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The BIOGRAPHER'S craft

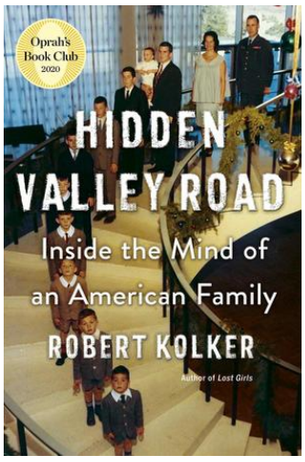
A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FOR WRITERS & READERS OF BIOGRAPHY

December 2020 | Volume 15 | Number 10

A First Look at "Best Biographies" of 2020

Starting in November, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and various media outlets began announcing their choices for the "best books" of the year. While biographies were rarely put into their own category, they often appeared in lists of overall best books, best nonfiction titles, and suggestions for holiday shopping. Some of the titles are not traditional biographies but have been labeled as biographies by Amazon or other sources. Here's a look at the best books lists as of December 1; we'll include more in next month's issue. (On first mention, the names of BIO members are in boldface.)

Once again, *Publishers Weekly* was among the first publications to list its best books of the year. Its nonfiction category included these biographies:



Hidden Valley Road was also one of *Publisher Weekly*'s Top Ten Books of the Year.

- *The Daughters of Yalta: The Churchills, Roosevelts, and Harrimans: A Story of Love and War* by Catherine Grace Katz
- *Fallout: The Hiroshima Cover-Up and the Reporter Who Revealed It to the World* by Lesley M. M. Blume
- *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* by Alan Mikhail
- *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker
- *Mad at the World: A Life of John Steinbeck* by **William Souder**
- *The Man Who Ate Too Much: The Life of James Beard* by James Birdsall
- *The Price of Peace: Money, Democracy, and the Life of John Maynard Keynes* by Zachary D. Carter
- *Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976–1980* by Rick Perlstein
- *Warhol* by Blake Gopnik
- *Wild Thing: The Short, Spellbinding Life of Jimi Hendrix* by Philip Norman

Library Journal broke down its best books into 15 categories. The following categories included biographies:

Watch the Virtual Event Honoring Gayatri Patnaik

Gayatri Patnaik received BIO's 2020 Editorial Excellence Award on Monday, November 9, at an online event that featured three of her authors: Imani Perry, Marcus Rediker, and Jeanne Theoharis, along with literary agent Tanya McKinnon. You can watch a video of the event at **BIO's video library**, and it's also available on our **YouTube channel**.

Learn from the BIO Experts

If you missed the live presentation of BIO's latest Zoom workshop, you can now watch the video. BIO members Gretchen Gerzina, Carla Kaplan, and Anne Boyd Rioux, along with moderator Marlene Trestman, answered questions about proposal writing and promotion. The event is now archived in BIO's video library and is also available on our YouTube channel.

From the Editor

I was gratified to see the

Arts

- *Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar* by Oliver Craske
- *What Becomes a Legend Most: A Biography of Richard Avedon* by Philip Gefter
- *Phantom Lady: Hollywood Producer Joan Harrison, the Forgotten Woman Behind Hitchcock* by Christina Lane
- *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* by Jenn Shapland

Biography and Memoir

- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *Rebel Cinderella: From Rags to Riches to Radical, the Epic Journey of Rose Pastor Stokes* by Adam Hochschild

Science and Technology

- *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker

Social Sciences

- *After the Last Border: Two Families and the Story of Refuge in America* by Jessica Goudeau
- *Show Them You're Good: A Portrait of Boys in the City of Angels the Year Before College* by Jeff Hobbs
- *Agent Sonya: Moscow's Most Daring Wartime Spy* by Ben Macintyre

The New York Times Book Review listed *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker as one of its Top Ten Books of the year, and included these biographies among its Notable Books of 2020:

- *Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich, the Fall of a Speaker, and the Rise of the New Republican Party* by **Julian E. Zelizer**
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S. Haldane* by Samanth Subramania
- *Fallout: The Hiroshima Cover-Up and the Reporter Who Revealed It to the World* by Lesley M. M. Blume
- *The Inevitability of Tragedy: Henry Kissinger and His World* by Barry Gewen
- *The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker, III* by Peter Baker and Susan Glasser
- *The Quiet Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War—A Tragedy in Three Acts* by Scott Anderson
- *Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976–1980* by Rick Perlstein
- *The Saddest Words: William Faulkner's Civil War* by Michael Gorra
- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson
- *A Woman Like Her: The Story Behind the Honor Killing of a Social Media Star* by Sanam Maher

response to the recent letter I sent to BIO members, seeking subjects for our "Member Interview" feature and content for both *TBC* and our new Instagram account. For the interview column, I quickly filled in all the slots for 2021 and even took some for 2022. The response showed me, again, how passionate our members are about biography and how eager they are to share their knowledge and experience with other biographers.

With this last issue of 2020, we have the first part of our annual roundup of the year's best biographies, as chosen by Amazon and various media outlets. We also have an interview with Amanda Sewell who, with her first biography, learned some of the pitfalls of writing an unauthorized account of the life of a reclusive subject, and a book review by BIO Board member Kitty Kelley.

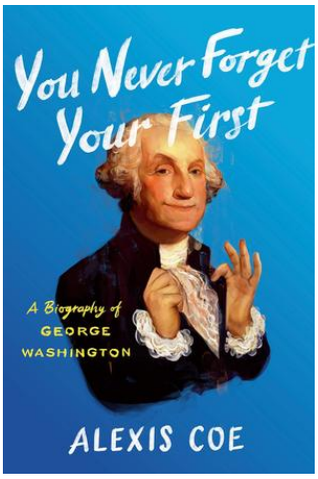
On a more somber note, this tumultuous year is drawing to a close with the pandemic still raging in the United States and other parts of the world. I hope everyone can still find ways to connect to loved ones and enjoy the holiday season, with hope for a much better New Year.

Stay well,

Michael Burgan

Follow BIO on Social Media!

Get the latest BIO news and share questions and ideas with other biographers by following BIO on social media. We have new Twitter and Instagram accounts, both can be found at



Alexis Coe offered a new take on George Washington in her biography of the president.

NPR presented its annual Book Concierge feature and biographies turned up in several of its categories:

Biography and Memoir

- *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker
- *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* by Jenn Shapland
- *Sisters in Hate: American Women on The Front Lines Of White Nationalism* by Seyward Darby
- *You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George Washington* by Alexis Coe
- *Gabrielle Chanel: Fashion Manifesto* by Miren Arzalluz
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, A Life* by Jonthan Alter
- *American Oligarchs: The Kushners, the Trumps, and the Marriage of Money and Power* by Andrea Bernstein
- *A Silenced Voice: The Life of Journalist Kim Wall* by Ingrid Wall and Joachim Wall
- *Everything Man: The Form and Function of Paul Robeson* by Shana L. Redmond

For History Lovers

- *Night Letters: Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Afghan Islamists Who Changed the World* by Chris Sands with Fazelminallah Qazizai
- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson

There's No Biz Like Show Biz

- *Up All Night: Ted Turner, CNN, and the Birth of 24-Hour News* by **Lisa Napoli**

The Washington Post named *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker one of its top ten books of the year and included these biographies in its list of 50 notable works of nonfiction:

- *Abe: Abraham Lincoln in His Times* by David S. Reynolds
- *The Art of Her Deal: The Untold Story of Melania Trump* by Mary Jordan
- *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.
- *Dark Mirror: Edward Snowden and the American Surveillance State* by Barton Gellman
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *Galileo: And the Science Deniers* by Mario Livio

@biographersintl, and two Facebook sites: a page, which is visible to everyone, and a group, which has content visible only to BIO members who join it.

