

TOPICS OFFERED FOR SUMMER 2015

Please note that the books listed for each course are only possible candidates. Do not buy any until the pre-meeting and a decision on the common reading is made.

***Classes start May 1st and end August 31st.
Holiday periods are adapted to by individual class voting.***

1. (AMM) AMERICA'S MILITARY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The United States has been "at war" for more than a decade. Yet as war has become normalized, a yawning gap has opened between America's soldiers and the society in whose name they fight. For ordinary citizens, as former secretary of defense Robert Gates has acknowledged, armed conflict has become an "abstraction" and military service "something for other people to do" rather than the business of "we the people." In our common reading, Andrew Bacevich examines the gulf between America's soldiers and the society that sends them off to seemingly perpetual war, and argues that the responsibility for defending the country should rest with its citizens, not with a "foreign legion" of professionals and contractor-mercenaries. Professor Bacevich (history & international relations) served twenty-three years in the Army (West Pointer), was company commander in Vietnam, and retired as lieutenant colonel. He has authored several books on military history and policy, as well as numerous articles in various journals.

Presentations can address any aspect of military policy, including moral and ethical issues with the use of drones, recent technological advances, and our treatment of veterans, among many others. The book will provide the foundation for interesting and informative class discussions that will enrich our knowledge and understanding of how American military policy has evolved and provide insight on what our future policies should be.

Common Reading: *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*, by Andrew Bacevich (September 2013)

2. (ART) LATIN AMERICAN ARTISTS

In 2017 there will be 46 exhibits in and around Los Angeles featuring the work of Latin American Artists. Get a head start on the contemporary world of these artists and join this S/DG. Whether inspired by realities, economics, politics or just the creative genius of these artists, the art world is finally focusing on the works of Latinos. There are hundreds of artists to choose from and a multitude of styles. Suggestions for presentations include Jose Orozco, Diego Rivera, David Siqueros, Rufino Tamayo, Alberto Vargas, Frida Kahlo, Alejandro Otero, Fernando Botero, Marisol Escobar, among many others. A field trip to the Museum of Latin American Art would enhance this area of research and appreciation.

Possible Common Reading: *Latin American Artists of the 20th Century* (2nd edition), by Edward Lucie-Smith (October 2004)

3. (CAL) CALIFORNIA UNCOVERED: STORIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

This common reading is an anthology, published in 2005 by the California Council for the Humanities. It contains excerpts from prizewinning authors, including Maxine Hong Kingston, Gary Soto, John Steinbeck, Luis Rodriguez and many others. The selections cast light on the experiences of many first- and second-generation Californians as well as those who were born in California. It contains stories and personal experiences from people who live in many areas of the state.

Common Reading: *California Uncovered: Stories for the 21st Century*, by Chitra Banerjee Divkaruni, William E. Justice & James Quay (Nov 2004)

4. (CIV) THE AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

It has been 50 years since the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the final piece of legislation that was supposed to guarantee equality for all Americans. Some believe that the election of an African-American President demonstrates that the dream has been achieved. Yet recent events, such as a number of recent deaths of black men, and particularly unarmed men, at the hands of police, make it clear that we are not as finished with racism as some had hoped and believed. Perhaps it is now time to look back on the seminal events of the mid-1960s and to the legislation that followed, in order to examine how far we have come ... and how far we have yet to go.

Thurgood Marshall was the head of the NAACP and our first African-American Justice of the Supreme Court. Most of us know that he argued school desegregation cases that culminated in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that outlawed separate but equal schooling. But, as a young lawyer, Marshall was involved in a case that until now has escaped national attention, but that, in its day, was compared to the better-known case of the Scottsboro Boys. Our common reading received the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction and will provide fertile ground for understanding the state of affairs prior to the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.

There are almost unlimited subjects for presentations including the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr., Congressman John Lewis, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks), important events of the 1960s (e.g., the March on Washington, integration of schools and the debate over busing, the Birmingham bus boycott, resistance from southern politicians, civil rights legislation, the events depicted in the recent movie *Selma*). We hope that some of the presentations will address current events (e.g., the Supreme Court's overturning of portions of the Voting Rights Act and subsequent changes to voting requirements, racial profiling

by the police through stop and frisk laws, and the killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner).

