

May Reading Recommendations: AAPI Heritage Month | Libraries

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May Reading Recommendations: AAPI Heritage Month

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Check out USU Libraries' curated list of must-reads for Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month!



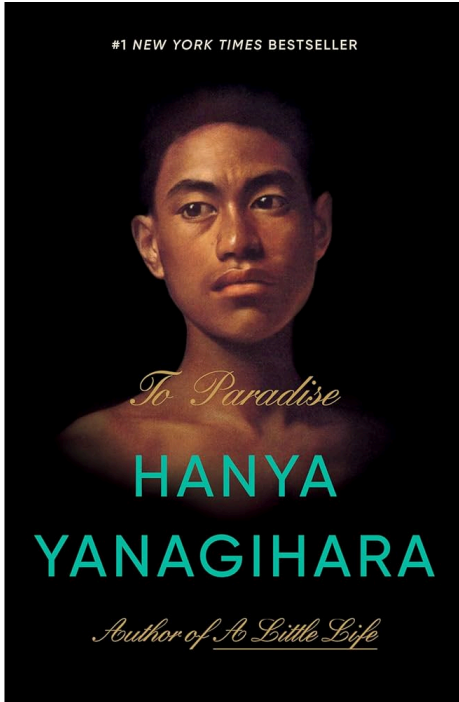
Yellowface by R.F. Kuang

Libby Book of the Month — No Wait Times or Holds throughout May!

White lies. Dark humor. Deadly consequences. Bestselling sensation Juniper Song is not who she says she is, she didn't write the book she claims she wrote, and she is most certainly not Asian American—in this chilling and hilariously cutting novel from R.F. Kuang, the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Babel*. Authors June Hayward and Athena Liu were supposed to be twin rising stars. But Athena's a literary darling. June Hayward is literally nobody. Who wants stories about basic white girls, June thinks. So when June witnesses Athena's death in a freak accident, she acts on impulse: she steals Athena's just-finished masterpiece, an experimental novel about the unsung contributions of Chinese laborers during World War I. So what if June edits Athena's novel and sends it to her agent as her own work? So what if she lets her new publisher rebrand her as Juniper Song—complete with an ambiguously ethnic author photo? Doesn't this piece of history deserve to be told, whoever the teller? That's what June claims, and the New York Times bestseller list seems to agree. But June can't get away from Athena's shadow, and emerging evidence threatens to bring June's (stolen) success down around her. As June races to protect her secret, she discovers exactly how far she will go to keep what she thinks she deserves. With its totally immersive first-person voice, *Yellowface* grapples with questions of

diversity, racism, and cultural appropriation, as well as the terrifying alienation of social media. R.F. Kuang's novel is timely, razor-sharp, and eminently readable.

[Access through the Libby app](#)

