ISR Reads Book Selections

April 2012 – Grace of Silence by Michelle Norris

August 2012 – Ultimate Punishment by Scott Turow

February 2013 – Oddly Normal: One Family’s Struggle to Help Their Teenage Son Comes to Terms with His Sexuality by John Schwartz

April 2013 – The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander and Cornel West

October 2013 - The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors and the Collision of Two Cultures by Anne Fadiman

February 2014 - Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai City by Katherine Boo (Author Presentation)

November 2014 - I am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban by Malala Yousafzai

November 2015 – Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (Martin Luther King Jr. Speaker)

March 2016 – Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson (UM Wallenberg Lecture Speaker)

June 2016 – Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City by Matthew Desmond

November 2016 – Cherokee Rose by Tiya Miles (Author Visit Book Club)

January 2017 – Citizen – An American Lyric by Claudine Rankine (Author ISR Martin Luther King Jr. Speaker)

May 2017 - $2.00 A Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America by Luke Shaeffer (Author Presentation)

September 2017 – The Way I see It: A Personal Look at Autism and Aspergers by Temple Grandin

December 2017 - Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

March 2018 – How to Kill A City by Peter Moscowitz

May 2018 – An American Marriage by Tayari Jones

August 2018 – Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy by Cathy O’Neil

ON INTRANET:

Below is a list of the books we have read.

_Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age_

By Kevin Boyle
In Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age, author Kevin Boyle rescues from obscurity a fascinating chapter in American history that had profound implications for the rise of the Civil Rights movement. Boyle opens with a compelling prologue portraying the migration of African-Americans in the 1920s to the industrial cities of the North, where they sought a better life and economic opportunity. This sets the stage for the ordeal of Dr. Ossian Sweet, who moves with his young family to a previously all-white Detroit neighborhood. When the local block association incites a mob to drive Sweet back to the ghetto, he gathers friends and acquaintances to defend his new home with a deadly arsenal. The resulting shooting death of a white man leads to a sensational murder trial, featuring the legendary Clarence Darrow defending Sweet, his family and their associates. Boyle brings immediacy to the social and economic factors that ignited racial violence, provoked the compelling court case, and set in motion the civil rights struggle.

Audacity of Hope

By Barack Obama

(Discussed in 2010)

Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream, by Barack Obama, engages themes raised in his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, shares personal views on faith and values, and offers a vision of the future that involves repairing a "political process that is broken" and restoring a government that has fallen out of touch with the people.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity

By Katherine Boo

This book was a winner of the National Book Award for Nonfiction and is based on three years of uncompromising reporting, a bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human. Annawadi is a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport, and as India starts to prosper, Annawadians are electric with hope. Abdul, a reflective and enterprising Muslim teenager, sees “a fortune beyond counting” in the recyclable garbage that richer people throw away. Asha, a woman of formidable wit and deep scars from a childhood in rural poverty, has identified an alternate route to the middle class: political corruption. With a little luck, her sensitive, beautiful daughter—Annawadi’s “most-everything girl”—will soon become its first female college graduate. And even the poorest Annawadians, like Kalu, a fifteen-year-old scrap-metal thief, believe themselves inching closer to the good lives and good times they call “the full enjoy.” But then Abdul the garbage sorter is falsely accused in a shocking tragedy; terror and a global recession rock the city; and suppressed tensions over religion, caste, sex, power and economic envy turn brutal. As the tenderest individual hopes intersect with the greatest global truths, the true contours of a competitive age are revealed. And so, too, are the imaginations and courage of the people of Annawadi. With intelligence, humor, and deep insight into what connects human beings to one another in an era of tumultuous change, Behind the Beautiful Forevers carries the reader headlong into one of the twenty-first century’s hidden worlds, and into the lives of people impossible to forget.

Changing Poverty, Changing Policies

Edited by Maria Cancian and Sheldon Danziger
Changing Poverty, Changing Policy is the fifth in a series of edited volumes sponsored by the Institute for Research on Poverty that evaluate the nature of poverty and the scope of antipoverty policies. Chapter 1, Changing Poverty and Changing Antipoverty Policies, by Maria Cancian and Sheldon Danziger, was the focus for the ISR Reads discussion.

**Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture**

By Peggy Orenstein

Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture by Peggy Orenstein, author of the groundbreaking bestseller Schoolgirls, reveals the dark side of pink and pretty and discusses the effects of commercialization on young girls. The rise of the girlie-girl, she warns, is not that innocent, despite girls' successes in the classroom and on the playing field. From premature sexualization to the risk of depression to rising rates of narcissism, the potential negative impact of this new girlie-girl culture is undeniable—yet armed with awareness and recognition, parents can effectively counterbalance its influence in their daughters' lives.

**Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families**

By J. Anthony Lukas

Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families by Anthony Lukas is the Pulitzer Prize-winning account of ten years in Boston that began with news of Martin Luther King's assassination, a watershed moment in the city's modern history. To bring understanding to that moment, Lukas, a former New York Times journalist, focuses on two working-class families, headed by an Irish-American widow and an African-American mother, and on a middle-class white liberal couple. Lukas goes beyond stereotypes, carefully grounding each perspective in its historical roots, whether in the antebellum South, or famine-era Ireland.