Common Reading: *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America*, by Gilbert King (February 2013)

5. (CUL) THE AMERICAN PLATE: A CULINARY HISTORY

Do you know where your food comes from? How about the history of Coca Cola or iceberg lettuce? Beginning with a discussion of pre-Columbian American Indian foods and ending with molecularly modified foods, each bite tells the story of a particular food, be it chitlins or quiche, where it came from, how it was and is used. It's full of interesting food trivia, with some recipes thrown in. The possibilities for presentations are numerous; one could do more research on some of the foods mentioned, or come up with more original food explorations.

Common Reading: *The American Plate: A Culinary History in 100 Bites* by Libby O'Connell (November 2014)

6. (DEC) GREAT DECISIONS - 2015

The *Great Decisions* briefing book features impartial, thought-provoking analyses on eight issues of concern to U.S. policymakers today. Each article is written by carefully selected experts, offers questions and tools for discussion, as well as policy options for U.S. officials. As the Foreign Policy Association (FPA) has done annually for over 50 years it encourages readers to consider and discuss these world issues. In addition to the annual briefing book *Great Decisions — 2015*, the FPA now publishes a DVD that presents background information on the issues from subject matter specialists.

In the study/discussion group, each issue will be introduced by watching the FPA's DVD ½ hour presentation of the topic to set-up the discussion sessions which will be structured one class per topic. Each topic will have one or more presenters leading the discussion. The pre-meeting will allow the group to set up a detailed agenda for discussions.

At the end of the trimester each Omnilorean may choose to complete the accompanying National Opinion Ballot that is compiled by the FPA and presented to the U.S. Secretary of State, Congress and the White House at the end of the year.

- Russia and the Near Abroad
- Privacy in the Digital Age
- Sectarianism in the Middle East
- India Changes Course
- U.S. Policy Toward Africa

- Syria's Refugee Crisis
- Human Trafficking in the 21st Century
- Brazil's Metamorphosis

Common Reading: *Great Decisions – 2015* is available from the FPA
Website: http://www.fpa.org/great_decisions

7. (DRY) DRY: THE WEST WITHOUT WATER

Recently the Los Angeles Times featured a story simply titled, “DRY”. It chronicled the struggles of today’s Central Valley Californians trying to survive as their water wells dry up.

Lynn Ingram has looked extensively at this deepening water problem in her book *The West Without Water*. Using this book as a resource, class members will learn about climate and paleoclimate conditions in the history of The West and speculate on what the future may hold for California and the Western United States.

Presentations may be made on past climactic conditions, the effects on peoples of the time, what present day water experts predict, how government is preparing for the future, etc.

This is a course with implications for all of us.

Suggested Common Reading: *The West without Water: What Past Floods, Droughts, and Other Climatic Clues Tell Us about Tomorrow*, by Lynn Ingram and Frances Malamud-Roam

8. (EMI) EMILY DICKINSON: HER LIFE AND POETRY

Summer can be fun by delving into one of America's most mysterious, eccentric and provocative cultural icons, Emily Dickinson. Today, she is universally recognized as one of Americas' most important and prolific poets. Even though she came from a successful family with strong community ties, she lived an introverted and reclusive life. She was considered bizarre, The Myth of Amherst, and known for wearing only white clothing. She frequently refused to greet guests, and eventually, she even refuse to leave her room. Most of her friendships were carried out by correspondence. She had less than a dozen of her eighteen hundred poems published during her lifetime. What is intriguing about this topic is that we also come in close contact with her family, which leads us to probe deep into her psyche: why she was the way she was. It is a story that will keep you glued to the book.

Common Reading: *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, by Richard B. Sewall (July 1998)

R. W. B. Lewis, of the New Republic expressed that, "Richard Sewall's biographical vision of Emily Dickinson is as complete as human scholarship, ingenuity, stylistic pungency, and common sense can arrive at."

