

BLL Book Reviews

Brewster Ladies Library
1822 Main Street
Brewster, MA 02631

In this issue...

*Time for Bed, Old House (Picture Book for 3-7 year-olds) by Jane Costa Bates
and Illustrated by AG Ford (Nori Morganstein)*

The Words That Made Us by Akhil Reed Amar (Doug Wilcock)

*Super Volcanoes: What they reveal about Earth and the Worlds Beyond
by Dr. Robin George Andrews (Don Boink)*

*It's Better to be Feared: The New England Patriots Dynasty and the Pursuit of Greatness
by Seth Wickersham (Jim Mills)*

The Last Chance Library by Freya Sampson (Doug Wilcock)

*I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year by Carol Leonnig
and Philip Rucker (Jim Mills)*

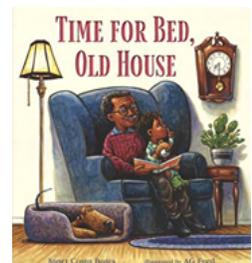
The Amur River: Between Russia and China by Colin Thubron (Jim Mills)

Peril by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa (Don Boink)

The Tyranny of Merit by Michael Sandel (Doug Wilcock)

Time for Bed, Old House (Candlewick Press, 2021 - Picture Book for 3-7 year-olds)
by Jane Costa Bates and Illustrated by AG Ford
reviewed by: Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director

You can never have enough “going to bed” books, and this one is so smart. What better way to teach a grandchild to fall asleep in a new place than by showing him how to put an old house to bed first? This involves first moving slowly and quietly through the house, before then making the house feel “dark and cozy.” Grandpop takes Isaac around his house, turning off lamps, shutting shades on the windows, and even reading stories to it.



It doesn't matter that Isaac can't read yet because Grandpop explains that he can read the pictures of the stories to the house. Isaac's Grandpop falls asleep first, but Isaac then has no problem finishing putting the house to sleep and then falling asleep himself. In putting the house to sleep, Isaac loses all anxiety about the noises of the old house and falling asleep somewhere new. Grandpop makes Isaac comfortable and cozy in the new environment.

It's nice reading a book with illustrations of antique furniture. It really does look like an old house in the background. Everything from the lamps to the grandfather clock, to the golden framed pictures on the walls, to the handmade looking quilt on the bed, speaks to a house that might make some odd noises here and there. The setting (the house) becomes its own character. It's put to bed in the story, but also, these little antique details, give it life too. This story might inspire a few children to put their own homes to bed.

The illustrations are bold and colorful. A lot of the book is darker in shading because it takes place at night, with the lights off, but the illustrator does a great job of making everything glow in a flashlight or illuminate by lamplight. By the time everyone is snoring at the end, you can't help but also feel cozy and warm and comfortable too.

The Words That Made Us
by Akhil Reed Amar
reviewed by Doug Wilcock

Akhil Reed Amar, a Constitutional scholar and law professor at Yale, set himself the formidable task of writing, in detail, a three volume Constitutional history spanning the years 1760 - 2000. This volume, *The Words That Made Us*, is the first in that trilogy and is subtitled America's Constitutional Conversation, 1760-1840. Amar takes us across what ought to be familiar ground for anyone who studied U. S. History in high school, but he does so in a way that sheds new light on how the conversation took place, how state conventions shaped the Constitution and the amendments that followed and were adopted as the Bill of Rights, and how events subsequent to the Constitutional adoption further shaped the document and how it was interpreted. Prof. Amar's motivation for such an effort comes from what he perceives as our collective poor understanding of the Constitution and because, as a Constitutional scholar and historian, he wants to unite history and law in "a wide-angled multi-generational narrative to understand the past and evaluate it using proper historical and legal tools of analysis."

Amar begins the story by focusing on two events that pre-date the notorious Stamp Act. The first event was whether to take local action to declare George III king. The locally elected Privy Council advised Gov. Bernard of Massachusetts to act. Loyalist Lt. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson had doubts: once independent action was taken by the colonists, where would it end? The second event was what came to be called the Paxton case, involving writs of assistance and search and seizure laws. The author suggests that the ruling notwithstanding, this often neglected and mis-interpreted 1761 case revealed the profound passions, deep tensions, and underlying forces that would rip the British Empire apart in 1776. This rupture would lead to an entirely new thing, "the American constitutional project, full stop, and not merely one interesting and important amendment dealing with search and seizure rules."