Feeling Stuck?

Whatever state your biography's in—vague idea, proposal, well underway—BIO's experienced biographers can help. BIO offers a one-hour coaching session via phone or email for the member discounted rate of $60. (Coaches may charge more for subsequent hours.) Learn more about the program here.

Bio

THE LATEST NEWS IN BIOGRAPHY

Presented by Biographers International Organization

October 2020

BIO Announces the Frances "Frank" Rollin Fellowship

In Support of African American Lives

BIO is pleased to announce the new Frances "Frank" Rollin Fellowship which will award $2,000 to an author working on a biographical work about an African American figure or figures whose story provides a significant contribution to our understanding of the Black experience.

The Rollin Fellowship is named for the first known African American biographer – Frances "Frank" Rollin – and aims to remediate the disproportionate scarcity and even suppression of Black lives and voices in the broad catalog of published biography. At its September meeting the Board of Directors unanimously approved the Rollin Fellowship, which reinforces BIO's mission to encourage diversity in the field. Deadline for applications is February 1, 2021.

Sign Up for the BIO Quarterly Newsletter

Have you signed up to receive *The Latest News In Biography* quarterly newsletter? You can read the October 2020 issue, pictured above, here. We hope you will share the newsletter with your colleagues and readers. Please subscribe here.

Do you have biography news you would like to share for future newsletters? Let us know!

Sold to Publishers

Marko Perko and Stephen M. Stahl

- *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* by **Jon Meacham** (also a "Most 2020 Book of 2020")
- *The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker, III* by Peter Baker and Susan Glasser
- *Max Jacob* by Rosanna Warren
- *Pelosi* by Molly Ball
- *The Professor and the Parson* by Adam Sisman
- *Rage* by Bob Woodward
- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson
- *Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World* by Amy Stanley

Amazon's editors chose *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker as one of the 20 Best Books of the year. Amazon's Best Biographies and Memoirs category included these books:

- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *The Zealot and the Emancipator: John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and the Struggle for American Freedom* by H. W. Brands

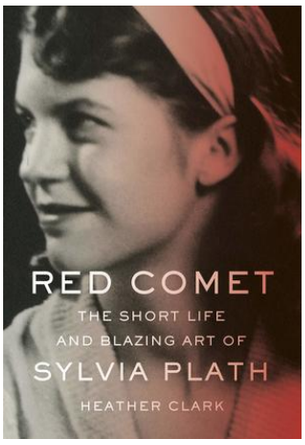
Amazon's choices for Best History books included these biographies:

- *Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976–1980* by Rick Perlstein
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* by Jon Meacham
- *The Hour of Fate: Theodore Roosevelt, J. P. Morgan, and the Battle to Transform American Capitalism* by Susan Berfield
- *Demagogue: The Life and Long Shadow of Senator Joe McCarthy* by Larry Tye
- *The Quiet Americans: Four CIA Spies at the Dawn of the Cold War — A Tragedy in Three Acts* by Scott Anderson

Biographies ended up on Barnes & Noble's list of the best books of the year in several categories:

Biography and Memoir

- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* by Heather Clark
- *Mad at the World: A Life of John Steinbeck* by William Souder



Kirkus and *Publishers Weekly* gave *Red Comet* starred reviews.

Current Affairs

- *Rage* by Bob Woodward

History

- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson

Tesla: His Tremendous and Troubled Life
sold to Prometheus Books
by Mark Gottlieb at
Trident Media Group

Andrew Morton
Elizabeth & Margaret: The Intimate World of the Windsor Sisters
sold to Michael O'Mara Books

Cristina de Stefano
The Child Is the Master: A Life of Maria Montessori
sold to Other Press
by Marleen Seegers at 2 Seas Agency,
on behalf of Carmen Prestia
at Alferj e Prestia Agenzia

Ben Bradlee Jr.
The Whistleblower: The Life and Times of Daniel Ellsberg
sold to Columbia University Press
by Joseph Veltre at Gersh Agency

Ben Schreckinger
The Bidens: Inside The First Family's Fifty Years of Tragedy, Scandal, and Triumph
sold to Twelve
by Matthew Carlini at Javelin

Maggie Haberman
Untitled biography of Donald Trump
sold to Penguin Press
by Matt Latimer and
Keith Urbahn at Javelin

Robert D. Richardson
Three Roads Back: How Emerson, Thoreau, and William James Responded to the Greatest Losses of Their Lives
sold to Princeton University Press
by Andrew Blauner at
Blauner Books Literary Agency

Philip Freeman
Julian: The Last Pagan Emperor Of Rome
sold to Yale University Press
by Joelle Delbourgo at
Joelle Delbourgo Associates

Julia Fox and John Guy
Hunting the Falcon
(Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn)
sold to Harper
by Grainne Fox at Fletcher & Company,
on behalf of
Natasha Fairweather at RCW

Peter Thompson
The Republican Father and the Adoptive

- *His Truth Is Marching On: John Lewis and the Power of Hope* by Jon Meacham
- *Bag Man: The Wild Crimes, Audacious Cover-up, and Spectacular Downfall of a Brazen Crook in the White House* by Rachel Maddow and Michael Yarvitz
- *Agent Sonya: Moscow's Most Daring Wartime Spy* by Ben Macintyre
- *The Zealot and the Emancipator: John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and the Struggle for American Freedom* by H. W. Brands
- *Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976–1980* by Rick Perlstein

Movies and TV

- *Cary Grant: A Brilliant Disguise* by Scott Eyman
- *The Nolan Variations: The Movies, Mysteries, and Marvels of Christopher Nolan* by Tom Shone

Music

- *The Butterfly Effect: How Kendrick Lamar Ignited the Soul of Black America* by Marcus J. Moore

Psychology

- *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker

Social Science

- *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.

Sports

- *Three-Ring Circus: Kobe, Shaq, Phil, and the Crazy Years of the Lakers Dynasty* by Jeff Pearlman
- *Tom Seaver: A Terrific Life* by Bill Madden

True Crime

- *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* by Hallie Rubenhold

Time magazine featured these biographies among its 100 Must-Read Books Of 2020:

- *Begin Again: James Baldwin's America and Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own* by Eddie S. Glaude Jr.
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *Hidden Valley Road: Inside the Mind of an American Family* by Robert Kolker
- *Hitler: Downfall 1939–1945* by Volker Ullrich
- *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* by Jenn Shapland
- *Reaganland: America's Right Turn, 1976–1980* by Rick Perlstein
- *She Come By It Natural: Dolly Parton and the Women Who Lived Her Songs* by Sarah Smarsh
- *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance*

Son: Thomas Jefferson and William Short
sold to Oxford University Press
by Christopher Rogers at
Dunow, Carlson & Lerner

Bruce Gilley
The Last Imperialist
(Sir Alan Burns)
sold to Regnery Gateway

John Eisenberg
Rocket Men
(Black quarterbacks in the NFL)
sold to Basic Books
by Susan Canavan at
Waxman Literary Agency

Maureen Callahan
Collateral Damage: Reckoning With the Kennedy Legacy of Misogyny, Mayhem, and Murder
sold to Little, Brown
by Nicole Tourtelot at
The Gernert Company

Please Keep Your Info Current

Making a move or just changed your email? We ask BIO members to keep their contact information up to date, so we and other members know where to find you. Update your information in the Member Area of the BIO website.

Membership Up for Renewal?