9. (FRC) BEHIND THE SCENES WITH FRANK CAPRA

Learn the back story of Frank Capra's brilliant career as we watch and analyze what made his films masterpieces. Films such as: "It Happened One Night", "You Can't Take It With You", "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington", "Arsenic and Old Lace", "It's a Wonderful Life", "Meet John Doe", "Pocket Full of Miracles" and many more. Despite winning 6 Academy Awards, we will discover how Capra struggled throughout his life against the glamour, vagaries and frustrations of Hollywood for the creative freedom to make some of the most memorable films of all time.

Common Reading: *Frank Capra, The Name Above the Title - An Autobiography* (March 1997)

10. (FUT) WHO OWNS THE FUTURE?

High tech, meaning computers, the internet, social media, the cloud, data mining, etc., has been used to amass vast personal fortunes, e.g., Bill Gates. It provides services so useful and enjoyable that it is hard to imagine living a full life without them. Still, automation and robots, efficiencies of business operation, and information dissemination and analysis have contributed to elimination of many middle skill jobs and the "hollowing out" the American middle class. This suggests that we are not employing information technologies in the "best" way. It is not uncommon for misapplications to occur with advances in technology, but this is happening so fast that it is hard to keep up and make corrections to the ways we operate.

Jaron Lanier is a "computer scientist" and considered to be the father of virtual reality. He is also a thinker concerned with how high tech is affecting our lives and society. He finds fault with much of the most popular on-line activities and warns against being seduced by "dazzlingly designed forms of cognitive waste." He makes suggestions for better ways to use high tech to enrich our lives. He holds that a healthy middle class is important to future economic stability and widespread satisfaction with life and he seeks ways of ensuring that. His second book dealing with this issues is "Who Owns the Future?," which overlaps "The New Digital Age" by Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen which focuses more on global issues and was used in a prior Omnimore S/DG.

This S/DG will explore how high tech impacts our lives and culture, consider Lanier's ideas and alternative possible ways of organizing and governing our societies use of high tech. Research/presentation topics might include net neutrality, open source publishing, copyleft, etc.

Common Reading: *Who Owns the Future*, by Jaron Lanier (May 2013)

11. (GEN) GENETICS AND GENEALOGY: THE INVISIBLE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RACE

This course looks at cutting-edge research to reveal how both historical artifacts and DNA tell us where we come from and where we may be going in a very readable way. While some books explore our genetic inheritance and popular television shows celebrate ancestry, this is the first book to explore how everything from DNA to emotions to names and the stories that form our lives are all part of our human legacy. Kenneally shows how trust is inherited in Africa, silence is passed down in Tasmania, and how the history of nations is written in our DNA. From fateful, ancient encounters to modern mass migrations and medical diagnoses, the book looks at how the forces that shaped the history of the world ultimately shape each human who inhabits it. A highly entertaining look at how DNA, increasingly visible to us since we first sequenced the human genome in 2000, can open up tracts of human history that had been entirely obscure. While DNA may now be visible, however, it remains more hint than history. Kenneally, a journalist and linguist, shows that just as a gene usually delivers its genetic message only in conversation with an incoming chemical messenger, so our DNA tells its tales most fully only in light of the history of the people who carry and interrogate it. It takes all those threads to get the whole story.

Common Reading: *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures*, by Christine Kenneally (October 2014)

12. (GHG) GENIUSES, HACKERS, AND GEEKS (OH MY!)

Have you ever wondered how innovation really happens? If so, this S/DG is for you. In the common reading, Walter Isaacson, who previously wrote acclaimed biographies of Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs, now examines the history of the digital revolution by focusing on the extraordinary minds of those who were instrumental in its development. Beginning with Ada, the Countess of Lovelace (and Lord Byron's daughter), who is considered to have been the world's first programmer in the 1840s, Isaacson examines some of the fascinating personalities, familiar and unfamiliar, who were instrumental in getting us to where we are today. This is the story of how their minds worked and what made them so inventive. It's also the story of how their ability to collaborate and master the art of teamwork made them even more creative.