**Dreams From My Father**

By Barack Obama

(Discussed in 2010)

In Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance, Barack Obama describes coming to grips with his racial identity through a period of rebellion that included drug use, becoming a community activist in Chicago, and traveling to Kenya to understand his father's past. His search for himself as a black American is rooted in the particulars of his daily life; it also reads like a commentary about all of us. He dismisses stereotypes of the "tragic mulatto" and then shows how much we are all caught between messy contradictions and disparate communities.

**The Eighth Promise: An American Son's Tribute to his Toisanese Mother**

By William Poy Lee

The Eighth Promise: An American Son's Tribute to his Toisanese Mother by William Poy Lee is a memoir that starts in the Southern Chinese farming villages of Toisan, where Lee's mother was born in 1926. Structurally, the book alternates chapters between the author's voice and that of his mother, whom the author interviewed in her original Toisanese dialect. But the main part of the book is set against the
background of the San Francisco of the 1960s and 1970s. Lee uses the narrative to summarize the upheavals of the civil rights era, the Vietnam War, and the counterculture, and of his own coming-of-age.

The Glass Castle: A Memoir

By Jeannette Walls

Jeannette Walls grew up with parents whose ideals and stubborn nonconformity were both their curse and their salvation. As the dysfunction of the family escalated, Jeannette and her brother and sisters had to fend for themselves, supporting one another as they weathered their parents' betrayals and, finally, found the resources and will to leave home. Despite this tumultuous upbringing, Walls describes her parents with deep affection and generosity.

The Grace of Silence: A Memoir

By Michele Norris

In the wake of talk of a “postracial” America upon Barack Obama’s ascension as president of the United States, Michele Norris, cohost of National Public Radio’s flagship program All Things Considered, set out to write, through original reporting, a book about “the hidden conversation” on race that is unfolding nationwide. She would, she thought, base her book on the frank disclosures of others on the subject, but she was soon disabused of her presumption when forced to confront the fact that “the conversation” in her own family had not been forthright. Norris unearthed painful family secrets that compelled her to question her own self-understanding: from her father’s shooting by a Birmingham police officer weeks after his discharge from the navy at the conclusion of World War II to her maternal grandmother’s peddling pancake mix as an itinerant Aunt Jemima to white farm women in the Midwest. In what became a profoundly personal and bracing journey into her family’s past, Norris traveled from her childhood home in Minneapolis to her ancestral roots in the Deep South to explore the reasons for the “things left unsaid” by her father and mother when she was growing up, the better to come to terms with her own identity. Along the way she discovered how her character was forged by both revelation and silence.

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban

by Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb

I Am Malala, Malala Yousafzai’s fearless memoir, co-written with journalist Christina Lamb, begins on Malala’s drive home from school on the day she was shot in the head. "Who is Malala?" the young gunman who stopped the Khushal school van asked. None of the girls answered. But everyone in the valley knew who Malala was. Ten years old when the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan came to the beautiful Swat Valley, once the home of ancient Buddhist kings, 11 years old by the time she had established herself as an international advocate for girls' education in Pakistan, Malala was targeted by the Taliban for "spreading secularism".

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

By Rebecca Skloot
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot chronicles the life of Henrietta Lacks, a poor Southern tobacco farmer whose cancer cells were harvested without her consent or knowledge in 1951. These cells became one of the most important tools in medicine and were vital in developing the polio vaccine and other important scientific advances. Yet Henrietta Lacks has remained virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave, and her family did not learn of her “immortality” until more than twenty years after her death. And though the cells had launched a multimillion-dollar industry that sells human biological materials, her family never saw any of the profits. The story of the Lacks family—past and present—is inextricably connected to issues of informed consent and bioethics.

Mountains Beyond Mountains: Healing the World: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer

By Tracy Kidder

(Discussed in 2007 – First ISR Reads book)

Mountains Beyond Mountains: Healing the World: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, by Tracy Kidder, is the story of Paul Farmer, a specialist in infectious diseases who seeks to redress inequalities in medical service to the desperately poor. His work establishing a complex of public health facilities on the central plateau of Haiti forms the keystone to efforts that now encompass initiatives on three continents. Farmer and a trio of friends began in the 1980s by creating a charitable foundation called Partners in Health. Over the years the foundation has grown in size and sophistication, gaining the ability to influence and collaborate with major international organizations because of the founders’ energy, professional credentials, and successful outcomes. Farmer's conduct is offered as a "road map to decency," albeit an uncompromising model that nearly defies replication.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

By Michelle Alexander

Contrary to the rosy picture of race embodied in Barack Obama's political success and Oprah Winfrey's financial success, legal scholar Alexander argues vigorously and persuasively that [w]e have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. Jim Crow and legal racial segregation has been replaced by mass incarceration as a system of social control (more African Americans are under correctional control today... than were enslaved in 1850). Alexander reviews American racial history from the colonies to the Clinton administration, delineating its transformation into the war on drugs. She offers an acute analysis of the effect of this mass incarceration upon former inmates who will be discriminated against, legally, for the rest of their lives, denied employment, housing, education, and public benefits. Most provocatively, she reveals how both the move toward colorblindness and affirmative action may blur our vision of injustice: most Americans know and don't know the truth about mass incarceration—but her carefully researched, deeply engaging, and thoroughly readable book should change that.