Please respond promptly to your membership renewal notice. As a nonprofit organization, BIO depends on members' dues to fund our annual conference, the publication of this newsletter, and the other work we do to

During the Blitz by Erik Larson

- *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* by **Peniel E. Joseph**
- *You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George Washington* by Alexis Coe
- *150 Glimpses of the Beatles* by Craig Brown

The magazine also placed *Hitler* and *The Dead Are Rising* on its list of the top ten nonfiction books of the year.

Smithsonian magazine's list of the Ten Best History Books of 2020 featured several biographies:

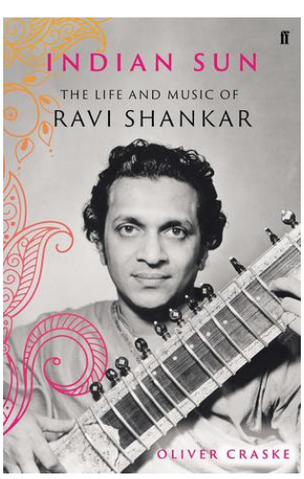
- *Uncrowned Queen: The Life of Margaret Beaufort, Mother of the Tudors* by Nicola Tallis
- *You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George Washington* by Alexis Coe
- *Veritas: A Harvard Professor, a Con Man and the Gospel of Jesus's Wife* by Ariel Sabar
- *The Other Madisons: The Lost History of a President's Black Family* by Bettye Kearse
- *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* by Les Payne and Tamara Payne
- *The Zealot and the Emancipator: John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, and the Struggle for American Freedom* by H. W. Brands

The *Smithsonian*'s Ten Best Science Books included *Hidden Valley Road* by Robert Kolker, and its Best Books About Food included *The Man Who Ate Too Much: The Life of James Beard* by John Birdsall.

The New York Public Library's choices for the best nonfiction books included *The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson and *Hidden Valley Road* by Robert Kolker. The library's list of best fiction and memoir included *My Autobiography of Carson McCullers* by Jenn Shapland.

Oprah Magazine had one biography on its list of the 20 best books of 2020: *The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* by Heather Clark. Likewise, *Esquire* included one biography on its list of top books: *This Is Big: How the Founder of Weight Watchers Changed the World—and Me* by Marisa Meltzer.

Critic John Wilson, writing in *First Things* magazine, chose two biographies as his favorite books of 2020: *A Handful of Earth, A Handful of Sky: The World of Octavia E. Butler* by Lynell George, and both volumes of *The Life of William Faulkner* by **Carl Rollyson**.



Oliver Craske's book is the first full biography of

In the United Kingdom, *The Spectator* asked its reviewers to name their favorite books of the year. Two biographies made the cut: Ruth Scurr chose Kate Summerscale's *The Haunting of Alma Fielding: A True Ghost Story* and Ysenda Maxtone Graham chose *Tom Stoppard: A Life* by **Hermione Lee**.

The Times chose best books in several categories, and these biographies made the lists:

Business

- *Billion Dollar Loser: The Epic Rise and Fall of Adam Neumann and WeWork* by Reeves Wiedeman

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Are You a Student?

Or do you know one who is interested in biography? BIO now has a special student membership rate. Visit the BIO website to find out more.

Biographer's Diary

By Cathy Curtis

Working with a Researcher

Before the pandemic, I had never hired a researcher. How could anyone else fathom the biographical treasure I might find in a shopping list or my lack of interest in a Christmas card sent by a famous person? And surely no hired person would be willing to adopt my routine of long, nonstop days, taking hundreds of phone photos of material I barely have time to glance at until I return home.

This year, however, the university library housing my new subject's primary archive was open only to students and faculty. After reaching the library's annual limit of electronic copy requests, the only alternative was to hire a graduate student recommended by

Ravi Shankar.

Music

- *The Ox: The Last of the Great Rock Stars* by Paul Rees
- *Indian Sun: The Life and Music of Ravi Shankar* by Oliver Craske
- *Small Hours: The Long Night of John Martyn* by Graeme Thomson
- *Bowie Odyssey: 70* by Simon Goddard

Memoirs and Biographies

- *JFK Volume 1: 1917–1956* by Fredrik Logevall

Art

- *The Lives of Lucian Freud: Fame 1968–2011* by William Feaver

In addition, *The Sunday Times* named *One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time* by Craig Brown the Pop and Rock book of the year.

The *Financial Times* also broke down its best books into different categories, and biographies turned up on several of the lists:

History

- *Machiavelli: His Life and Times* by Alexander Lee

Politics

- *Joe Biden: American Dreamer* by Evan Osnos
- *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* by Peniel E. Joseph
- *MBS: The Rise to Power of Mohammed bin Salman* by Ben Hubbard
- *The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker, III* by Peter Baker and Susan Glasser

Critics' Choice

- *Frank Ramsey: A Sheer Excess of Powers* by Cheryl Misak
- *On Seamus Heaney* by Roy Foster
- *The Habsburgs: The Rise and Fall of a World Power* by Martyn Rady

Classical Music

- *Beethoven, A Life* by Jan Caeyers, translated by Brent Annable

Visual Arts

- *The Lives of Lucian Freud: Fame 1968–2011* by William Feaver
- *Morozov: The Story of a Family and a Lost Collection* by Natalya Semenova

Literary Nonfiction

- *Tom Stoppard: A Life* by Hermione Lee
- *Let's Do It: The Authorised Biography of Victoria Wood* by Jasper Rees

The Guardian also had many different categories for its best books, and these biographies were included:

Politics

the librarian to take photos for me.

Long ago, as a graduate student in art history, I volunteered for a supposed research project at a museum. When I showed up, in my houndstooth-check wool suit, I discovered that my task was to remove clouds of dust from stacks of nineteenth-century glass plate photographs. Left on my own, with no explanation of the ultimate purpose of this exercise, I lasted just one day.

That's why, aware that research is normally a skilled task involving personal initiative, I warned the grad student that this job would be almost entirely mechanical—turning pages and snapping photos, based on the box and file lists I would provide. I also briefly explained my project and why I was cherry-picking certain portions of the archive.

I knew I'd miss being able to apply my own "radar" to a file—zipping past pages that a quick glance told me were sure to be unhelpful. Sure enough, since I have no idea about the precise nature or page count of each file, and my researcher can't read my mind, there have been problems. I've wound up with pages that duplicated material in other files, double sets of photocopies, and material I would have passed over as marginal or useless.

While I could have asked the researcher to email me information about the contents of each file before photographing it, that would have wasted a lot of time and probably run up my bill. (I pay her $25 per hour, a reasonable fee set by the library. As the total mounts, I try to rationalize how it compares with the cost of hotel charges and meals, had I been on-site.) On the positive side, my researcher is the

- *Diane Abbott* by Robin Bunce and Samara Linton
- *Boris Johnson: The Gambler* by Tom Bower
- *Joe Biden: American Dreamer* by Evan Osnos

Science

- *A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S. Haldane* by Samanth Subramanian

Art

- *Andy Warhol* by Blake Gopnik
- *Artemisia Gentileschi* by Jonathan Jones
- *The Lives of Lucian Freud: Fame 1968–2011* by William Feaver

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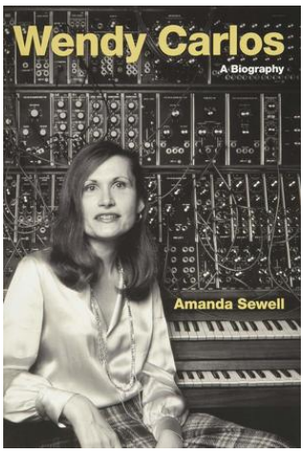
When Subjects Lash Out: Amanda Sewell and Wendy Carlos



Wendy Carlos is Amanda Sewell's first biography.

