

ACLU of Southern California READING GUIDE

2024

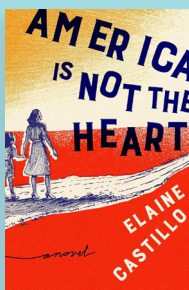
The ACLU of Southern California presents our annual reading recommendations, featuring titles that deepen our collective understanding and marshal our shared humanity to inspire a better world.

We've selected books that illuminate issues central to our work and uplift underrepresented voices—and that we ourselves enjoyed. We hope these books will help inform your activism.

This year, the list features several books hand-picked by ACLU SoCal staff. You'll hear from advocates who work on gender and reproductive justice, police accountability, education equity, and economic justice about books that have helped guide their work.

Support your local independent bookstores or purchase online at bookshop.org.

DIVERSE STORIES



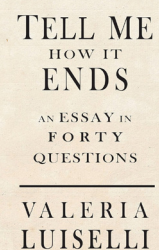
America Is Not the Heart:
A Novel
ELAINE CASTILLO

This family saga about three generations of documented and undocumented Filipinas in the Bay Area explores the costs of emigrating, the scars of colonization and dictatorship, and the elusiveness of the American Dream.



Wandering Stars:
A Novel
TOMMY ORANGE

The highly-anticipated follow-up to Pulitzer finalist *There, There* focuses on the Cheyenne ancestors of one of its characters, examining in epic form the atrocities they experienced—and the ripple effects of those traumas across generations.

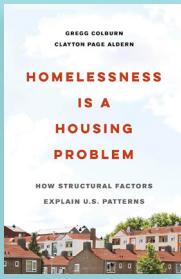


Tell Me How it Ends:
An Essay in Forty Questions
VALERIA LUISELLI

This poignant account of Luiselli's work as a translator for child asylum seekers highlights the contrast between the idea of America many immigrants hold and the cruel realities of our immigration system.

ECONOMIC EQUITY

STAFF PICK



Kath Rogers
Staff Attorney

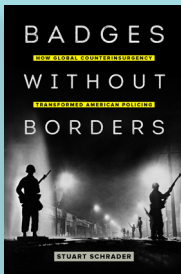


Homelessness is a Housing Problem: How Structural Factors Explain U.S. Patterns

GREGG COLBURN, CLAYTON PAGE ALDERN

Tracing public policy from the 1970s to now, this book reveals that the heart of America's houselessness crisis is vast income inequality and lack of access to affordable housing. Imploring readers to view the structural failure as one that affects all of us, the authors provide insight into how safe and stable housing is essential to a healthy life.

POLICING



STAFF PICK

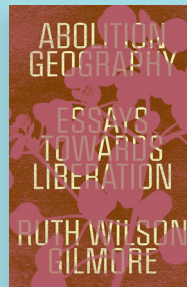
Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing

STUART SCHRADER

What is the relationship between empire abroad and the repressive policing we observe daily on American streets? This groundbreaking exposé reveals how the United States government's post-WW2 attempts to professionalize the oppressive police forces of Cold War despots and dictators came home to roost domestically, laying the foundation for the tactics and strategies domestic cops use across the country.



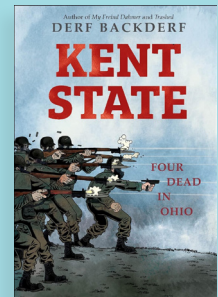
Mohammad Tajsar
Senior Staff Attorney



Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation

RUTH WILSON GILMORE,
EDITED BY BRENNA BHANDAR
AND ALBERTO TOSCANO

This collection of writings by a foremost abolitionist thinker addresses the intersection of racism, geography, and incarceration—and illuminates what it means to advocate for freedom for all.



Kent State: Four Dead in Ohio

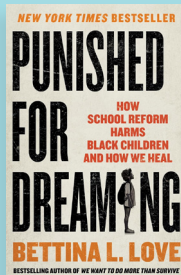
DERF BACKDERF

A resonant read in our current moment, Backderf's acclaimed graphic novel examines the events of May 4, 1970, when the National Guard opened fire on anti-war student protesters at Kent State University.