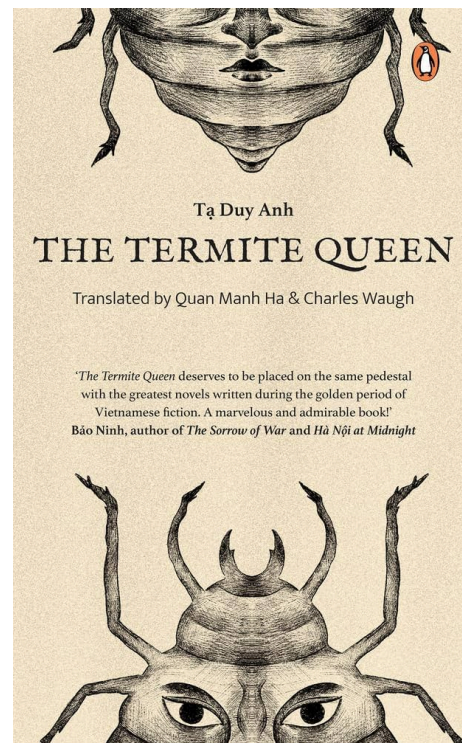


***To Paradise* by Hanya Yanagihara**

From the award-winning, best-selling author of the classic *A Little Life*—a bold, brilliant novel spanning three centuries and three different versions of the American experiment, about lovers, family, loss and the elusive promise of utopia. *To Paradise* is a fin de siècle novel of marvelous literary effect, but above all it is a work of emotional genius. The great power of this remarkable novel is driven by Yanagihara's understanding of the aching desire to protect those we love—partners, lovers, children, friends, family, and even our fellow citizens—and the pain that ensues when we cannot. In an alternate version of 1893 America, New York is part of the Free States, where people may live and love whomever they please (or so it seems). The fragile young scion of a distinguished family resists betrothal to a worthy suitor, drawn to a charming music teacher of no means. In 1993, a young Hawaiian man lives in a loveless marriage, his partner a powerful attorney twenty years his senior. And in 2093, in a world riven by disease and governed by totalitarian rule, a woman struggles to protect the man she has been with for many decades. These three sections are joined in an enthralling and ingenious symphony,

as recurring notes and themes deepen and enrich one another: a townhouse in Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village; illness, and treatments that come at a terrible cost; wealth and squalor; the weak and the strong; race; the definition of family, and of nationhood; the dangerous righteousness of the powerful, and of revolutionaries; the longing to find a place in an earthly paradise, and the gradual realization that it can't exist. What unites not just the characters, but these Americas, are their reckonings with the qualities that make us human: Fear. Love. Shame. Need. Loneliness.

[Ebook available through USU Libraries](#)

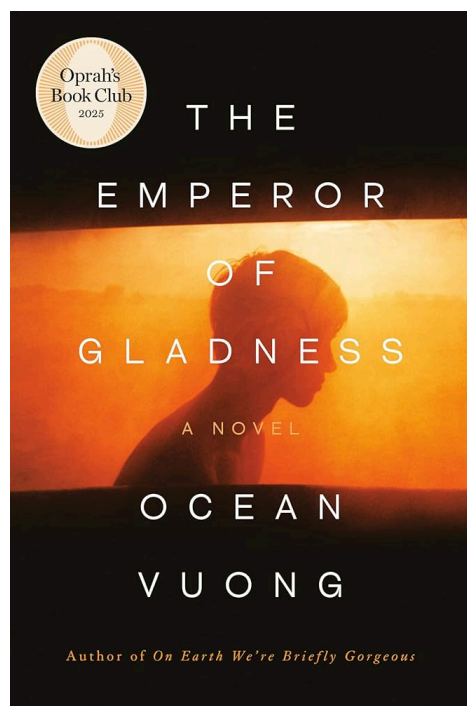


***The Termite Queen* by T# Duy Anh; translated by Quan Manh Ha and Charles Waugh**

The *Termite Queen* delves into the seamy underground of corrupt development practices and environmental degradation in Vietnam. Burrowing deep inside the tension-filled relationship between contemporary Vietnam's hyper-capitalist society and its communist government, T# Duy Anh's *The Termite Queen* tells the Kafkaesque story of a young man who must expose the corruption of a vast network of murky figures profiting from their connections to power. Banned in Vietnam, this allegorical story is told by Viet, a native-born Vietnamese who takes over his

deceased father's powerful land development corporation. The funeral hasn't even concluded before Viet suspects foul play, as one clue after another leads him to question everything he thought he knew about his father, their family business, and its incredible ability to get approval for projects with dubious societal and environmental returns. With *The Termite Queen*, T# Duy Anh cements his reputation as one of contemporary Vietnam's greatest fabulists, having filled this tale with criticisms that can only come from a deep and abiding love for his country.

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***The Emperor of Gladness* by Ocean Vuong**

Ocean Vuong returns with a bighearted novel about chosen family, unexpected friendship, and the stories we tell ourselves in order to survive. One late summer evening in the post-industrial town of East Gladness, Connecticut, nineteen-year-old Hai stands on the edge of a bridge in pelting rain, ready to jump, when he hears someone shout across the river. The voice belongs to Grazina, an elderly widow succumbing to dementia, who convinces him to take another path. Bereft and out of options, he quickly becomes her caretaker. Over the course of the year, the unlikely pair develops a life-altering bond, one built on empathy, spiritual reckoning, and heartbreak, with the power to transform Hai's relationship to himself, his family, and a community on the brink. Following the