When Amanda Sewell set out to write a biography of electronic music pioneer Wendy Carlos, she knew she was filling a scholarly hole. Despite Carlos's many accomplishments—including popularizing the Moog synthesizer, scoring films for Stanley Kubrick, and releasing *Switched-On Bach*, the first classical music album to sell more than one million copies—no one had ever profiled the musician's life in detail. Sewell was also aware that others might have been put off the task because they knew Carlos was something of a recluse who, for many years, had avoided interviews and tended to be litigious. Further complicating the endeavor, would-be biographers needed to address a part of Carlos's personal life that had become very public: her transition from male to female during the late 1960s.

Sewell, music director of Interlochen Public Radio in Michigan and a Ph.D. in musicology, was up for the challenge, and Oxford University Press published her *Wendy Carlos: A Biography* this summer. The book has been generally well received, with reviewers calling it "a balanced biography" (*Kirkus*); a "nuanced" look at a "groundbreaking composer" (*Library Journal*); and "a grounded, thoughtful, appreciative study" marked by "elegant prose" (*The Wall Street Journal*). One person, however, was less than enamored with the book—Wendy Carlos. Sewell's experience highlights some of the challenges biographers face when writing an unauthorized biography.

In an email interview with *TBC*, Sewell said calling her book unauthorized "makes it sound a bit sordid, like I was digging through her trash or something—which I definitely didn't!" But, Sewell said, it was unauthorized "in that the subject didn't participate, nor did anyone in her circle." Sewell was prepared for that, knowing that Carlos adhered to what she called her "First Law": "For every parameter that you can control, you must control." As Sewell wrote in the introduction to her book, Carlos applied her law to her music and urged other

most hardworking, pleasant, and scrupulously honest person I'd ever hope to meet.

But what drives me crazy is that the online "workspaces" (e.g., Google Docs, Dropbox), enabling bulk delivery and sorting of photos, assume that I am *collaborating* with my researcher. Constantly batting away the bells and whistles intended to help us work together, I want to shout, "No, I am working by myself!" What I want is a simple device that allows the researcher to upload files she will never see again, so that the biographer can make use of them in whatever way she sees fit.

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musicians to do the same. Sewell went on, Carlos also "attempted to control how she has been portrayed by journalists, scholars, and others who have written or want to write about her."

Sewell told *TBC* that several people discouraged her from writing about Carlos, and some "suggested gently that I wait until she died before I wrote the book because it would be easier." Sewell contacted Carlos and "dozens of people she'd worked with over the years, and not a single person agreed to be interviewed on the record about her." Some people warned that Carlos might try to sabotage the book before it was published.

That didn't happen, but before the book's September release, Carlos did post a statement on her website. It said, in part: "[The book] belongs on the fiction shelf. No one ever interviewed me, nor anyone I know. There's zero fact-checking. Don't recognize myself anywhere in there—weird. Sloppy, dull and dubious, it's hardly an objective academic study as it pretends to be." Carlos also called Sewell's work mean-spirited and filled with "a grab-bag of online urban legends, including anonymous axes to grind." Carlos called herself a victim of "needless personal attacks."

Despite Carlos's accusations, Sewell tackled the project as a serious academic forced to work around the stonewalling she received from Carlos and her associates. "I started with primary sources in Carlos's own words," Sewell said. "I tracked down every published interview I could find that she had given since the 1960s. . . . I also relied heavily on Carlos's website—although it hadn't been updated since 2009, it was a wealth of information that she had written herself."

Sewell also visited several archives to unearth unpublished primary sources, seeking things Carlos had written or that had been written by people close to her. Those sources included the papers of Arthur Bell. He was the journalist who, working for *Playboy*, conducted the 1979 interview in which Carlos first publicly discussed her gender identity. The papers contained notes written by Carlos and interview notes Bell had jotted down while talking to her. The papers also contained one of those tiny finds biographers love: Sewell said there was "even a Chinese food takeout menu where [Carlos] had written her order on it in purple marker."

For the finished product, Sewell said, she included an endnote after nearly every sentence. "I documented my research meticulously, not only for my own scholarly integrity but also in case any allegations arose that I had fabricated information. I wanted to leave a trail of breadcrumbs, as it were, so that all of my source materials were clearly identified."

Sewell believes that the reporting on her identity as a transgender woman led to at least some of Carlos's distrust of the media. "When she disclosed in 1979 that she was female, journalists and scholars largely focused on her gender than on her music. I think she was horrified by this laser focus on one dimension of her life, particularly because she seems to have seen her transition as something that was complete and that did not merit any further discussion."

Yet the biographer had to discuss it. "Her gender identity shaped so much of her life and career," Sewell said. "But I want to be clear about what I mean: I'm not saying she wrote this kind of music or acted this way because she's transgender, but rather, she was responding to cultural forces around being transgender. She was lonely and afraid for her life, so she isolated herself and spent all of her time learning about these new cutting-edge synthesizers. It's an important distinction, and one that is often overlooked by journalists and scholars."

Going back to the issue of authorized versus unauthorized biographies, Sewell said, "I'd invite your readers to think about what an 'authorized' biography is and does. Does the author write only about what the subject tells them? Who is consulted as a source? What if there is conflicting information between the

John A. Farrell
Irwin Gellman
Michael Holroyd
Peniel Joseph
Hermione Lee
David Levering Lewis
Andrew Lownie
Megan Marshall
John Matteson
Jon Meacham
Marion Meade
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subject's account and others' accounts? What if the subject says a topic is off-limits? At what point is it more of an autobiography than a biography?"

As to Carlos's attacks on the book, Sewell said, "I regret that she sees it as a personal attack when I have so much respect and admiration for her. She is so respected and admired by so many people, and I wanted to create a resource for those who want to know more about her. . . . I am sad that I have angered this octogenarian who I admire so much (it's not my intention to go around infuriating old ladies, I promise). But as a biographer and scholar, I found her response completely predictable. I figured she would lash out, because that's what she's done about anyone who's written about her life in the past 40 years."

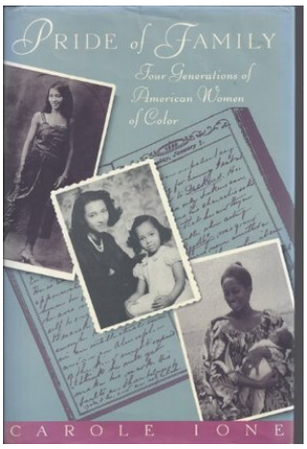
Sewell added that she had to chuckle when someone on Twitter accused her of writing the book as a get-rich-quick scheme. "I can assure you that nothing about this process was quick, nor will sales of this book make me rich." And for some fans of Wendy Carlos, the biography had one positive effect. Several wrote Sewell to thank her; Carlos updated her website for the first time in 11 years to launch her attack on the book.

Book Review

Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color
by Carole Ione
Summit Books

By Kitty Kelley

Editor's note: While TBC *does not usually review books, we make exceptions for books about the biographer's craft. This month, we're featuring a slightly different review, one with relevance for BIO. As we wrote in our October issue, Carole Ione (known professionally as IONE) is a relative of Frances Anne Rollin Whipper, the namesake of BIO's new Frances "Frank" Rollin Fellowship for a biography-in-progress of an African American figure. Ione had traced her family history and her ties to Rollin in* Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color. *BIO Board member Kitty Kelley recently reviewed the book, and we're reprinting the review here.*



Carole Ione grew up in a world of beautiful Black women of various shades, where marriages crumbled, fathers fell by the wayside, and mothers forged ahead with careers and the "occasional" man. As a 10-year-old sitting at the piano listening to her mother sing Calypso songs, Ione, as she now calls herself, "learned early on from those lyrics that soldiers and sailors could be trouble—you might never see them again."

