthew McKeon led Platoon 71 into the receding tidal waters of Ribbon Creek on a disciplinary exercise. In darkness and chaos, six Marine recruits were drowned in minutes, and the attention of the nation



weighed heavily upon McKeon and the tough training practices of the Marine Corps. The legal and political wrangling during McKeon's court-martial, combined with unprecedented media exposure, rocked the historic foundations of the Marine Corps and forced changes in methods used to train U.S. Marines. The final verdict devastated McKeon's military career. Comprehensively researched and clearly documented, Stevens offers an authoritative and objective perspective on the events of that tragic night, weaving personal testimonies from survivors of Platoon 71 with official military and legal records. Writing as a former trial court judge and 1957 Parris Island recruit, the author provides valuable legal and military experience to assist the reader in understanding the details surrounding the events of the Ribbon Creek tragedy and ensuing trial. This very readable chronicle of a significant event in the history of the Marine Corps recounts in detail the fast-paced legal maneuvering during the court-martial, including excerpts from official court transcripts. Engaging and focused in style, Stevens enhances the details of the unfolding legal proceedings with a candid portrayal of the individual personalities involved. Perhaps one of this work's greatest merits is that the author does not endeavor to guide the reader to a specific conclusion. Facts are presented and various perspectives are considered, but ultimately the reader is left to ponder the events, the judgment and the consequences. The narrative is supplemented with captioned black and white photographs and maps, a bibliography and an index. Recommended for academic and public libraries. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Geoffrey P. Timms**
Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University

Haunted Savannah: The Official Guidebook to Savannah Haunted History Tour 2007 by James Caskey
(Bonaventure Books, 2006, ISBN 0-9724224-2-0, \$13.95).



Savannah is one of those coastal Southern towns with its fair share of ghostly tales. In this guidebook, an accompaniment to the haunted history tours of Savannah, the author presents histories of reportedly haunted locations. Conjectures as to the cause of the activity and personal recollections of those who have witnessed Savannah's seeming overabundance of paranormal phenomena for themselves are presented for many locations. These locations include old homes, businesses and hotels, along with graveyards and town squares. Tales dating back to Savannah's early English settlers, slave labor, Civil and Revolutionary war experiences, and duels pepper this

volume and give the reader a sense of the past of this grand city. Photos are included of supposed paranormal activities caught on camera, but the overabundance of similar photos in popular TV shows and online render them almost silly at this point. Inclusion of maps, an index, and unadulterated photos of the properties discussed could add to the usefulness of this tourist guide. Some of the historical tales presented are truly creepy, but the author admits that many of the firsthand experiences conveyed here may be intended to increase tourism at certain establishments. *Haunted Savannah* is an immediately relevant source for those who have taken or wish to take a tour of the haunted spots in Savannah that have been explored in such venues as the Travel Channel. Ghost tourism is a big deal in a city voted the most haunted city in America on the "Scariest Places on Earth" television series. This may be a dubious honor, but it is one that Savannah seems to take not only in stride but with pride. Other books detailing Savannah's haunted locations exist, though this volume claims to be the "most up-to-date book on sale today." It is up to the reader to decide which guide is the most useful. This guidebook is recommended for readers with an interest in regional travel and unique sightseeing opportunities or for those with an interest in the paranormal and Savannah history. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Julie Poole**
Mercer University

Imprinting the South: Southern Printmakers and Their Images of the Region 1920s – 1940s by Lynn Barstis Williams (University of Alabama Press, 2007, 978-0-8173-1560-3, 0-8173-1560-8, \$39.95).