Presentations can focus on any of the dozens of individuals instrumental in the history of computing (e.g., Steve Jobs, Alan Turing, Bill Gates) or on the development of any computing technologies (e.g., the Worldwide Web, graphical user interfaces, the Apple Macintosh). The variety of presentations is almost boundless

Common Reading: *The Innovators: How a Group of Geniuses, Hackers, and Geeks*

Created the Digital Revolution, by Walter Isaacson
(October 2014)

13. (HAP) MINDFUL PATH TO HAPPINESS

Happiness has become a core question of our lives. Can we make ourselves happier and what would that require? An entire industry of quick fix or self-help gurus has emerged to answer the question. Yet the question is age old with Aristotle possibly the original self-help guru. Dan Harris, anchor of ABC News, *Nightline*, and Weekend Edition of *Good Morning America*, recently wrote a memoir about his public breakdown and journey to mindfulness entitled *10% Happier*. A lifelong nonbeliever, he found himself on a bizarre adventure, involving a disgraced pastor, a mysterious self-help guru, and a gaggle of brain scientists. Using his book as our springboard, this S/DG will explore the so-called mindful revolution -- "a meeting of minds between positive psychology and Buddhism," that may very well be a turning point in how the culture looks at happiness. In addition to reading and discussing Harris' book, members will research and present on the practice of meditation, the science behind the practice, the history, the approaches of various proponents such as Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, Joseph Goldstein.

Common Reading: *10% Happier: How I Tamed the Voice in My Head, Reduced Stress Without Losing My Edge, and Found Self-Help That Actually Works--A True Story*, by Dan Harris
(December 2014)

14. (LAW) OMNIOLORE GOES TO LAW SCHOOL

Do you love all those crime shows on TV? Were you riveted by the OJ case, the George Zimmerman case, and the Amanda Knox case? This course aims to be an entertaining and informative introduction to our legal system. From constitutional law to contracts to archaic procedures that still guide our civil suits, the suggested text offers an understandable, layman's overview of the cases and legal concepts. We'll discuss both criminal cases and civil cases (like the Apple vs. Samsung patent cases), and soon you'll be able to answer your own questions about things like due process, imminent domain and when an officer has to read you your Miranda rights.

"All the benefits of that first year of law school without the tedium, the terror, and the sleep deprivation!"

Common Reading: *Law 101: Everything You Need to Know About American Law, Fourth Edition*, by Jay Feinman (September 2014)

15. (MIG) MIGRATION – WINNERS, LOSERS AND POLICY DECISIONS

One topic that generates the strongest political opinions today is immigration. This book presents concepts, models and the results of studies that may permit a more reasoned approach. It lays out the various effects of migration on the indigenous, the migrants, and those left behind. Its primary focus is migration from poorer to richer countries. It discusses the effects on individuals and on nations. It emphasizes effects on happiness and society as well as economics. This book can help us reflect on how migration affects our lives, community and country. Presentations could include particular migrations, immigrant groups in our communities, policy questions and proposals.

Common Reading: *Exodus, How Migration Is Changing Our World*, by Paul Collier (October 2013)

16. (MMM) MASS MOVEMENT MENTALITY

There have been many evil mass movements in our lifetimes, from Nazis and Communists to anti-war and anti-globalization and Occupy Wall Street and anti-genetically modified foods, etc. In the 1950s a self-educated man who worked as a laborer and longshoreman wrote a book about the mentality of people who joined such radical movements. He claimed that such people had several characteristics in common and could in fact switch between movements with relative ease. Belonging to such a movement was what mattered to them. This book is not a detailed and rigorous delineation, based on scientifically conducted study, but a stimulating set of personal observations and postulations that the reader is supposed to argue with. This seems like a good basis for a Study Discussion Group as the subject is one of continuing relevance. We can expect involved debates to result.