Ione's only paladins were women: her great-aunt, Sistonie, a physician and member of Washington's Black aristocracy; her grandmother, Be-Be, a former Broadway chorus dancer who ran the best restaurant in Saratoga Springs, drawing celebrities like Cab Calloway, Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker, and Ethel Waters; and her mother, Leighla, who carved a career writing mysteries. Ironically, the biggest mystery hid behind the stone wall of secrets that kept the women estranged and incapable of bonding as a family.

At the age of 19, against fierce objections, Ione married a white Frenchman. In 1956, they moved to his home in Alsace, where everyone in the textile-

Dona Munker
Jane Lincoln Taylor
(New York)

Felicity O. Yost
(Hawaii)

To contact any of our correspondents, click here.

manufacturing town was white and spoke a German dialect called Elsässerditsch. That part of France, the Haut-Rhin, was scorned by Parisians as the *exterieur*, so its denizens tried to be "more French than the French," Ione writes. As a Black American woman, she became a freakish curiosity, stared at in the streets:

> "I realize now that it was exactly that depressing feeling of being thought inferior to the society I lived in that I had hoped to escape by marrying . . . [I longed] to assuage the painful and confusing aspects of blackness."

Soon, she and her husband moved back to New York, where they occupied separate bedrooms and led separate lives as he encouraged a philosophy of free love. Ione began an affair with a married alcoholic man many years her junior, followed by an even more unconventional relationship with a woman painter who lived in a loft on Canal Street:

> "I had begun to understand that I was—like most people, I thought—not simply heterosexual but sexual, and from then on I would resist any labels on my sexuality."

After her divorce, she married "a gay man living as a heterosexual" with whom she had three children. But after 13 years "of no love for me," she again divorced. Ione received no succor from her mother or grandmother, only a "frosty politeness." Both blamed her for leaving her husband and becoming like them: a single mother.

Feeling betrayed and desperate for a sense of belonging, Ione sought to explore the lives of her *family*, a word she italicizes as if it's exotic and foreign. The result, published in 1991 when she was 54, was *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color*, a rich reverie of superb writing—half memoir, half biography—nine years in the making that probes the tortured bonds of mothers and daughters and the journey of one girl through a gnarled thicket of secrets.

With bracing honesty and eloquence, Ione documents in *Pride of Family* the alienation she felt within her own community, where a pernicious line of color had segregated her since childhood:

> If you're white, you're all right.
> If you're brown, stick around.
> If you're black, get back.

When she found her maternal grandfather late in life, she asked him about his mother, and he said that she, Ione's great-grandmother, was good-looking. "She was fair. Very light skin—and she had good hair." That one word—hair—is freighted for Black women, and Ione was particularly sensitive about it as her mother and grandmother were light-skinned beauties with straight, silky hair:

> "Mine was fuzzy, woolly, nappy . . . everything I didn't want it to be . . . my hair was bad . . . not in the worst degrees of 'bad'—for there are degrees—but 'bad' nonetheless. Did this make my mother and grandmother love me less, did it create a subtle distance between us?"

That distance narrowed when Ione discovered the diary of her great-grandmother, Frances "Frank" Anne Rollin (1845–1902), and unearthed many family secrets. Rollin also gave Ione, a writer, a feeling of pride for her foremother, a 19th-century activist who was the first known African American biographer. In 1868, Rollin wrote *The Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* under the name Frank A. Rollin.

That biography is little known today, but the biographer lives on, having been recently embraced by Biographers International Organization (BIO), which established the Frances "Frank" Rollin Fellowship for African American

Biography, providing a $2,000 fellowship for a writer working on a life story of an African American figure or someone whose story provides a significant contribution to the Black experience.

Ione, now 83 and living in Kingston, New York, is thrilled by the fellowship. "It's a dream coming true through the centuries," she told BIO. "There was a line in [Frank's] diary in which she said she wanted to 'make her mark in literature,' and now [I feel] it's finally happened."

Shorts

Yale Introduces New Series on Black Lives

As reported by *Publishers Weekly* and Publishers Marketplace, Yale University Press will publish a Black Lives series starting in early 2022. The series will feature brief biographies of individuals of African descent who profoundly shaped history. The editorial board for the series includes Jacqueline Goldsby, David Blight, and Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Did AI Write New Obama Biography?

Writing for Slate, Dan Kois suggested that a new, brief biography of Barack Obama was created using artificial intelligence (AI). *Barack Obama Book* appeared for sale on Amazon just as the former president's memoir was hitting the market. The biography was credited to "University Press," with no author listed. Kois's reporting followed up on a tweet from HarperCollins editor Eric Nelson, who first suggested the book was the product of AI. By the time Kois picked up the story, *Barack Obama Book* was ranked at number 114 on Amazon's bestseller list, and it was in the top spot in the retailer's Political Leadership category. Kois said the 61-page book, which took him about 20 minutes to read, was part of its publisher's goal to capitalize on people doing searches for the Obama memoir. He called it "an SEO ploy by a shadowy company that has scores of $2.99 knockoffs ready to be downloaded . . . [including] quickie biographies of au courant figures like Obama, [Kamala] Harris, and Dolly Parton." Using software created at Harvard University and MIT to help detect AI-generated writing, Kois said a sample paragraph from the Obama biography suggested it was the product of AI. No one at University Press replied to his request for a comment, and as of November 20, the book was no longer for sale at Amazon.

Member Interview

Six Questions with Katherine Manthorne

Katherine Manthorne is a professor of art history at CUNY's Graduate Center.

What is your current project and at what stage is it?

Only last week I received advance copies of my book *Restless Enterprise: The Art and Life of Eliza Pratt Greatorex.* But long before that gratifying moment, I had begun to consider the inevitable question: what next? Several projects had been swirling around in my brain and the prospects were intriguing, but then fate intervened. I was approached by an acquisitions editor with the question: we were thinking about the need for a biography about the 19th-century female painter Fidelia Bridges. Would you be interested? As the bestselling female artist and illustrator in post-Civil War America, Bridges made her audiences pause and reflect upon intimate corners of nature. During the current pandemic when so many of us are finding rare solace being outdoors in the landscape, her art speaks to us more eloquently than ever. And so I commenced a draft of my book proposal on Bridges.

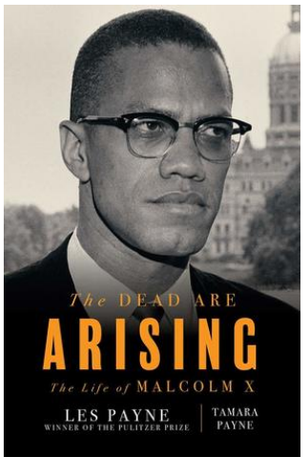
Who is your favorite biographer or what is your favorite biography?
Confronted with the task of selecting a single artwork by J. A. M. Whistler, art collector Charles Lang Freer protested that it was impossible to chose among pearls. This question poses a similar dilemma for a biographer. In my interior life I inhabit the nineteenth century and seek out books that narrate that epoch in a prismatic way. Taking Kit Carson as its focus, Hampton Sides's *Blood and Thunder: An Epic History of the American West* distinguishes itself for its meticulous research, near-cinematic storytelling, and singular insights into the transformative forces at work in the American Southwest. It represents the best of historical biography.

