

Brilliant, brainy books to take to the beach

By Zócalo

Summer is a time of familiar comforts: the scent of sunscreen and the feeling of sand between toes, the taste of Bomb Pops and the sight of long, late, orange sunsets. But with the multiplexes filled with sequels, reboots, and retreads, and the beginning of a long election season crowded with familiar names, don't you think something original is in order? In the spirit of getting out of our comfort zones this summer and taking a crack at something new, we asked recent Zócalo guests for the fresh and forthcoming nonfiction books they think curious people should bring to the beach, pool, bar, and porch this summer.

***“Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People”* by Elizabeth A. Fenn**

This book is for all readers who think that we don't have enough evidence to tell the histories of Native American peoples. Fenn counteracts that view with a marvelously deft history that weaves together resources as disparate as textual evidence, folkloric traditions, and climate science. The book fills long-lived holes in our collective understanding of the experience of Native American peoples on this continent.

– Danielle Allen, author of *“Our Declaration and Institute for Advanced Study”*, political philosopher

***“Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America”* by Jill Leovy**

This is what the best nonfiction should be, and why a great true story will always trump an amazing novel. There's savage, whip-smart, acid prose, iconic characters, and a driving narrative, but underlying that is a deeply argued, impeccably

researched, gut-wrenching look at the tragic and flawed injustice at the core of violence in black America. A must read, but also a thoroughly enjoyable one.

– David Sax, author of *“The Tastemakers”*

“The Wright Brothers” by David McCullough

As always, McCullough is terrific at describing the personal and social side of important historical events.

– Robert D. Putnam, author of *“Our Kids”* and *“Bowling Alone”*, and Harvard University political scientist

“Everything You Ever Wanted: A Memoir” by Jillian Lauren

“Everything You Ever Wanted” is, in brief, about an adoptee who adopts a baby herself, but like all the best memoirs, it’s both personal and universal. It expands outward to encompass so many experiences and feelings we all share: love, loyalty, struggles with the past, what it means to take a profound and longed-for risk. Lauren is fierce and funny and unsparingly frank, and this book crackles with pain, love, truth, joy, and an abundance of excellent writing.

– Kate Christensen, author of *“Blue Plate Special”*

“The Prize: Who’s in Charge of America’s Schools?” by Dale Russakoff

Russakoff offers a rare window inside urban school reform in an age of unprecedented investment – but precarious-at-best community support.

– Elizabeth Green, author of *“Building a Better Teacher”*

“It’s a Long Story: My Life” by Willie Nelson

As a music journalist, I’ve interviewed Willie Nelson a few times – and yes, one of those times was on his tour bus. He was a candid and captivating storyteller, a warm-hearted

outlaw with a unique perspective on his life as a singer, songwriter, and activist. And so first on my list of summer beach reads is his new autobiography. We all know Willie's music, but equally interesting are his musical journey and his boundary-pushing, from bucking the established Nashville Sound of the '60s to his current crusade to legalize marijuana.

– Denise Quan, *entertainment journalist and producer*

"The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History" by Elizabeth Kolbert

This book should be required reading in schools, the U.N., the IMF, the Chinese Politburo, and everywhere else. Kolbert knows her stuff—hard-edged, data-driven science! – and she writes swimmingly well.

– Ann Louise Bardach, *author of "Without Fidel"*

"Even This I Get to Experience" by Norman Lear

It's moving, funny, beautifully written, and it spans show biz, politics, history, and dysfunctional families. Bonus: If you get the audio version, Lear recorded it – and he's a terrific performer.

– Marty Kaplan, *USC communications scholar and Jewish Journal columnist*

Spain: The Centre of the World 1519-1682 by Robert Goodwin

As an artist whose work is highly involved with Mexican history and culture, I have been trying to fill in my historical gaps on the history of Spain. After recently reading "Dogs of God: Columbus, the Inquisition, and the Defeat of the Moors" by Edward Reston, I have been searching for another book that picks up the thread. I've already pre-ordered "Spain: The Center of the World 1519-1682" by Robert Goodwin, which will be published in July. The book picks up where Reston left off and examines the Golden Age of Spain and

its supremacy in Transatlantic exploration.

– *Judithe Hernández, muralist*

“Pig Tales: An Omnivore’s Quest for Sustainable Meat” by Barry Estabrook

“The Chain: Farm, Factory and the Fate of Our Food” by Ted Genoways

“Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight” by Timothy Pachirat

These three books about meat/processing plants/pigs are wonderful reads (doesn’t sound like it, right?). In order of easier to take to gutsier (sorry):

In “Pig Tales”, Estabrook takes an engaging look at the pig – its wild and domestic origins and our relationship with it on small sustainable farms – and focuses a critical eye on our large industrial “factories.”

In the absorbing “The Chain”, Genoways focuses on five Hormel plants. It’s hard to underplay how riveting this tale of line workers, union leaders, hog farmers, local politicians, and activists is. You will never eat Spam again.

And in “Every Twelve Seconds“, which began as a doctoral thesis, Pachirat goes undercover as an employee in a large slaughterhouse to investigate how the workers are affected by the seen and the unseen. It’s a fantastic read.

– *Evan Kleiman, host of KCRW’s “Good Food”*