No history of the early part of the era can ignore the Big Six (Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton). Not surprisingly, Amar has his favorites (Washington, Franklin, and Hamilton) and spends considerable effort to show how Adams and Jefferson were absent for the Constitutional conversation and either didn't fully comprehend, or chose to ignore, the implications. By contrast, Amar has fulsome praise for Washington, suggesting that Washington listened carefully to the arguments that were made and that he was savvy enough not to attempt to dominate the proceedings of the constitutional congress, instead picking and choosing those issues that he felt had the greatest importance. Amar suggests that there are varied interpretations of Hamilton but that Hamilton, like Washington, understood finance and war and used that understanding to help build a strong, independent, unified country. By contrast, neither Adams nor Jefferson had either the experience or understanding that Washington and Hamilton had.

The story Amar tells is not dominated by the Big Six. Certainly John Marshall, another Revolutionary War soldier, played a tremendous role in how the third branch of our government, the federal judiciary, evolved and grew to equal Congress and the Presidency in stature. In the case of Marshall, it is a two-part story. Marshall is Part I, Joseph Story Part II. Together they solidified the Supreme Court's appellate review powers, first in *Marbury v. Madison* and then in *Martin v. Hunter's Lessee*. The latter case involved Section 25 of the Judiciary Act of 1789. In writing the opinion of the court, Judge Story wrote (Marshall had recused himself from the case) that Section 25 gave the Supreme Court appellate review over any state case, civil or criminal, in which the appellate claimed the state court deprived him of federal rights. Story went on further to say, much as Marshall often wrote further to make a larger point, that if Congress tries to repeal Section 25 the court will find the repeal unconstitutional.

Two aspects of the book that I found intriguing were neither judicial nor historical. One was how contemporary paintings played into the historical moment and the other was how robust newspapers were in the United States, far outstripping both in number and circulation what was available in England at the time. Amar notes that George Washington was a voracious reader of newspapers, in effect using the medium to keep his finger on the pulse of the nation. (continued on the next page)

We can find echoes of contemporary events in the history Prof. Amar explicates. In particular, he skillfully takes us through the stalemated election of 1800 in which, given the nature of the electoral process, Jefferson and Aaron Burr tied for the Presidency. We are told that John Marshall may have been writing as the author “Horatius,” offering to “solve” the issue, and we see Thomas Jefferson being a “sloppy, rash, and trigger-happy politico.”

This book is not for the faint-hearted. It is just shy of seven hundred pages, and those seven hundred pages are filled with detail. But it is worth the effort to get a much broader understanding of our Constitutional history. Prof. Amar instructs well, offering an excellent corrective to our Constitutional ignorance.

Super Volcanoes. What they reveal about Earth and the Worlds Beyond

by Dr. Robin George Andrews

reviewed by Don Boink

This is a book I arbitrarily picked up after reading a number of Baldacci books and sought something different. Volcanic activity has always interested me. This book offers detailed explanations about volcanoes and reassures those fearful of volcanoes that there is little to fear as long as proper precautions are taken. Detailed explanation is given about the several aspects of vulcanism and what is really going on there.

The volume of knowledge about vulcanism in space and the universe adds much to what we know about our own earth. The various levels of our subterranean world are graphically described and the interactions between these various elements are graphically described. The theory of plate tectonics, the study of the earth’s crust that is in constant motion, initially conceived almost a 100 years ago by Alfred Wegener is today well substantiated. To learn that the Arabian peninsula is being presently being pulled apart was news to me. The effects of Plate Tectonics, though hardly noticeable on a yearly basis, in geologic terms of thousands of years is indeed significant.

Currently there are a number of active volcanoes in various parts of the world. One of the more recent one was the explosive eruption occurred in the U. S. at Mt. Helena where a large portion of one side of the mountain was blown off in 1980. Historically perhaps the most famous and destructive was that of Krakatoa in Indonesian in 1883. The eruption of Vesuvius, earlier yet in 79 AD, buried Pompeii which is still being excavated today with many discoveries about ancient Roman life continually being made.