What have been your most satisfying moments as a biographer?
Tracking Greatorex's career, I unraveled her relationships with many accomplished women of whom I had been previously unaware: Elizabeth Ellet, author of the pioneering compendium *Women Artists: In All Ages and Countries* (1859); Sallie Gibbons, who in 1870s New York owned and operated an art gallery on Madison Avenue where she mounted early benefit exhibits including some for women; and most endearing of all, Mary Louise Booth, historian of old New York, founding editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, and one of the most well-connected women in the city. Making their acquaintance was one of my great joys.

One research/marketing/attitudinal tip to share?
As writers—biographers or otherwise—we all send our work out into the world in the form of proposals, sample chapters, or completed manuscripts and wait with bated breath for the judgment to be handed down. One has to have a large supply of handkerchiefs or develop a thick skin to weather the process of securing a literary agent or publisher for the latest labor of love. But one bit of wisdom shared by a seasoned, successful author keeps me going: if you aren't receiving at least one rejection a week, then you aren't sending out enough submissions.

If you weren't a biographer, what dream profession would you be in, and why?
At various phases in my life I have pondered or engaged in diverse professions: photographic journalism, archaeology, medicine, book store proprietor, and art history. They all offer their advantages, but one of the attractions of writing the lives of others is that we can immerse ourselves—at least for a time—into a series of careers and experiences vastly different from our own. That's my dream job.

What genre, besides biography, do you read for pleasure and who are some of your favorite writers?
Reading fiction is not only one of my great pleasures, it also opens my eyes to alternative verbal imagery, word usage, and narrative techniques that can be carried over into my own nonfiction writing. For these reasons I return repeatedly to Herman Melville and especially *Moby Dick.* In it Melville does for cetaceans what Richard Powers did for trees in *The Overstory*: he portrays them as sentient, communicative, and intertwined with the fate of human animals. Images of the *Pequod*'s multicultural crew, Ahab nailing a coin to the mast, or Queequeg walking the streets of Nantucket with his harpoon imprinted themselves on my memory. What Melville called a "blasphemous book" rewards multiple re-readings.



Tamara Payne completed the biography of Malcolm X started by her father Les Payne after his death in 2018.

Prizes

National Book Awards

The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X by Les Payne and Tamara Payne won the Nonfiction category of the National Book Awards. The award comes with a $10,000 cash prize. You can see the winners in all five categories here.

Baillie Gifford Prize

Craig Brown's *One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time* won the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-fiction. The prize is worth £50,000 ($66,533), making it the top award for nonfiction in the United Kingdom. Brown's book was released as *150 Glimpses of the Beatles* in the United States. Martha Kearney, chair of the judges for the prize, called it "a profound book about success and failure which won the unanimous support of our judges. Craig Brown has reinvented the art of biography. In the deep gloom of 2020, we have discovered a shaft of light."

Costa Book Awards

The Man in the Red Coat by Julian Barnes was the only biography on the Biography category shortlist for the Costa Book Awards. The other three shortlisted books were memoirs. The winner of the Costa Book Awards in each of five categories will be announced on January 4, 2021, and the overall winner of the Costa Book of the Year will be announced January 26. You can see the shortlists for each category here.

Call for Applications

Massachusetts Historical Society

The Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) will award at least two long-term fellowships for the 2021–2022 academic year. The stipend, governed by a National Endowment for the Humanities formula, is $5,000 per month for a minimum of four months and a maximum of 12 months and also includes a housing allowance. Applicants must have completed their training for the terminal degree in their field, usually a Ph.D, before the application deadline of **January 15, 2021**. You can find more information about the fellowship program here.

MHS has also put out a call for papers for its 2022 conference "Underrepresented Voices of the American Revolution." The deadline for submitting a proposal is **January 4, 2021**. Find more information here.

Gotham Center for New York City History Instructor Positions

The Gotham Center for New York City History, at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, is seeking instructors for a new program offering non-credit online seminars and courses for the public on different facets of New York City history. Courses are presented during evening hours via Zoom, and instructors will be paid $100 to $118 per hour depending on their experience. Learn more here.

Research Tips

British Library Offers Thousands of Maps Online

The British Library is digitizing 40,000 maps from its Topographical Collection of King George III and making them available through Flickr. The maps were drawn between 1500 and 1824. The royal collection also includes architectural drawings, cartoons, and watercolors. As reported by Medievalists.net, some of the collection's highlights include a hand-drawn map of New York City from 1664, maps from James Cook's expedition to St. Pierre and Miquelon in 1763, and the earliest comprehensive land-use map of London. Some 18,000 images are already online.

Find Digitized Newspapers with Elephind.com

The website Elephind.com is a search engine with just one task: to find articles in a wide range of digitized newspapers of the past, including some from Australia, Japan, and New Zealand. Elephind searches across many individual sites at one time, including the Library of Congress' Chronicling America collection. According to Elephind, "many of the smaller newspaper sites are not well known and may be difficult to find with the usual search engines but are searchable from Elephind.com."

Obituaries

Jan Morris

Jan Morris, a travel writer and historian, died November 20, in Pwllheli, Wales. She was 94.

After completing her service in the British military, Morris earned a degree from Oxford University and began a career in journalism. She won fame for her reporting on the first ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. At the time, and until she was 46, Morris was known as James Morris. She chronicled her transition from male to female in her 1974 memoir *Conundrum*. By then, Morris was already known as a skilled travel writer and historian. Her more than four dozen books included several biographies: *Lincoln: A Foreigner's Quest*; *Fisher's Face: Or Getting to Know the Admiral* (about Lord Admiral Jack Arbuthnot Fisher); and *The Hashemite Kings*, written when she was James Morris.

Writers Life

Audible Backtracks on Cutting Royalty Payments on Returned Books

Following an outcry from thousands of individual writers and several groups that represent authors, including the Authors Guild and the Society of Authors, Audible has changed its policy on returned books. The company had been encouraging monthly subscribers to freely return or exchange books, offering that as a perk of membership. The returns and exchanges, however, cut into the royalties paid to authors who sell audiobooks through Audible's Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX). As of January 1, 2021, Audible will pay author royalties on books returned or exchanged within seven days of purchase; under the current policy, Audible deducts royalties for books returned or exchanged within one year. Reacting to the change, an Authors Guild statement said, "While we appreciate that Audible is acknowledging the concerns raised by authors and has shown a willingness to making changes to its policy of deducting royalties for returns up to 365 days, we don't think that the proposal goes far enough. For high volume audiobook listeners, a 7-day period is more than enough to listen to a whole audiobook and exchange, and it is not fair to deduct the author's royalty for books that have been or could have been listened to. This practice is unparalleled in digital media retail. We think that royalties should only be deducted in cases of accidental purchase and within a much shorter period of time, such as 48 hours, and only if the audiobook hasn't been listened to substantially."

Never worry about the commercial possibilities of a project. That stuff is for agents and editors to fret over—or not.
—Geoff Dyer

Oxford University Press Announces Words and Phrases of the Year
Breaking with tradition, Oxford Languages, part of Oxford University Press, did not choose a single "word of the year" for 2020. As stated on its website, "It quickly became apparent that 2020 is not a year that could neatly be accommodated in one single 'word of the year.'" The words and phrases on the 2020 list include: COVID-19, WFH (working from home), lockdown, superspreader, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), and cancel culture. Oxford Languages released a report explaining its decision and the words it chose, which you can download here.

