

NONFICTION

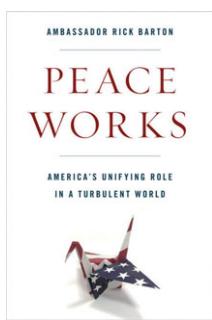
Peace Works: America's Unifying Role in a Turbulent World

Rick Barton (Questrom'83)

Rowman & Littlefield

OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS, THE United States has lost thousands of lives and spent billions of dollars to bring peace to conflict zones around the world—with limited success. As a leader at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), an ambassador to the United Nations, and an assistant secretary of state, Barton has worked in numerous global hot spots and believes he's learned lessons that can improve America's peacebuilding efforts.

Barton's book offers summaries of recent US involvement in a range of troubled countries, including Bosnia,



Rwanda, Haiti, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Honduras. Along with personal stories of working with the people of these countries, he has concrete suggestions for learning from US successes and failures in each.

He argues that US assistance is most valuable when it capitalizes on the ingenuity of local people and when it is catalytic—arriving early to jump-start promising changes. “America should think of itself as a venture capitalist, not a pension manager,” he writes.

When Barton led USAID's 1994 efforts to bolster Haiti's young democracy, for example, his office provided seed funding for small, community-led projects throughout the country. The Haitians they funded not only built new bridges, schools, and water systems for their towns but also gained valuable democratic experience collaborating with

fellow citizens to solve local problems.

In a concluding chapter, Barton recommends three specific changes to America's approach to peacebuilding: tolerate greater risk so that good ideas will cease to be stymied by overblown legal and security concerns; name a single point person to lead US efforts in each crisis country; and insist on congressional approval for overseas actions, which will improve public debate at home and increase US credibility abroad.

The public knows America's current approach is failing, Barton writes; leaders should respond not by withdrawing from the global scene to focus on “America First,” but instead, by seizing the opportunity to make serious reform.—CORINNE STEINBRENNER

POETRY

A Distant Center

Ha Jin (GRS'94)

Copper Canyon Press

EST KNOWN AS AN AWARD-winning novelist, Jin is also an accomplished poet. In this slender but elegant collection, the author of *Waiting*, *War Trash*, and *Nanjing Requiem* returns to many of the themes that have preoccupied his fiction for more than two decades: exile and displacement, China's fraught political history, and the importance of hard work and perseverance.

Many of the poems are addressed to “you” and feel like dispatches from a world-weary traveler, offering the kind of philosophical advice one might expect from a grandparent. In one poem, “A Center,” the speaker urges the reader:

“You must hold your quiet center,
where you do what only you can do.
If others call you a maniac or a fool,
just let them wag their tongues.”

Elsewhere, the writer seems to be addressing himself. “The Lost Moon” concludes with these lines:

“I have landed in a place
my ancestors never heard of—
I need to grow a new backbone.”

The strongest, most deeply felt poems are those that address exile. It's a subject Jin, director of the BU Creative

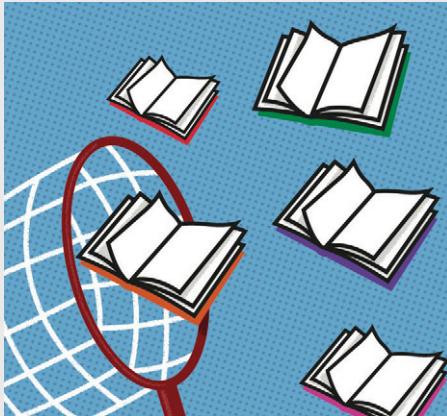


From Teen Secrets to a Defense of Howard Zinn

Four classmates are ecstatic when they succeed in befriending their favorite young adult novelist after a book signing in **ALL OF THIS IS TRUE** (HarperTeen, 2018) by Lygia Day Peñaflor (Wheellock '95). But their starstruck bliss sours when their lives become thinly veiled fodder for her next novel, and their dark truths and secrets are cast out for all to read. Now, one of the friends is in a coma, beaten for a secret revealed in the book. The suspenseful novel is smartly told from fractured viewpoints—through interviews, diary musings, and even portions of the book within the book—that slowly unravel the events leading to a disastrous outcome.