EDUCATION EQUITY

STAFF
PICK



Amir Whitaker
Senior Counsel



Punished for Dreaming:

How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal

BETTINA L. LOVE

Steeped in history, this book reframes the “achievement gap” between Black and white students that has remained constant despite extensive reforms. As we approach the 70-year anniversary of *Brown v. Board*, Dr. Love highlights the harms of these reforms to Black students and families while laying out a path for educational repair and healing.

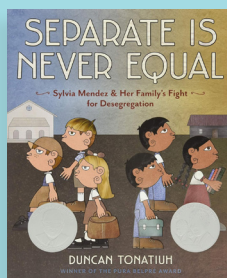
YOUNG READERS



Our History Has Always Been Contraband:

In Defense of Black Studies
EDITED BY COLIN KAEPERNICK,
ROBIN D.G. KELLEY, AND
KEEANGA-YAMAHTTA TAYLOR

Black Studies has been under relentless attack since its founding as a discipline. Featuring new and historical writing by titans of Black thought and scholarship, this collection explains how we got here—and how to fight back.



Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation

DUNCAN TONATIUH

Seven years before *Brown v. Board*, 8-year-old Sylvia Mendez and her family won a landmark lawsuit to end segregated schooling in California. This award-winning picture book tells her story.

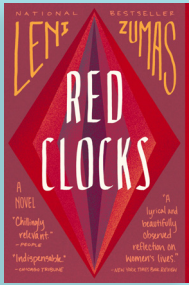


My Lost Freedom: A Japanese American World War II Story

GEORGE TAKEI

Star Trek actor and activist George Takei's beautifully illustrated children's book looks back at his own memories to help today's children understand a dark chapter in our country's history.

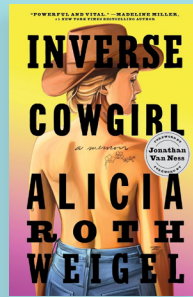
GENDER & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE



Red Clocks

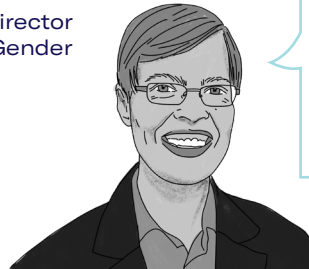
LENI ZUMAS

Published in 2018, this dystopian novel about an America in which abortion is banned, in-vitro is illegal, and embryonic personhood is enshrined in the Constitution feels disturbingly close to our 2024 reality.



STAFF PICK

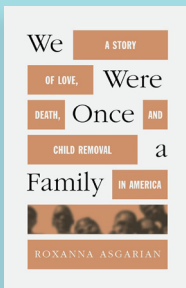
Amanda Goad
Audrey Irmas Director
of the LGBTQ, Gender
& Reproductive
Justice Project



Inverse Cowgirl

ALICIA ROTH WEIGEL

Weigel evokes New York City clubs, South African street corners, and the Texas statehouse as she recalls finding her voice as an intersex woman in a world where most people don't know what that means. From this memoir full of joy, growth, and struggle, readers will come away having learned why the "I" in LGBTQIA+ is important to name.



We Were Once a Family: A Story of Life, Death, and Child Removal in America

ROXANNA ASGARIAN

Ending on the Pacific Coast Highway, this devastating true story highlights how the structural racism and family policing of the foster care system makes tragedy possible.



The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service

LAURA KAPLAN

From 1969 until *Roe* was decided in 1973, the Jane Collective helped more than 11,000 women obtain safe abortions. With the horrific results of *Roe*'s fall playing out across the country, this firsthand account feels particularly relevant.



Your Wound / My Garden

ALOK VAID-MENON

What does it mean to live and die with dignity in a world utterly opposed to it? Written during COVID lockdown, this poetry collection by a recent ACLU SoCal Bill of Rights Awards honoree is an argument for beauty in the face of grief, loss, and chronic pain.

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SoCal

aclusocal.org/books

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