Spend time thinking. Writing's only about 20 percent of the job. Sometimes less.
—Meg Rosoff

Free Workshop on Getting Access to Public Records
The Poynter Institute offers a free, online workshop called "Open Records Success: Strategies for Writing Requests and Overcoming Denials." The course is designed for journalism students or others who have never navigated the process of requesting public records. The class can be taken any time and at each student's pace. Learn more here.

When people tell you something's wrong or doesn't work for them, they are almost always right. When they tell you exactly what they think is wrong and how to fix it, they are almost always wrong.
—Neil Gaiman

Writers at Work

How do biographers do what they do? Or more precisely, how do they organize the space where they conceive of projects, go through notes, write and rewrite their books? With Writers at Work, *TBC* offers glimpses into the working spaces of fellow biographers, with the writers describing what works for them and perhaps offering tips on what others should or shouldn't do.

This month, Aaron Shulman shows us his office.

Please share with us pictures of where you work, so we can include them in future issues.

Aaron Shulman, author of the *The Age of Disenchantments: The Epic Story of Spain's Most Notorious Literary Family and the Long Shadow of the Spanish Civil War*, lives with his wife and their daughter in a small bungalow a few blocks from the beach in Santa Barbara, California. When he isn't surfing, he works in this light-filled nook in their kitchen.

Members' Virtual Events

Given the proliferation of author events that can be easily accessed online, and which are often archived after the event, *TBC* is now listing upcoming member events so other members can take part live and providing links to past events that have been recorded. Previously, those archived videos would have been featured in "Member News and Notes." Look for this special section for as long as the pandemic disrupts the presentation of in-person author events.

Coming Up

December 8: PEN America's virtual gala will feature **Ron Chernow** in discussion with Barack Obama, who is receiving the organization's Voice of Influence Award. Reserve a spot here.

December 15: Along with Peter Osnos, **Kai Bird**, executive director of the Leon Levy Center for Biography, will moderate the center's next virtual event, a conversation with Evan Osnos about his new biography, *Joe Biden: The Life, the Run, and What Matters Now*. Register here.

Archived Events

Angela V. John delivered the keynote address, "Lady Rhondda Sees It Through: *Time and Tide*'s Owner-Editor" for the Festival of Women Writers and Journalists. Her talk is available here.

At an event hosted by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, **Marlene Trestman** previewed her forthcoming book, *Most Fortunate Unfortunates: New Orleans' Jewish Orphans' Home, 1855–1946*.

Completing the fall schedule of events at the Leon Levy Center for Biography, **Peniel E. Joseph** discussed his *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.* with David Levering Lewis. Peniel also took part in a video interview with *Access*, the magazine of the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin, which you can see here.

Heath Lee gave the annual David F. Peters Lecture, hosted by the Westminster Canterbury Richmond retirement community in Richmond, Virginia, discussing her *The League of Wives: The Untold Story of the Women Who Took On the U.S. Government to Bring Their Husbands Home from Vietnam*.

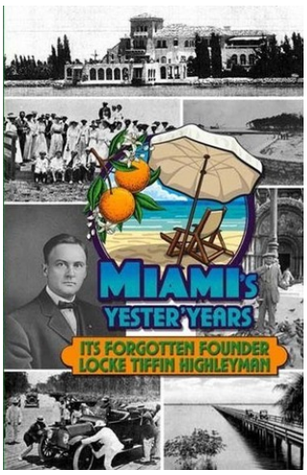
Bernice Lerner and her mother Ruth, a Holocaust survivor, discussed Bernice's *All the Horrors of War: A Jewish Girl, a British Doctor, and the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen* at an event hosted by the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center of Nassau County, New York.

Carl Rollyson took part in the University of Hertfordshire's "Creative Conversation" virtual interview, talking about his career as a biographer and his recent books about Sylvia Plath and William Faulkner.

Robert Caro and Robert Gottlieb participated in the first "Behind the Book" event, sponsored by the Library of Congress.

Tell Us About Your Events!

Member News and Notes



Miami's Yester'Years is Patricia Daly-Lipe's 10th book.

In July, we missed the publication of **Patricia Daly-Lipe**'s *Miami's Yester'Years: Its Forgotten Founder Locke Tiffin Highleyman*. New this month are *Restless Enterprise: The Art and Life of Eliza Pratt Greatorex* by **Katherine Manthorne**; *Sometimes You Have to Lie: The Life and Times of Louise Fitzhugh, Renegade Author of* Harriet the Spy by **Leslie Brody**; and *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* by **Alison M. Parker**. Out in paperback are **Carol Sklenicka**'s *Alice Adams: Portrait of a Writer* and *The Bourbon King: The Life and Crimes of George Remus, Prohibition's Evil Genius* by **Bob Batchelor**. Bob took part in the Buckeye Book Fair, discussing his latest book, *Rookwood: The Rediscovery and Revival of an American Icon*. Bob recorded a short video for the fair that describes the book. Bob also appeared on the Crime Beat Radio podcast, in a look at the life of one of his previous subjects, Stan Lee. This month's "Sold to Publishers" column features two members: **Marko Perko**, co-author with Stephen M. Stahl of *Tesla: His Tremendous and Troubled Life*, and **Andrew Morton**, whose next book will be *Elizabeth & Margaret: The Intimate World of the Windsor Sisters*. **Janice Nimura** appeared on *PBS News Hour*, talking about the value of keeping a journal during challenging times. **James McGrath Morris** wrote a commentary called "New Mexico School for the Arts Will Inspire State's Future Writers" for the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. **Marlene Trestman** took part in the Florida JCC Book & Author Series to discuss her *Fair Labor Lawyer: The Remarkable Life of New Deal Attorney and Supreme Court Advocate Bessie Margolin.* **Kimberly A. Hamlin** wrote "Kamala Harris Shows Women Can Thrive in Politics Doing Things Their Own Way" for *The Washington Post*. For Booklist, **Steve Paul** reviewed *Mad at*

the World: A Life of John Steinbeck by **William Souder**; *Woody Guthrie: An Intimate Life* by Gustavus Stadler; and, forthcoming, *Sybille Bedford: A Life* by Selina Hastings. **Joanne Mulcahy** wrote "How to Write a Biography" for the Lazuli Literary Group. **Jack El-Hai** wrote "The Case of the Autographed Corpse" for *Smithsonian* magazine. Scheduled for production in 2021 is *It Never Entered My Mind*, a film about the Abstract Expressionist painter Elaine de Kooning, based on **Cathy Curtis**'s *A Generous Vision: The Creative Life of Elaine de Kooning*. **Julian Zelizer** was interviewed on NPR's *Here and Now*, about the 2020 presidential election.

Marc Leepson with his DAR National History Medal, which goes to those who promote American history on the national level and have advanced the understanding of America's past.

