

Suggested Reading: Women in the World

Here are books which will introduce the reader to global women's issues. It is intended to serve as a resource for those seeking to learn more about the role of women in other societies, offering suggestions for reading by individuals and Branch book groups. It focuses on the lives of women who have made a difference in promoting peace and advancing the welfare of women, and on issues facing women in other cultures. This list is by no means exhaustive, and suggestions for inclusion of other titles are welcome: please send them to Gloria Blackwell at blackwellg@aauw.org. Please include both the author's name and title of the book. Some of the books and authors on this list may be controversial; we take no positions on this aspect of their writings.

➤ Abbassi, Jennifer and Sheryl L. Lutjens, eds., *Rereading Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Political Economy of Gender*. A compilation of articles on women's issues by Latin American and Latin Americanist scholars (mostly women) which first appeared in the journal *Latin American Perspectives*. While some papers are more readable than others, this is a rich lode of information to be mined as well as a window onto the feminist literature on Latin America which has developed in recent decades. The book focuses particularly on changes which have taken place in women's lives as a result of changes in the world economy.

➤ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi: *Purple Hibiscus*. This debut novel by a talented Nigerian writer tells the story of a 15-year old girl growing up in the power of a father who is a "Big Man" seen as a pillar of society and philanthropist by his community but is an abusive tyrant at home, and of her painful emergence as a courageous young woman. It is a moving, insightful book which takes the reader deep inside a troubled family while larger troubles beset the world in which they live. Among other honors, the author, who shares her life between the United States and Nigeria, has been awarded a 2008 "genius grant" by the MacArthur Foundation.

➤ Ahmed, Leila: *Women and Gender in Islam*. This is an excellent historical review of the role women have played in Islamic societies across the centuries. A professor of women's studies at the University of Massachusetts when the book was written, in 1999 Ahmed, who is Egyptian, was appointed the first professor of women's studies in religion at the Harvard Divinity School.

➤ Albright, Madeleine: *Madam Secretary*. The autobiography of the first woman to serve as U.S. Secretary of State, this is a very readable presentation of both her personal story as a woman leading our foreign policy, and the issues with which she dealt as Secretary of State.

➤Betancourt, Ingrid: *Until Death do us Part; My Struggle to Reclaim Colombia*. Written before Betancourt was kidnapped by leftist guerillas in 2002 (she was rescued recently after 6 years in captivity), this book concentrates on her political career, first as a Representative and then as a Senator in the Colombian Legislature. This is a compelling story by a very courageous (some might say foolhardy) woman. (The hardcover version of this book is currently out of print, but can be obtained through sellers of remainders; a paperback version of the book is in the works, and should be out in October.)

➤Gildersleeve, Virginia: *Many a Good Crusade*. The former Dean of Barnard College, Virginia Gildersleeve was for many years the International Relations Chair of AAUW and its predecessor. Along with colleagues from Great Britain and Canada, she founded the International Federation of University Women in the aftermath of World War I in an effort to foster peace. She later served as a member of the U.S. delegation to the San Francisco Conference which founded the United Nations. (Out of print, but available through interlibrary loans or as a used book from Amazon.com)

➤Glendon, Mary Ann: *A World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. As chair of the Human Rights Commission convened by the United Nations in 1947 to draft the Declaration, Eleanor Roosevelt used all of her skills to bring such unlikely partners as France, the USSR, Nationalist China, and others together to write a document which all could sign. This is an excellent window on the formation of a statement of principles which, while often honored in the breach, still serves as the conscience of the world, as well as on the character of a remarkable woman.

➤Hirsi Ali, Ayaan: *Infidel*. The personal journey of an Islamic woman born in Somalia whose life led from a traditional childhood in Africa through rebellion against an unwanted marriage arranged by her father to refuge and citizenship in Holland, where she became a Member of Parliament and a passionate advocate for the rights of Moslem women. Caught up in controversy in Holland, especially in the wake of the murder of Theo Van Gogh after he made a film in collaboration with Hirsi Ali, she now resides in the U.S. where she works with the American Enterprise Institute.

➤Hunt, Swanee: *This Was Not Our War*. This book offers the moving testimonies of 26 women who survived Bosnia's ethnic upheavals. Hunt, as the U.S. Ambassador to Austria in the 1990s, hosted some of the Bosnian peace discussions and has maintained her concern for the region through Women Waging Peace. She is now Director of the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. However, this book is about the women of Bosnia, not about herself.

➤Ilibagiza, Imaculee: *Left to Tell*. At 22, Ilibagiza and 7 other women spent 91 days in hiding in the bathroom of a Hutu pastor's home while the Rwandan genocide raged

outside and her family was murdered. She credits her strong Catholic faith for her ability not only to survive but to forgive her family's killers. One needn't share her religious faith to be moved by her compelling story.

