Books

6 New Books for Your Summer Reading List

From A'Lelia Bundles ’76JRN, John McWhorter, and other Columbia authors.

By
Rebecca Shapiro
|
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Liquid: A Love Story

By Mariam Rahmani ’21SOA

Two years after finishing her PhD at UCLA, the unnamed Iranian-American narrator of Mariam Rahmani’s hilarious debut novel feels no closer to achieving the kind of success she thought her fancy degree would provide. So she takes a glib comment from a friend seriously and decides instead to marry rich. Putting her education to some use (her dissertation was on the depiction of marriage in Eastern and Western culture), she devises a plan to go on a hundred dates over the course of the summer. The result? A wry rom-com with plenty of biting satire about the state of academia.

Joy Goddess

By A’Lelia Bundles ’76JRN

Journalist, television producer, and Columbia Trustee emerita A’Lelia Bundles is perhaps best known for her work promoting and preserving the legacy of her great-great-grandmother, Madam C. J. Walker, America’s first female self-made millionaire. Bundles’s biography of Walker was adapted into a Netflix miniseries in 2020. Now Bundles turns her attention to her grandmother and namesake, A’Lelia Walker, a businesswoman and patron of the arts who became a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Through extensive research and access to Walker’s personal correspondence, Bundles paints a vivid portrait of the woman Langston Hughes called the “joy goddess of Harlem’s 1920s.”

Stuck

By Yoni Appelbaum ’03CC

A surprising hallmark of American upward mobility is the mobility itself — the ability to move to follow economic opportunities. So argues *Atlantic* writer Yoni Appelbaum in his compelling new book. But according to Appelbaum, the mobility that once

made this country more open, prosperous, and unique has declined rapidly over the course of the last few decades. In the 1960s, one in every five Americans moved in a given year; now that figure is one in thirteen. The result is that there are abundant jobs in some parts of the country but no affordable housing, while in other parts the opposite is true. Appelbaum explains the reasons for this important social change while laying out the steps necessary to reverse it.

The Trouble of Color

By Martha S. Jones ’01GSAS

Martha S. Jones, a venerated professor at Johns Hopkins, is known for her works of African-American history, such as 2020’s *Vanguard*, which chronicles how Black women have defied racism and sexism to pursue political power. Her latest work is her most personal — blending history and memoir, she examines her own family’s history, looking back across six generations to grapple with fundamental issues of identity and belonging. Jones has plenty of material to work with — her grandfather was president of Bennett College, a prominent all-women HBCU — and here she showcases her impeccable research skills and elegant prose, as well as an admirable amount of true introspection.

Pronoun Trouble

By John McWhorter

Pronouns have become a controversial topic over the last few years, but in his delightful new book, Columbia linguist John McWhorter puts politics aside and gets into the grammatical nitty-gritty of these pesky little words. McWhorter weighs in on whether it’s correct to use *they* to refer to a singular person (he’s a fan), introduces us to some excellent pronouns of yore (e.g., the Old English *uncer*, meaning *belonging to us two*), and pokes holes in some of the arbitrary rules that we adhere to (e.g., when to use *I* vs. *me*).

Cellar Rat

By Hannah Selinger ’02CC

Hannah Selinger spent much of the aughts working in the restaurant industry, as a sommelier and beverage director for celebrity chefs like Bobby Flay and David Chang. It’s an enviable-sounding career, but in her debut memoir, Selinger — now a Massachusetts-based food writer — lays bare the toxic culture of some of these glamorous hot spots. The book is often funny, with plenty of juicy gossip, but Selinger is dead serious about the trauma that she endured in an industry rife with hazing, verbal abuse, and sexual harassment.

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