Author Lynn Barstis Williams explains in her preface to *Imprinting the South* that she hopes the book will "be a contribution to the emerging field of Southern studies." Her effort will indeed be considered valuable to anyone interested in Southern artists and their work. Williams begins this engaging book with an extensive history of printmaking in the South, concentrating on specific regions and individuals. She discusses at length the subjects that Southern printmakers have historically chosen to depict, such as the natural world, the architecture of the region and the activities in which Southerners traditionally have engaged. Williams' introductory accounts and discussions give the reader a valuable historical context in which to place the prints and printmakers included in the book. The printmakers chosen by Williams are artists who lived or traveled in the American South from the 1920s through the 1940s and



who depicted the region in their works. Each printmaker (60 artists in all) receives an individual entry, which includes a one-page discussion of the artist's life and work, as well as a black and white reproduction of one of the artist's prints. While the artists included may have shared a common geography, the images of the printmakers' works display a wide diversity of styles. Many artists achieved delicate and subtle tones using lithography and etching techniques while others employed wood and linoleum cuts for bold chiaroscuro effects. A glossary of printmaking techniques is included for readers who desire technical information on how the various types of prints were produced. Williams provides an appendix of artists connected to the South and lists institutions that own at least three of their prints. A valuable resource for both scholars and general readers, *Imprinting the South* is recommended for public and academic libraries. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Edward Whitley**
Georgia College & State University Library

The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture Volume 3: History edited by Charles Reagan Wilson (University of North Carolina Press, 2006; ISBN 978-0-8078-5691-8; \$19.95).



The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture expands and updates the original Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, published in 1989 as a one-volume, 1,656-page compendium of regional history, politics, art, lore and manners. Developed by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi, the new work is being published in 24 volumes, each devoted to one aspect of Southern life. Rich in diversity on many levels, *History* moves away from a mere North-South comparison to the South's role in the international economy, America's frontier mystique and its foreign policy; the region as part of the Atlantic world; and the South as a multiethnic community with internal diversity. *History* begins with two introductions, one for the encyclopedia and one for this volume, and an overview article by Wilson. A series of alphabetized thematic articles follows, from Abolition to World War II, and includes Populism, Indian Eras, Globalization, Sharecropping and Tenancy, Slave Revolts, the Civil Rights Movement and others. The volume concludes with a section of briefer entries. Most of these are thumbnail biographies of individuals (Jimmy Carter, Medgar Evers, Jeb Stuart, the abolitionist Grimké sisters), but here also are organizations, agencies, and groups (Confederate Veterans, the Congress of Racial Equality) and an assortment of other entries (the Voting Rights Act,

Jamestown). Each entry is signed by its author and followed by source notes. Many readers will miss the distinction between the two sections; there are no headings to mark the division. The volume is well-indexed, but there are no cross-references to the other volumes, a lack that limits the usefulness of an otherwise excellent resource. The encyclopedia is being published in paperback as well as hardcover, which will make the 24-volume set more affordable. Recommended for all academic libraries and most public libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **Vanessa Cowie**
Forsyth County Public Library

Return to Good and Evil: Flannery O'Connor's Response to Nihilism by Henry T. Edmondson III; contributor Marion Montgomery (Lexington Books, 1st Paperback Edition 2005; ISBN 0739111051, \$27.95).

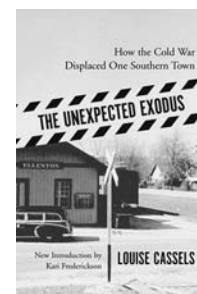


Professor Henry T. Edmondson III has done a great service for readers of Flannery O'Connor in his book *Return to Good and Evil: Flannery O'Connor's Response to Nihilism*. He has gone where so many O'Connor scholars would love to go: deep into Georgia College and State University's special collection of her personal library and published and unpublished manuscripts, and has emerged with a wealth of knowledge about the philosophical and theological foundations of her work. He shares this knowledge in a series of clear, thought-provoking, enlightening discussions of her short stories and novels that provide readers with a greater sense of O'Connor's worldview and purpose than can be gained from reading her fictional work in isolation. Edmondson centers his discussions on O'Connor's implicit desire to refute the troubling influence of nihilism in modern culture; thus, the discussions of O'Connor's art often address the greater issue of the moral decline of a society that seeks to antiquate notions of good and evil. O'Connor's goal was to create "large and startling pictures" to shock her willfully sightless audience into sensing the necessity for redemption and the presence of grace at work in the world. O'Connor's pictures are held up to the light by Edmondson, who points out themes and nuances rooted in her Catholicism and makes reference to the influence of others such as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, Frederick Copleston, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Jacques Maritain and Pascal. Edmondson's ideas on O'Connor's fiction and philosophy are firmly based on her own explications of her stories in letters and lectures and in the works of the theologians she most admired. Flannery O'Connor lived most of her life in Milledgeville, Georgia, and is arguably the most

influential writer to come from this region of the country. This book of essays on her work would be a valuable part of the collection of any public or academic library in Georgia. ►►