Marc Leepson officially received the Daughters of the American Revolution History Medal at the Falls Church, Virginia, DAR Chapter's 110th Anniversary Celebration and Community Awards Ceremony. The DAR National History Medal goes to those who promote American history on the national level and have significantly advanced the understanding of America's past. Marc reviewed *Chasing the Light: Writing, Directing, and Surviving* Platoon, Midnight Express, Scarface, Salvador, *and the Movie Game* by Oliver Stone. **Iris Jamahl Dunkle** wrote "Why Was Jack London's Wife Written Out of His Legend?" for Electric Lit. **Kitty Kelley** wrote a letter to the editor of *The New York Times Book Review* on the review of *The Man Who Ran Washington: The Life and Times of James A. Baker, III* by Peter Baker and Susan Glasser. Kitty was also one of the biographers interviewed for the new Showtime documentary *The Reagans*; her *Nancy Reagan: The Unauthorized Biography* was published in 1991. **Eric K. Washington** gave the opening remarks at the 51st anniversary celebration of Black Solidarity Day in Harlem's St. Nicholas Park. During the event, New York City officials dedicated two newly named park spaces: James Baldwin Lawn and Langston Hughes Playground. Eric is a nominee for the 2021 GANYC Apple Awards, given by the Guides Association of New York City to honor individuals and organizations that encourage and promote New York City tourism, culture, and preservation while supporting the work and contributions of professional New York City tour guides. Eric's *Boss of the Grips: The Life of James H. Williams and the Red Caps of Grand Central Terminal* is up for the Outstanding Achievement in Book Writing (Non-Fiction) award. **Laurie Gwen Shapiro** is also a nominee, in the Outstanding Achievement in Essay/Article/Series Writing category, for her *New Yorker* article "The Improbable Journey of Dorothy Parker's Ashes." Winners will be announced on February 22. **Carl Rollyson** reviewed *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* by Heather Clark for Simply Charly. On his podcast A Life in Biography, Carl interviewed **Celia Stahr** about her *Frida in America: The Creative Awakening of a Great Artist*. In *The Atlantic*, the article "The Books Briefing: How to Tell the Story of a Family" by Kate Cray led off with a reference to **Linda Leavell**'s *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*. **Gretchen H. Gerzina** gave a virtual talk for Oxford University's Nineteenth Century Research Seminar called "Sarah E. Farro: What a newly discovered African American writer can tell us about the British Victorian Novel." At the Stratford, England, Literary Festival, **Hermione Lee** discussed her biography of Tom Stoppard. She wrote a review of *The True History of the First*

Mrs. Meredith and Other Lesser Lives by Diane Johnson for *The New York Review of Books*. Patrick Parr wrote "The Story of Commodore Matthew C. Perry's Trip to Shuri Castle in 1853" for Japan Today, which you can read here.
Congratulations to all the BIO members whose biographies made one or more of the "best book" lists of 2020: **Peniel E. Joseph**, **Hermione Lee**, **Jon Meacham**, **Lisa Napoli**, **William Souder**, and **Julian Zelizer**.

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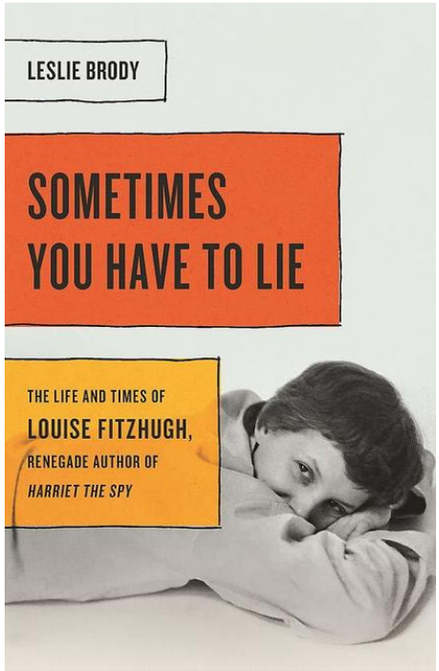

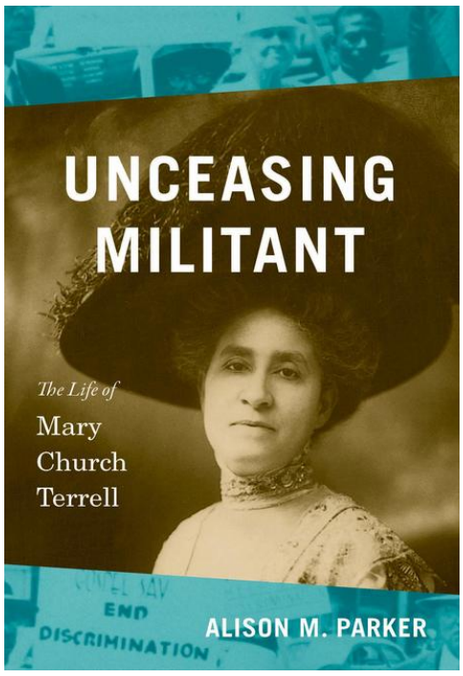

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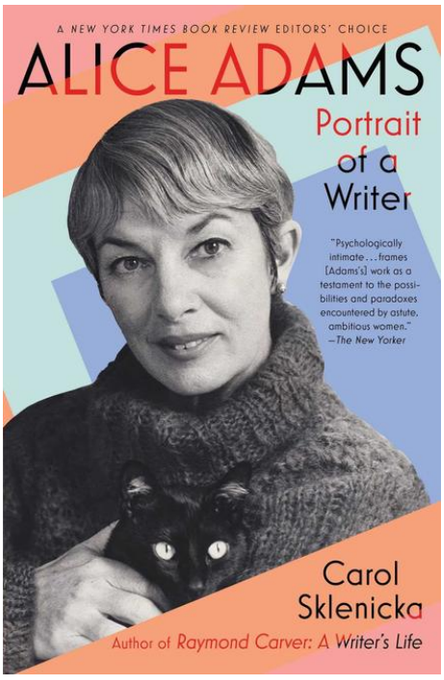

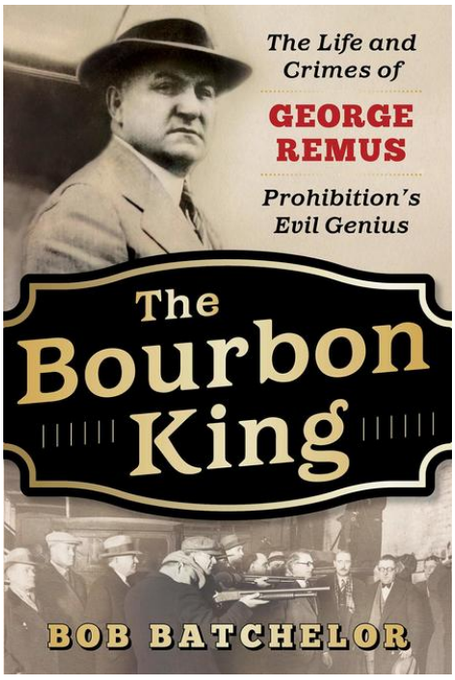

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Amanuensis

Amanuensis: A person whose employment is to write what another dictates, or to copy what another has written. Source: *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913).

I approached writing the Stephen Miller book with a completely open mind, thinking well, maybe this guy has been completely misunderstood. And there was a part of me that sympathized with the young Stephen Miller, who internalized all of the racism and white supremacy that he was exposed to growing up, because I remember growing up in that environment. I remember there was a sense of shame associated with being Mexican American because it had so deeply seeped into the culture. . . . There's just this obsession with what it means to be "American." And so that was one thing that was really interesting to me to explore with Stephen Miller—how he internalized that as a Jewish American boy.

He has writings where he talks about like, you know, Jewish people are the minorities, so Jewish holidays are not as important to him as American holidays. That, to me, was really interesting to just try to understand why? But for him, it never changed, because Stephen Miller sounds the same today as he did when he was 16. If you compare his writings, if you compare his rhetoric, it's the same topics, the same incendiary language, and it just never went away for him.

. . . [F]or me growing up in that environment, it gave me a level of like, OK, I'm not going to approach Stephen Miller with complete hostility when I started this reporting project. I understand what it's like to grow up in that environment of wanting to be seen as belonging and sort of internalizing that white supremacy, but then trying to understand: How did he never come out of that? And that's where the radicalization comes in. [more]

"What Happens When a Racist Troll Runs National Policy? A Chat With Stephen Miller Biographer Jean Guerrero"

Biographers International Organization

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