Common Reading: *The True Believer*, by Eric Hoffer (There are several editions in paperback, beginning with 1963)

17. (MUS) MUSEUMS: 21ST CENTURY DESTINATIONS OF PLEASURE

Once the staid, formal and often boring setting for the well-educated upper class, museums have recently become fun-outings for the middle classes. Partly this is due to the increasing use of technology in the form of computer displays and audio accompaniment. But also in the last half of the 20th century, museums began to change from an “elegant receptacle” for art works to a spectacle in and of itself. Some museum buildings are an attraction equal to or beyond the displayed collections. Throughout the world more than 50 new-age museums have been completed and dozens more are in various stages of design and construction. Some critics deplore the ascendancy and emphasis on the housing, while others praise the personal and psychological effect of “becoming part of it.”

In this S/DG we will become more familiar with the newer museums and their architects such as Frank Gehry's Bilbao and the new Minneapolis Museum, Kohn Peterson Fox's Rodin Gallery in South Korea, Arata Isozaki's Center of Science and Industry in Columbus, Ohio, the dazzling Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, the Museum Het Valkhof in the Netherlands with its exterior of shimmering aquamarine glass panels, and I.M. Pei's Miho Museum of Japanese Art outside of Kyoto, as well as the famous museum designs of Renzo Piano, Rem Koolhaas and others.

As we look at these fascinating museum edifices, we'll evaluate both the outward appearance and the interior designs that maximize the viewing of the art works. We'll marvel at the stylistic ingenuity, boldness of form, breathtaking feats of design and craftsmanship . . . and perhaps here and there, even some of the "art stuff" scattered around inside. This S/DG will seek to provide insight into this new phenomenon by examining the reasons that have given rise to this explosion of new structures and we'll research and make presentations on individual examples emphasizing the aesthetics, the functionality, the technology, the economics and more.

Possible Common Reading:

Designing the New Museum, by James Trulove (2000)

Making Museums Matter, by Stephen Weil (2002) [This book covers a lot more than just the design of museums. It has 29 essays on things like: the special qualities of art museums; the relationship of copyright law to the visual arts; a consideration of how the museums and legal systems cope with the problem of Nazi-era art.]

18. (NOW) HOW WE GOT TO NOW

History tells us about the massive plagues and disease, but it doesn't spend much time on how sanitation came into being so important in preventing it. The need for clean water as cities grew led to chlorination and continued to spawn ideas for "cleanliness" which resulted in advertising of soap – with 'soap operas' being born. This S/DG will use the book *How We Got To Now* by Steven Johnson as a basis to consider how an 'innovation, or cluster of innovations, in one field end up triggering changes that seem to belong to a whole different domain altogether.' Many inventions and technologies that have changed our very way of living came into being in ways that could not have been either predicted nor orchestrated. Presentations can expand on other areas of invention and discovery in medicine, aerospace, information systems, or on any of the individuals identified as creators or inventors.

Common Reading: *How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made The Modern World* by Steven Johnson (September 2014)

19. (PHL) PLATO AT THE GOOGLEPLEX: WHY PHILOSOPHY WON'T GO AWAY

Is philosophy obsolete? Are the ancient questions still relevant in the age of cosmology and neuroscience, not to mention crowd-sourcing and cable news? The acclaimed philosopher and novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, recipient of a MacArthur "Genius" Award, provides a dazzlingly original plunge into the drama of philosophy, revealing its hidden role in today's debates on religion, morality, politics, and science.

Imagine that Plato came to life in the twenty-first century and embarked on a multicity speaking tour. How would he handle the host of a cable news program who denies there can be morality without religion? How would he mediate a debate between a Freudian psychoanalyst and a tiger mom on how to raise the perfect child? How would he answer a neuroscientist who, about to scan Plato's brain, argues that science has definitively answered the questions of free will and moral agency? What would Plato make of Google, and of the idea that knowledge can be crowd-sourced rather than reasoned out by experts? With a philosopher's depth and a novelist's imagination and wit, Goldstein probes the deepest issues confronting us by allowing us to eavesdrop on Plato as he takes on the modern world.

