

# Check it out!

## The most popular library books in America

— No review noted ▲ Favorable review  
 M Mixed review ▼ Unfavorable

### HARDCOVER NONFICTION

			The Christian Science Monitor	The New York Times	Kirkus Review of Books	Selected Reviews*
1	<b>THE SOUTH BEACH DIET</b> , by Arthur Agatston, Rodale, \$24.95 The South Beach Diet was born of a cardiologist's desire to give patients struggling with traditional low-fat or low-carb diets a livable regimen to lower cholesterol levels. Weight loss proved a pleasing side effect. In the book based on these findings, Agatston focuses not on no-carb but on good-carb dieting and the effects of foods on blood-sugar levels. Despite the flashy cover, the book is true to its serious premise and benefits from a recognition of the psychological challenge of losing weight. (320 pp.) By <i>Tonya Miller</i>		M	—	—	▲ PW
2	<b>AGAINST ALL ENEMIES</b> , by Richard A. Clarke, Free Press, \$27 No one is better placed to compare the Bush and Clinton records on terrorism than Richard Clarke, the counter-terrorism chief for both presidents. But his scorching indictment of President Bush — and high praise for Clinton — is not sustained by the balance of his book, where there's ample evidence of missed cues on the terrorist threat in both administrations. Still, Clarke's version of "the right stuff" looms large over the official 9/11 investigation. If enough people read the book, it could affect the 2004 election. (320 pp.) By <i>Gail Chaddock</i>		▲	▲	—	M PW
3	<b>PLAN OF ATTACK</b> , by Bob Woodward, Simon & Schuster, \$28 Woodward, Washington's preeminent investigative journalist, has produced a fly-on-the-wall account of the 16-month period leading up to the war against Iraq. Some scan the book's 443 pages and see a president attuned to history's challenges. Others see a president who never fully draws on his advisers' wisdom and misleads the press and Congress about his plans. The appeal of Woodward's book is not its magisterial prose but rather its rich sourcing that provides valuable context. (Full review April 23) (443 pp.) By <i>David Cook</i>		▲	▲	—	▲ WP
4	<b>EATS, SHOOTS &amp; LEAVES</b> , by Lynne Truss, Gotham, \$17.50 Truss has done the English-speaking world a huge service. In one tidy little volume, she has wittily and concisely presented the rules of English punctuation. Her book challenges the notion that mastery of the basics is beyond the ken of ordinary people. She's particularly clear (and outraged) about the abuse of the apostrophe, but her comma chapter is excellent, too. A surprise bestseller in England, this edition has not been reedited for the American audience, but that turns out not to matter much. (Full review April 6) (209 pp.) By <i>Ruth Walker</i>		▲	▲	—	▲ PW
5	<b>WORSE THAN WATERGATE</b> , by John W. Dean, Little, Brown, \$22.95 The White House counsel during Watergate, Dean invokes the Nixon presidency to make the case that the current Bush administration is more secretive and potentially more destructive than any preceding it. The title suggests high crimes and misdemeanors, but Dean's copious endnotes cite a lengthy parade of longtime Bush antagonists. This is a nonobjective, sensationalized connection of circumstantial dots leading, in the author's opinion, to nothing short of an American apocalypse. (253 pp.) By <i>Christopher Hartman</i>		▼	—	—	M LJ
6	<b>THE FABRIC OF THE COSMOS</b> , by Brian Greene, Knopf, \$28.95 Since the beginning of the 20th century, physicists have found themselves dealing with realms further removed from everyday experience. Consequently, they have come to rely much less on concrete illustrations. Greene treads swampland familiar to genre enthusiasts — general relativity, quantum mechanics, superstring theory — but he builds conceptual bridges where other guides have left us stranded in the mud. Clean prose and examples drawn from the world of "The Simpsons" make for illuminating fun. (592 pp.) By <i>Darren Abrecht</i>		▲	▲	—	▲ LJ
7	<b>READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN</b> , by Azar Nafisi, Random, \$23.95 Tired of fighting a repressive administration and government, Nafisi assembled a private class for seven of her best female students in Iran to talk about forbidden works of Western literature. Incredibly, the controversial "Lolita" resonated most powerfully. Like its main character, her students felt themselves "the figment of someone else's dreams," those of an ayatollah who sought to "re-create" women in the image of an illusory past. A passionate, astute defense of the value of literature. (Full review March 27) (347 pp.) By <i>Heather Hewett</i>		▲	—	▲	▲ PW
8	<b>BLUE BLOOD</b> , by Edward Conlon, Riverhead, \$26.95 "Blue Blood" is Conlon's story of life on the job in the NYPD. Descended from Irish-American public servants, Conlon weaves his family's and New York City's history into his journey from police academy to detective. At times, the book collapses under the weight of a shifting timeline and repetitive detail, destroying the cohesion of an engaging story. But usually, Conlon vividly depicts the complexity of being a police officer in a time of public distrust. Though wonderfully wry, this book is not for the faint of heart. (512 pp.) By <i>Tonya Miller</i>		M	▲	▲	▲ LJ
9	<b>THREE WEEKS WITH MY BROTHER</b> , by Nicholas & Micah Sparks, Warner, \$22 This work could have been subtitled "Thirty-seven Years With My Family," as the brothers Sparks use their trip around the world as a literary device for telling the tale of their childhood and young adult lives. It's a story of a family filled with love and faith, challenged by poverty, dysfunction, and loss, but the narrative feels as if it's been buffed, polished, and edited for Hollywood. Be prepared to ride an emotional roller coaster, to laugh at the funny bits and cry (or groan) at the sad parts. (368 pp.) By <i>J. Johnson</i>		M	—	—	M LJ
10	<b>THE PRICE OF LOYALTY</b> , by Ron Suskind, Simon & Schuster, \$26 A cautionary tale from an outsider who became an insider, but never quite one of the Bush team. It's a piercing look into an administration that battles to keep secret even a list of who attends meetings. Former secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill is late to discover what political scientists have talked about for years: being in the cabinet doesn't always matter. A highly unflattering view of a president who is seen as too tentative and quip-ready by a man who never warmed to Bush's nickname for him, Pablo. Chilling. (348 pp.) By <i>Gail Chaddock</i>		▲	▲	—	—
11	<b>THE ULTIMATE WEIGHT SOLUTION</b> , by Phil McGraw, Free Press: Simon & Schuster, \$26 Rather than rely on will power or counting carbs, television's Dr. Phil McGraw recommends that people lose weight by changing their thinking about food. He challenges readers to take behavioral "audits" to help determine what drives their eating habits and then offers a plan of action that sets specific goals in order to lose weight. Some of those goals include right thinking, establishing a "no-fail" environment, and mastery over impulse eating. A serious, helpful, and encouraging diet book. (320 pp.) By <i>Mary Roberts</i>		M	—	—	—
12	<b>PERFECTLY LEGAL</b> , by David Cay Johnston, Portfolio, \$25.95 It's no secret to most Americans that their tax system is horribly complex. But many may not realize just how unfair it is. Johnson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, spells out just how corrupted the system has become in "Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich — and Cheat Everybody Else." One hopes the popularity of his book will influence the political scene. But don't count on it. Both parties rely heavily on the wealthy political donor class for campaign funds. (320 pp.) By <i>David Francis</i>		▲	▲	—	▲ PW
13	<b>THE SOUTH BEACH DIET COOKBOOK</b> , by Arthur Agatston, Rodale, \$25.95 As far as fad diet cookbooks go, the South Beach Diet Cookbook is a notch above the rest. The diet book and this long-awaited companion cookbook aim to help people distinguish between good carbs (unrefined, whole grain) and bad (processed white flour); good fats (olive oil, omega 3) and bad (butter, fatty meats). Many of the recipes are easy and fast to prepare. And anytime a diet cook book says you can have peanut butter cookies and flourless chocolate cake with almonds, it's hard to feel deprived. (352 pp.) By <i>Tom Regan</i>		M	—	—	▲ PW
14	<b>AMERICAN DYNASTY</b> , by Kevin Phillips, Viking, \$25.95 Phillips doesn't like George W. Bush. In fact, the former GOP operative turned disgruntled analyst doesn't have a lot of positive things to say about any of the Bush clan. "American Dynasty" is as much about the implicit dangers of dynastic politics as it is about the Bushes in particular. But overall, as a cohesive book, it's a mixed bag. It wanders a lot, and some chapters are better than others. Depending on where you stand, you'll probably like it or hate it, but there won't be many people in the middle. (Full review Jan. 13) (416 pp.) By <i>Dante Chinni</i>		M	▲	—	▲ NW
15	<b>LIES AND THE LYING LIARS WHO TELL THEM</b> , by Al Franken, Dutton, \$24.95 Franken's diatribe against the political right will elicit snorts and chortles. The former "Saturday Night Live" comedian tackles the neoconservative propaganda machine, exposing what he considers its hypocrisy and factual sloppiness. He shows how these people whining on TV — and those he criticizes. (379 pp.) By <i>Noel Paul</i>		M	—	—	▲ BL