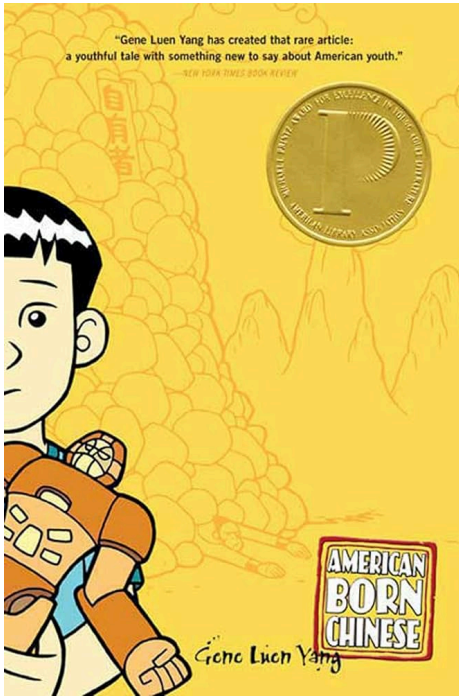
cycles of history, memory, and time, *The Emperor of Gladness* shows the profound ways in which love, labor, and loneliness form the bedrock of American life. At its heart is a brave epic about what it means to exist on the fringes of society and to reckon with the wounds that haunt our collective soul. Hallmarks of Ocean Vuong's writing—formal innovation, syntactic dexterity, and the ability to twin grit with grace through tenderness—are on full display in this story of loss, hope, and how far we would go to possess one of life's most fleeting mercies: a second chance.

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***Taiwan Travelogue: A Novel* by Yáng Shu#ng-z#**

In 1938 Taiwan, Aoyama Chizuko—a successful Japanese woman writer visiting the island to research a culinary travelogue—meets a young Taiwanese woman, also named Chizuru, who is hired as her interpreter and makes her dreams come true. The charming, erudite, meticulous Chizuru arranges Chizuko's travels all over the Land of the South and also proves to be an exceptional cook. Over scenic train rides and braised pork rice, lively banter and winter melon tea, Chizuko grows infatuated with her companion and intent on drawing her closer. But something causes Chizuru to keep her distance. It's only after a heartbreaking separation that Chizuko begins to grasp what the "something" is. Disguised as a translation of a rediscovered text by a Japanese writer, this novel was a sensation on its first publication in Mandarin Chinese in 2020 and won Taiwan's highest literary honor, the Golden Tripod Award. *Taiwan Travelogue* unburies lost colonial histories and deftly reveals how power dynamics inflect our most intimate relationships.

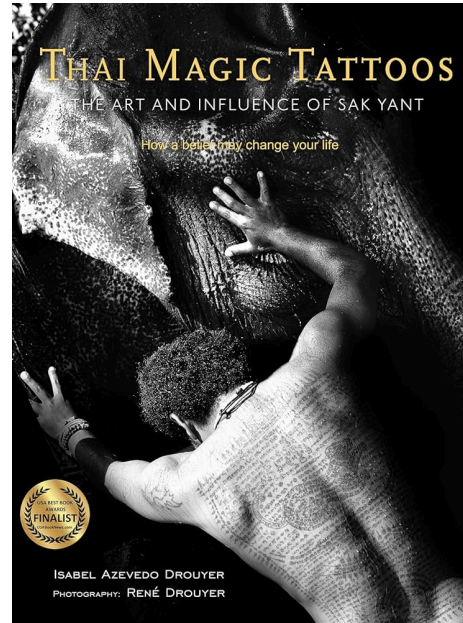
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American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang

A tour-de-force by New York Times bestselling graphic novelist Gene Yang, *American Born Chinese* tells the story of three apparently unrelated characters: Jin Wang, who moves to a new neighborhood with his family only to discover that he's the only Chinese-American student at his new school; the powerful Monkey King, subject of one of the oldest and greatest Chinese fables; and Chin-Kee, a personification of the ultimate negative Chinese stereotype, who is ruining his cousin Danny's life with his yearly visits. Their lives and stories come together with an unexpected twist in this action-packed modern fable. *American Born Chinese* is an amazing ride, all the way up to the astonishing climax.