Possible topics for presentation include Plato and his Dialogues, other Greek philosophers, or other views about the relevance of philosophy.

Common Reading: *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away* by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein (March 2014)

20. (PVP) PALOS VERDES AND THE SOUTH BAY

Palos Verdes and the South Bay's dramatic beauty is mirrored by a dramatic history. Feuding over claims to the Rancho San Pedro continued for seventy-three years. The Vanderlip family's forty-year development of the Palos Verdes Peninsula resulted in one of California's wealthiest and most well-kept enclaves of coastal cities. Marineland of the Pacific on the Peninsula's end was one of the West Coast's more popular tourism draws before its controversial closing. In this exciting compilation of articles, authors Bruce and Maureen Megowan reveal some of the intriguing secrets and little-known facts nestled within the hills, valleys and nearby cities of this beautiful area. Discover some of the fascinating stories about the development of the South Bay and Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Topics could include any of the historical characters or sites in the area.

Common Reading: *Historic Tales from Palos Verdes and the South Bay* by Bruce L. and Maureen D. Megowan (July 2014)

21. (SOL) SEEMINGLY ORDINARY LIVES

Honeydew: Stories by award winning author Edith Pearlman will be the basis for this discussion group. “Honeydew” is Edith Pearlman's 4th short story collection.

She is the highest seller on Amazon in single author short story collections and the winner of the 2011 National Book Critics Circle Award as well as many other awards for excellence.

The stories in ‘Honeydew’ excel in capturing the complex and surprising turns in seemingly ordinary lives. In these stories, the point of view flits nimbly from character to character, allowing the reader to absorb the world from a bird's-eye perspective. The result is like a diorama, simultaneously intimate and removed: we are able to observe both how these characters perceive the world and how the world perceives them.

With 20 stories, this is a robust collection. We will be able to look thoroughly at the stories and compare and contrast these stories with our lives and the lives of the character. Reflecting on lives of others often gives us a greater understanding and appreciation of our own.

Common Reading: *Honeydew: Stories*, by Edith Pearlman (January 2015)

22. (TRU) HARRY TRUMAN

As FDR’s running mate, Truman was destined to succeed him. He won the office as an underdog in 1948. His life is a great American story, filled with vivid characters such as Churchill, Stalin, Marshall, Acheson. Our book reveals him to be a more complex, informed and determined man than imagined. His programs and policies continue to impact contemporary politics. He spanned the 19th and 20th centuries, from the Missouri frontier through WWI, the Pendergast machine, his whistle-stop campaign, WWII, the bomb, and Korea. His life, and events in his presidency offer many topics for presentations.

Common Reading: *Truman*, by David McCullough (June 1993)

23. (WST) WEST OF THE REVOLUTION

1776, the year of the American Revolution but have you ever wondered what was going on in the rest of North America in that eventful time? In his book *West of the Revolution* Claudio Saunt’s answer to that question is “Quite a lot.”

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the French and Indian War and divided North America in two with Spain presiding over the territory west of the Mississippi and Britain everything to the east (except New Orleans). British fur traders flooded Canadian prairies in search of beaver pelts. Native Americans, with the French eliminated from their trading territory, had British and Spanish within trading distance and the Osage played one group against the other expanding their dominion west of the Mississippi River, overwhelming the small Spanish outposts in the area. The Lakota Sioux advanced across the Dakotas. One traditional Sioux history states that they first seized the Black Hills, the territory they now consider

their sacred homeland, in 1776. They migrated westward battling other tribes and Europeans in their path. On the west coast the Russians were pushing south and the Spanish were pushing north, establishing missions and San Francisco in their wake. "It was a continent seething with peoples and purposes beyond Minutemen and Red Coats."

A host of presentation topics present themselves, e.g. the booming fur trade and its impact on British and American traders as well as Native American tribes, relationships among Native American tribes, the Russian incursion into the Pacific Northwest, Spanish movement into the West – to name a few.

Common Reading: *West of the Revolution: An Uncommon History of 1776* by Claudio Saunt (June 2014)