In **ZINNOPHOBIA: THE BATTLE OVER HISTORY IN EDUCATION, POLITICS, AND SCHOLARSHIP** (Zero Books, 2018), David Detmer (CAS '80) has crafted something of an homage to his former professor, the polarizing BU historian Howard Zinn. Zinn, who died in 2010, taught in the College of Arts & Sciences political science department for 24 years. Detmer, a professor of philosophy at Purdue University Northwest, bills the book as an extended defense of Zinn's teachings and controversial **A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES** (1980). Detmer's engaging critical conversation is welcome in today's politically fraught climate, and is of interest to both fans and critics of Zinn's work.

In his debut poetry collection, Duy Doan (GRS '11) roams through memories of childhood and adulthood, siblings, cousins, and lovers, and even captures the exquisite joy of watching FC Barcelona elevate soccer to an art form. **WE PLAY A GAME** (2018), which was published by Yale University Press after Doan won the 2017 Yale Series of Younger Poets competition, is also marked



by its exploration of the realm between two languages and two cultures, the America of Doan's birth and the Vietnam of his ancestors.

Media critic and Northeastern University professor Dan Kennedy (MET '84) has produced a timely book in **THE RETURN OF THE MOGULS: HOW JEFF BEZOS AND JOHN HENRY ARE REMAKING NEWSPAPERS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY** (ForeEdge, 2018). Using the *Washington Post* (owned by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos), the *Boston Globe* (owned by John Henry, who also owns the Boston Red Sox), and the *Orange County Register* (formerly owned by entrepreneur Aaron Kushner) as case studies, Kennedy explores how entrepreneurs have attempted to plumb their unique backgrounds to revitalize newspapers in an increasingly digital landscape. Kennedy espouses the importance of newspapers, and frames these "wealthy, civic-minded" owners as the industry's saving graces; but it's clear they still have much work to do.

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With her debut young adult novel, **DEAR RACHEL MADDOW** (Feiwel and Friends, 2018), Adrienne Kisner (STH '03; '11) has remade Beverly Cleary's Newbery Medal-winning *Dear Mr. Henshaw* (1983) for Generation Z. Instead of letters sent to a beloved writer, Kisner builds her story with emails typed out to the protagonist's favorite television personality. The short chapters move quickly as 16-year-old Brynn Harper documents her high school experience—and a student government race disrupted by attacks on the press, voter suppression, and shady donations—one email at a time. Kisner explores tried-and-true YA themes of dating, family conflict, and stress against the backdrop of the modern political divide in a Pennsylvania steel town.—MARC CHALUFOUR, MARA SASSOON, ANDREW THURSTON

Writing Program, knows well. Born in Liaoning, China, he was studying for his doctoral degree at Brandeis University when student-led pro-

ONLINE: *Read three new poems at bu.edu/bostonia.* tests calling for democratic reforms swept through Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The protests were met with a violent military response that resulted in an estimated 10,000 deaths. Following the massacre, Jin decided to immigrate to the United States.

In one of the new collection's most powerful poems, "Acceptance," he

captures both the physical and psychological dislocation that comes with uprooting one's life:

"You can't go home anymore and will drift on the wind of chance—wherever you land you will be an outsider."

Despite references to suffering and loss, many of the poems are infused with a stoic optimism. In "A Center," one of the final poems in the collection, Jin concludes with a promise:

"As long as you stay put year after year, eventually you will find a world beginning to revolve around you."

A Distant Center is Jin's fourth collection of poems and his first written in Chinese and then rewritten in English, rather than composed in English. Despite the translation, they still capture a voice that is by turns philosophical, compassionate, and generous—a perfect counterpoint to these noisy, often deafening times.—JOHN O'ROURKE