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America

By Barbara Ehrenreich

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America by Barbara Ehrenreich describes the author's quest to understand the lives of working class people. She left behind her middle class life as a journalist except for $1000 in start-up funds, a car, and her laptop computer to try to sustain herself as a low-skilled
worker for a month at a time. Despite the advantages of her race, education, good health, and lack of children, Ehrenreich's income barely covered her month's expenses in only one instance, when she worked seven days a week at two jobs (one of which provided free meals) during the off-season in a vacation town.

**Oddly Normal: One Family's Struggle to Help Their Teenage Son Come to Terms with His Sexuality**

By John Schwartz

Three years ago, John Schwartz, a national correspondent at *The New York Times*, got the call that every parent hopes never to receive: his thirteen-year-old son, Joe, was in the hospital following a failed suicide attempt. After mustering the courage to come out to his classmates, Joe's disclosure — delivered in a tirade about homophobic attitudes — was greeted with dismay and confusion by his fellow students. Hours later, he took an overdose of pills.

Additionally, John and his wife, Jeanne, found that their son's school was unable to address Joe's special needs. Angry and frustrated, they initiated their own search for services and groups that could help Joe understand that he wasn't alone. *Oddly Normal* is Schwartz's very personal attempt to address his family's own struggles within a culture that is changing fast, but not fast enough to help gay kids like Joe. Schwartz follows Joseph through childhood to the present day, interweaving his narrative with common questions, including: Are effeminate boys and tomboy girls necessarily gay? Is there a relationship between being gay and suicide or mental illness? Should a child be pushed into coming out?

**The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma**

By Alex Kotlowitz

The Other Side of the River: A Story of Two Towns, a Death, and America's Dilemma by Alex Kotlowitz reports on two towns in southwest Michigan and a murder case that exposed racial tensions. A black teenager surfaces in the St. Joseph River, drowned. How did he get there? The towns of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, divided by both race and the river, grapple with the possibilities in this maddeningly difficult case. Alex Kotlowitz puts his sharp reporting skills to good work here, describing in detail everything that is known about Eric McGinnis's short life and untimely death. But the book is best at plumbing the racial psychology of these mutually suspicious communities.


By Azar Nafisi

Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books is a memoir by Johns Hopkins literature professor Azar Nafisi, who returned to her native Iran after a long education abroad and remained there for 18 years before leaving 1997 for the United States. In 1995, after resigning from her job as a professor at a university in Tehran due to repressive policies, Nafisi invited seven of her best female students to attend a weekly study of great Western literature in her home. Since the books they read were officially banned by the government, the women were forced to meet in secret. They began to use the meetings as a springboard for debating the social, cultural, and political realities of living under strict Islamic rule but always returning to the books as the primary focus. Woven through her story are the books she has taught along the way, among them works by Nabokov, Fitzgerald, James, and Austen.
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures

By Anne Fadiman

"The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down explores the clash between a small county hospital in California and a refugee family from Laos over the care of Lia Lee, a Hmong child diagnosed with severe epilepsy. Lia's parents and her doctors both wanted what was best for Lia, but the lack of understanding between them led to tragedy. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Current Interest, and the Salon Book Award, Anne Fadiman's compassionate account of this cultural impasse is literary journalism at its finest. The current edition, published for the book's fifteenth anniversary, includes a new afterword by the author that provides updates on the major characters along with reflections on how they have changed Fadiman's life and attitudes."

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time

By Greg Mortenson

In Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace ... One School at a Time, author Greg Mortenson tells the story of how, after a 1993 climb of Pakistan’s treacherous K2, he was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade he built fifty-five schools—especially for girls—that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth.

Ultimate Punishment: A Lawyer's Reflections on Dealing with the Death Penalty

By Scott Turow

As a respected criminal lawyer, Scott Turow has been involved with the death penalty for more than a decade, including successfully representing two different men convicted in death-penalty prosecutions. In this vivid account of how his views on the death penalty have evolved, Turow describes his own experiences with capital punishment from his days as an impassioned young prosecutor to his recent service on the Illinois commission which investigated the administration of the death penalty and influenced Governor George Ryan’s unprecedented commutation of the sentences of 164 death row inmates on his last day in office. Telling the powerful stories behind the statistics, as he moves from the Governor’s Mansion to Illinois’s state-of-the art “super-max” prison and the execution chamber, Ultimate Punishment has all the drama and intellectual substance of Turow’s bestselling fiction.