— Reviewed by **Leslie R. G. Bullington**
Augusta, Georgia

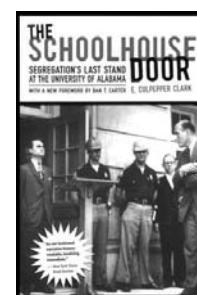
The Unexpected Exodus: How the Cold War Displaced One Southern Town by Louise Cassels (University of South Carolina Press, 2007; ISBN 978-1-57003-709-2, ISBN 1-57003-709-4, \$19.95).



Historian Susan A. Crane wrote an article titled "Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory" that appeared in the December 1997 *American Historical Review*. Louise Cassels' book *The Unexpected Exodus* writes into history the collective memory of all the former residents of Ellenton, S.C., as they were forced to relocate to make way for the construction of the Savannah River Plant. The Savannah River Plant was constructed at the beginning of the Cold War to produce materials for weapons or fuel for power purposes. Louise Cassels was a schoolteacher and a member of the most prominent family in Ellenton. She provides readers with a vivid account of the hopes, fears and concerns of the citizens of Ellenton before and after the announcement of their need to relocate to make way for the plant. The emotions of the citizens of this small South Carolina community ran from anger to feelings of patriotism. This book not only provides insight into how the construction of the plant affected this one community but also into how the military industrial complex changed the economy of the South. Louise Cassels demonstrates that the individual really does matter in history. First published in 1971, the book will be a welcome addition to the collections of public and academic libraries. ►►

— Reviewed by **Diane Fulkerson**
University of West Georgia

The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama by E. Culpepper Clark (University of Alabama Fire Ant Books, 2007, ISBN 9780817354336, \$24.95).



Some of us remember former Alabama Governor George Wallace's infamous schoolhouse door stand at the University of Alabama as he attempted to bar federal authorities from enforcing segregation in

Alabama schools. *The Schoolhouse Door* is the story of the events at the University of Alabama that led up to this incident and the way that segregation issues were eventually resolved at the University of Alabama. One of the first African-American students admitted to the University of Alabama was a library science student named Autherine Lucy. Ms. Lucy was not allowed to eat in the college dining hall or to live in campus housing. Unfortunately, Ms. Lucy was expelled from the university only a few days after she began the program because of racial unrest, even though she did not instigate the unrest. In order to write this powerful narrative history, Dr. Clark interviewed former University of Alabama students, faculty and administrators from the 1956-65 era. He tells their stories and interweaves documentation from campus policies, faculty meeting minutes and other documents from the '50's and '60's. The book explores the opposite views of two college presidents: Dr. Oliver Carmichael held the view that the university is powerless to move beyond political sentiment; Dr. Frank Rose, his successor, believed that the university could take an active role in promoting desegregation efforts. Dr. Clark uses a fair and balanced approach in telling this story. *The Schoolhouse Door* is a valuable narrative account of the desegregation movement in the South and its implications for desegregation nationally. This book is appropriate for high school, academic and public libraries. »

— Reviewed by **Ravonne Green**
Valdosta State University

JUVENILE

ABC Safari by Karen Lee (Sylvan Dell Publishing, 2007; ISBN: 978-0-9777423-0-1, \$15.97).

Author/illustrator Karen Lee has created a beautiful journey through the alphabet. Clearly researched, this title teaches while it captivates young readers. More than just an alphabet book, *ABC Safari* uses beautifully descriptive language to highlight the many details of the animal kingdom. "His face is fiercely sprouting horns. Just 'keep away' his grimace warns. But truly he's a gentle guy. The Rhino's really rather shy." Children will delight in the outstanding illustrations, encompassing animals of many different biomes. This fact-based book is suitable for reading aloud to a group. The Creative Minds section at the end is reproducible for a memory

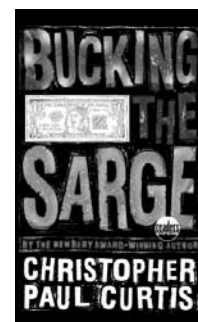


game. The only downfall of the book is that the animal profiles do not include locations. This title would be an excellent addition to any collection. »

— Reviewed by **Lindy Moore**
West Georgia Regional Lithia Springs Branch

Bucking the Sarge by Christopher Paul Curtis (Wendy Lamb Books, 2004; ISBN 0-385-32307-7, \$15.95).