➤Kara, Siddharth, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. This is a difficult and painful book to read, but an important one. The author undertook an extensive on the ground investigation into the conditions under which women and young girls are enslaved to become prostitutes, from the factors that put them at risk at the point of origin to the means by which they were transferred to their (usually foreign) owners, to the degrading conditions under which they are forced to work and from which escape is rare. His proposed means to reduce the incidence (though he concedes it will probably never be wiped out) is an economic one: to raise costs and substantially reduce the obscene profits in this "industry" by establishing a well funded international police effort against it; as he says, if he could find the victims, an elite police force should be able to do so.

➤Kohut, Andrew and Bruce Stokes: *America Against the World*. This compendium of global public opinion surveys attempts to answer the questions of how we are different from, and why we are disliked in, other countries, from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. While this is not a book on women's issues, it is important reading for anyone concerned about growing anti-Americanism abroad, and helps us "to see ourselves as others see us." It is about much more than differences over the "war on terror", though that has deepened the divisions between us and the rest of the world. This is not a polemic; the authors let the results of the surveys speak for themselves.

➤Kristof, Nicholas D. and Sheryl WuDunn, Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide. This husband and wife team of New York Times reporters have written a clear-eyed report on the gender-based cruelty to women common throughout the world, and a call to action by the international community to alleviate the oppression and poverty from which so many women suffer.

➤Maathai, Wangari: *Unbowed: A Memoir*. In *Unbowed*, Nobel Prize winner Wangari Maathai recounts her extraordinary journey from her childhood in rural Kenya to the world stage. When Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977, she began a vital poor people's environmental movement, focused on the empowerment of women that soon spread across Africa. Persevering through run-ins with the Kenyan government and personal losses, and jailed and beaten on numerous occasions, Maathai continued to fight tirelessly to save Kenya's forests and to restore democracy to her beloved country. Infused with her unique luminosity of spirit, Wangari Maathai's remarkable story of courage, faith, and the power of persistence is destined to inspire generations to come.

- Mortenson, Greg and David Oliver Relin: *Three Cups of Tea*. When Mortenson was nursed to life in a remote Himalayan village following a failed attempt to climb K-2, he vowed to return and build the village a school, which turned out to be the first of many. This is his story of his efforts to educate boys and girls in Central Asia.
- Nafisi, Azar: *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. In this memoir, written by a retired university professor, a small group of female students examined forbidden Western fiction in the safety of her home. They divested themselves of their mandatory black robes and head scarves as well as many inhibitions in a world prescribed for them in the revolutionary Iran of 1995. We learn about Iran's history, as well as their daily struggles for freedom, and the necessary adjustments these women made in their search for knowledge and empowerment while managing to exist in their authoritarian reality. This is an important read for those who strive to understand more about living in a culture so prominent in today's news, and yet so different from our own.
- Sadat, Jehan: *A Woman of Egypt*. The widow of Anwar Sadat, former President of Egypt who was assassinated by Moslem extremists, tells her story. Mrs. Sadat was the keynote speaker at AAUW's 2005 Convention.
- Twist, Lynne: *The Soul of Money*. An international activist who has worked with the Hunger Project, Twist examines how our attitudes toward money affect our view of the world. She proposes that consciously working to change these attitudes can empower us to make a difference in the lives of others, and make our own lives more meaningful.
- UNICEF: *Status of the World's Children 2007*. This year's edition of UNICEF's annual report examines the status of women around the world. It can be obtained through UNP.UN.org.
- Walker, Alice: *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. A novel written around the issue of female genital mutilation in West Africa by the author of *The Color Purple*. Walker tells a good story which at the same time informs the reader about the issues surrounding FGM and what it does to the lives of women.
- Wintle, Justin: *Perfect Hostage: A Life of Aung San Suu Kyi*. Daughter of Aung San, father of Burma's independence movement, who was assassinated in 1947, Suu Kyi was educated in England and eventually married there. However, her deeply-held sense of obligation to continue her father's work and to bring democracy to a country long ruled by a repressive military regime led her to return home to actively work toward that end, putting herself forward as a candidate for president. Placed under house arrest whenever the government felt threatened by her work and still confined, Suu Kyi is perhaps the world's best known prisoner of conscience; she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Wintle has done an excellent job of not only telling her story but placing it in the context of the history of modern Burma. (Those who were puzzled by

the current Burmese government's refusal to allow humanitarian aid to the recent flood victims will find insights into the mindset of its leaders in these pages.)

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