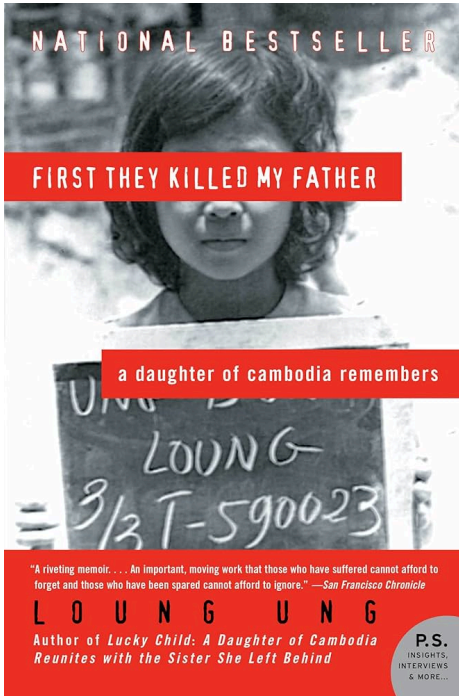
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Thai Magic Tattoos: The Art and Influence of Sak Yant by Isabel Azevedo Drouyer; photography: René Drouyer

For hundreds of years, Thai Buddhist monks, using magical incantations and spells, have been covering people's bodies with indelible ink marks in the belief that they will attract luck, wealth, and blessings. Images of tattooed men appear in 18th century murals. In the past, people believed that these tattoos would provide protection against evil spirits and could render the bearer invulnerable to stab wounds and even bullets. Known in Thai as Sak Yant, these ancient tattoos are today undergoing a revival in popularity, both in Thailand and beyond. In addition, Thai tattoo masters are invited to practice their art abroad, thus increasing the popularity of Sak Yant worldwide. Drawing on research fields as diverse as anthropology, religion, history, medicine, and psychology, *Thai Magic Tattoos: The Art and Influence of Sak Yant* also seeks to explain how tattoos can change the life of the bearer. With magnificent new photographs by René Drouyer, *Thai Magic Tattoos* is an essential guide to this fascinating subject.

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***First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* by Loung Ung**

One of seven children of a high-ranking government official, Loung Ung lived a privileged life in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh until the age of five. Then, in April 1975, Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army stormed into the city, forcing Ung's family to flee and, eventually, to disperse. Loung was trained as a child soldier in a work camp for orphans, her siblings were sent to labor camps, and those who survived the horrors would not be reunited until the Khmer Rouge was destroyed. Harrowing yet hopeful, Loung's powerful story is an unforgettable account of a family shaken and shattered, yet miraculously sustained by courage and love in the face of unspeakable brutality.

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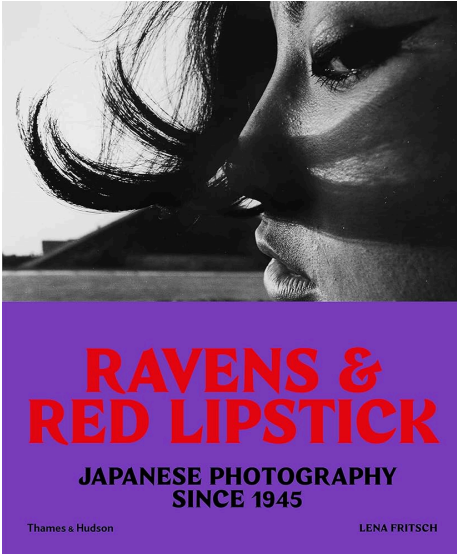


SAMOAN QUEER LIVES
DAN TAULAPAPA MCMULLIN AND YUKI KIHARA

***Samoan Queer Lives* edited by Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Yuki Kihara**

Samoan Queer Lives is a collection of personal stories from one of the world's unique indigenous queer cultures. The first of its kind, this book features a collection of autobiographical pieces by fa'afafine, transgender, and queer people of Samoa, one of the original continuous indigenous queer cultures of Polynesia and the Pacific Islands. Featuring 14 autobiographical stories from fa'afafine and LGBTIQ Samoans based in Samoa, Amerika Samoa, Australia, Aotearoa NZ, Hawai'i and USA. Includes a foreword and introduction by co-editors Dan Taulapapa McMullin and Yuki Kihara. Each story is accompanied by a portrait.