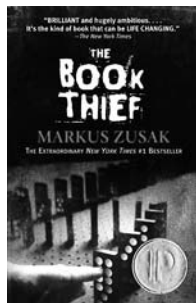
"Normally a ninth grader isn't what you think of when you mention the word 'crusader,' but that's precisely what Flint, Michigan's Whittier Middle School student Luther T. Farrell has turned out to be." Yes, Luther T. Farrell at the age of 15 is a crusader in a variety of ways. He has a college fund with \$92,000 and growing, credit cards to use and a certified driver's license. Mom, "the Sarge," pulls strings in all directions as she milks the system to build an empire using housing found in the slums for group homes. She claims all of this is being done for her one and only son, Luther. Despite Luther's age, the Sarge has placed him in charge of "The Happy Neighbor Group Home for Men," where the complete care of the residents becomes his job. Luther has higher ambitions and plans than running a slum housing empire for the Sarge. He places his focus on working hard in school, winning his third science fair project in a row and moving on to Harvard and graduating as a philosopher. Yet, he is completely dominated by his terrifying mother. Another dominating female in his life is the love of his life, Shayla, though she is his science fair project rival. When his science fair project on the dangers of lead wins, it attracts attention from the media. This attention infuriates the Sarge, and Luther realizes that the Sarge has no college money for him. With the help of his best friend Sparky, a pit bull named Poofy and the world's scariest rat, Luther sets out to break away from Sarge. The plan is put into motion. Hurray for Luther. This is a strong, motivated character. All readers will be cheering for Luther and his gang with each paragraph they read. Highly recommended for middle school students. »



— Reviewed by **Cheryl A. Carter**
Jasper Middle School

The Book Thief by Marcus Zusak
(Alfred A. Knopf, 2005; ISBN 978-0375-93100-0, \$16.95).

The Book Thief, narrated by the perceptive Death, presents hauntingly beautiful visions of Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Despite efforts to avoid the living, Death comes to observe the young Liesel Meminger, rightfully dubbed “the Book Thief,” on three occasions. At the age of nine, Liesel and her younger brother are brought to Molching, Germany, to live with a foster family. After the funeral of her brother, who dies in transit to the foster home, Death witnesses an illiterate Liesel stealing the *Gravedigger’s Handbook* from the snow. She subsequently arrives alone at her foster parents’ house on the poor Himmel (Heaven) Street. By day, Liesel is cursed by her foster mother Rosa Hubermann, who secretly possesses a heart of gold. By night, she has her nightmares comforted by her silver-eyed foster father Hans, who paints houses, plays the accordion and is a man who can keep a secret. During these sleepless



nights, Hans teaches Liesel to understand the writing in her stolen handbook. As Liesel learns to read, she craves more books and risks her life to obtain them, even stealing one from a fire. She also discovers that Molching is full of interesting people like her best friend Rudy, a boy with hair the color of lemons, and the distraught mayor’s wife, Ilsa Hermann, who simply looks away when Liesel steals books from her large library. When a man named Max arrives on the Hubermann’s doorstep appearing weary, broken and clutching the copy of *Mein Kampf* that saved him on his journey, Liesel’s life is forever changed. Liesel’s friendship with the Jewish fist-fighter and her willingness to keep her foster father’s secret help her realize the extreme power of words and their use in good or evil. *The Book Thief* deserves a place in every library. The novel is one of the nominees for the 2007-2008 Georgia Peach Book Award for Teen Readers, a 2007 Printz Honor Book, and is recommended for ages 15 through adult readers. ▶▶

— Reviewed by **Traci Peter**
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