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Booklist; Library Journal; Newsweek; Publisher's Weekly; Washington Post

# Libraries reveal their favorites

## Borrowed books speak volumes

I ONCE ASKED A student, "Did you read 'The Canterbury Tales' last year?"

"Well," he said, "it was assigned."

That distinction between what's assigned and what's read bedevils English teachers everywhere. And it resembles a quandary faced by observers of popular culture: We can determine which books are selling, but how can we tell which books are being read? Consider, for instance, the number of giant political biographies that fathers received with feigned enthusiasm last Sunday. Surely, a fair number of these will be placed with pride next to those pristine copies of Carl Sagan's "Cosmos."

This month, Library Journal has devised a survey of what Americans might actually be reading. Their new "bestsellers" list records the most borrowed and requested books at hundreds of public libraries — from a bookmobile in rural Washington State to branch libraries in New York City.

Of course, like any list, this one needs to be considered with a few caveats. Well-intentioned people may be checking out books that they never actually get around to reading. And some titles may be popular for decades without garnering enough requests to beat out the books that spike in popularity each month.

Also, everybody knows that some books are the kind that people want to keep rather than borrow. Consider, for instance, Rick Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life." The inspirational blockbuster has been a staple of the nonfiction bestseller list for the past 47 weeks, but it doesn't register on the Library Journal list.

Still, 65 percent of Americans use the nation's 16,000 libraries, and those libraries spend almost \$2 billion on books each year, about a fifth of the total market. So, this is definitely a list worth checking out.

— Ron Charles