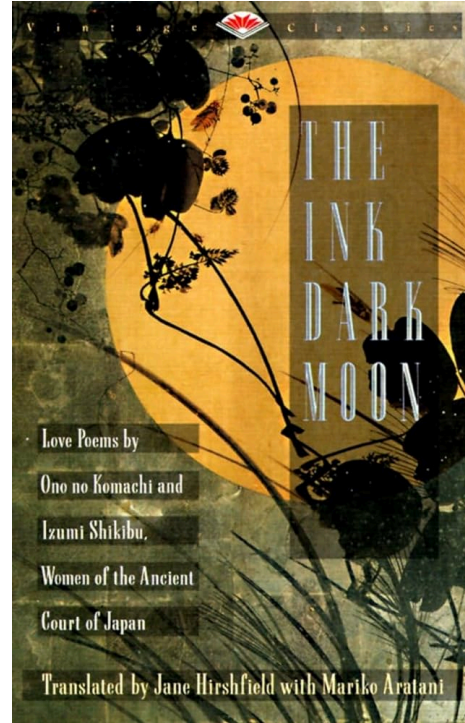
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***Ravens and Red Lipstick: Japanese Photography since 1945* by Lena Fritsch**

This rich volume provides one of the first overviews of Japanese photography to be published in English. Drawing on extensive research, Lena Fritsch traces the development of Japanese photography chronologically, from the severity of post-war Realism to the diverse ingenuity of photography in contemporary Japan. Interspersed are fascinating original interviews with some of the most influential photographers of each era, including Daido Moriyama. *Ravens and Red Lipstick* offers a visually bold survey of Japanese photography's recent history. Fritsch masterfully frames each movement with their business, education, and art-institutional backdrops—she shows the consumerism and intense political debates of 1960s and '70s Japan, for example, to be central to the rough style of the "Provoke" artists. Fritsch's great achievement is to bring observations from a range of disciplines to bear on her commentary with imagination and clarity.

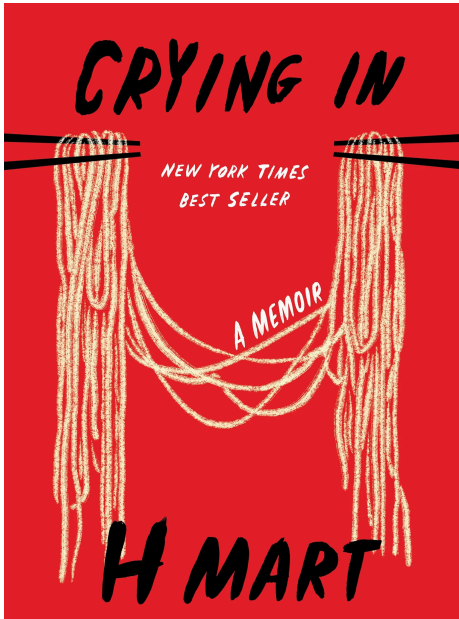
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***The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan* translated by Jane Hirshfield with Mariko Aratani**

These translated poems were written by two women of the Heian court of Japan between the ninth and eleventh centuries A.D. The poems speak intimately of their authors' sexual longing, fulfillment and disillusionment.

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***Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zauner**

From the indie rockstar of Japanese Breakfast fame, and author of the viral 2018 New Yorker essay that shares the title of this book, an unflinching, powerful memoir about growing up Korean American, losing her mother, and forging her own identity. In this exquisite story of family, food, grief, and endurance, Michelle Zauner proves herself far more than a dazzling singer, songwriter, and guitarist. With humor and heart, she tells of growing up one of the few Asian American kids at her school in Eugene, Oregon; of struggling with her mother's particular, high expectations of her; of a painful adolescence; of treasured months spent in her grandmother's tiny apartment in Seoul, where she and her mother would bond, late at night, over heaping plates of food. As she grew up, moving to the East Coast for college, finding work in the restaurant industry, and performing gigs with her fledgling band—and meeting the man who would become her husband—her Koreanness began to feel ever more distant, even as she found the life she wanted to live. It was her mother's diagnosis of terminal cancer, when Michelle was twenty-five, that forced a reckoning with her identity and brought her to reclaim the gifts of taste, language, and history her mother had given her. Vivacious and plainspoken, lyrical and honest, Zauner's voice is as radiantly alive on the page as it is onstage. Rich with intimate anecdotes that will resonate widely, *Crying in H Mart* is a book to cherish, share, and reread.

[Audiobook available through USU Libraries](#)