More interesting still are the number of active and inactive volcanoes and thermal vents in our oceans. Connected with these vents are a surprising number of life forms that coexist under extreme conditions of temperature and pressure. Perhaps, it would be well to read the epilogue first to get an idea of the vast scope of the book before wading into it. The format of the book is a series of chapters that takes one further and further into the universe. The biggest surprise to me was to learn that one of Jupiter’s moons, Io, is so active volcanically. The Voyagers I and II spacecraft which visited Jupiter are among NASA’s most ambitious endeavors. The author also gives an interesting commentary on the value of reading a book such as this to escape from current dystopian condition in the world. I strongly recommend the book.

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The BLL Book Reviews

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Thanks to JoAnn Phillips for her skill in editing these reviews.

It's Better to be Feared: The New England Patriots Dynasty and the Pursuit of Greatness

by Seth Wickersham

reviewed by Jim Mills

It's Better to Be Feared is not a biography of Vladimir Putin but is the story of our beloved New England Patriots over the past twenty years, the era of the quarterback - coach, Brady - Belichick dynasty. No one would think of New England as a being a center of football obsession, a characteristic usually associated with the South, particularly Texas. However in the past twenty years it has been New England that has dominated professional football. This did not happen by chance. The Brady - Belichick partnership created a single team supremacy of the National Football League unprecedented in the League's one hundred year history.

In 2000 both the quarterback and coach became part of the Patriot organization. The team had not been particularly outstanding during its sixty year history. Tom Brady was chosen by Bill Belichick on the seventh round pick, a not particularly promising start. The following year the Patriots' starting quarterback, Drew Bledsoe, suffered a major game injury and was replaced by Brady. Brady held that position for the next 19 years. Belichick has been known as a man of few words, something of a curmudgeon. However his primary characteristics are his encyclopedic knowledge of football and of his opposing teams, his great work ethic and devotion to his job. Belichick had developed an ability to see promising abilities in prospective players that other coaches did not see in prospective players and to cultivate these innate characteristics to produce top grade performers. Belichick preferred young malleable players to older ones who were more set in their ways.

During the Patriots' winning era, many accusations of unfair practices have been leveled against the team. Early on these accusations had to do with illegal video-taping of opponent's practices, acquiring their signal codes, and interfering with their radio communications during Patriot home games, the so-called Spygate. A decade later the Patriots were accused of deflating play footballs below the minimum allowed pressures, Deflategate. The latter charge drove the league to suspend Brady for four season games. It was never certain how much these banned practices aided the Patriots but there is no question of the team's basic superb playing ability.

The overall team strengths are basically a result of an unerring attention to detail and the continual practice and honing of game skills. Both Brady and Belichick were dedicated to winning and achieving the very best results in their field. As a Patriot, Brady went on to win a record six Super Bowls, acquiring a seventh victory after leaving the Patriots. Both Brady and Belichick did not consider what they did as work. As time went by and Brady aged, becoming one of the oldest quarterbacks in NFL history, he kept putting off retirement since he so loved what he did. He has maintained a vigorous exercise regime in order to maintain his physical readiness. In 2020 Brady left the Patriots to become the starting quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, continuing his winning ways. Belichick without Brady did not do as well in the 2020 season but has come roaring back in 2021 with a new quarterback, Mac Jones. Football, of course, is a team sport and the performance of any individual player is dependent on the support of many other players. A quarterback's success is dependent to a great extent on the ability of blockers to provide a sufficient time and space interval for him to perform. The skill of pass receivers in breaking into the open and the ability to snag an errant pass also contributes to a quarterback's success. Brady's decision to transition after 20 years to another team was fraught with potential dangers.

This reviewer is not a dedicated football fan but in recent years has followed the Patriots because of their unerring winning ways. I found this book, at 466 pages, somewhat difficult to read for two reasons. First the authors kept introducing new names of players, coaches, assistants, and owners making it difficult to keep track of just who was doing what to whom. The second problem is the use of football jargon sending me frequently to Google for definitions. *Overall It's Better to be Feared* provides fascinating explanations for the Patriot's outstanding performance. This book reveals the complexity of NFL team operations and the exacting requirement for precise coordination of numerous individuals to achieve dominance in an exceedingly competitive sport.

The Last Chance Library

by Freya Sampson

reviewed by Doug Wilcock

Can you imagine what would ensue if the Select Board suddenly announced that due to decreasing readership and budget constraints, the Brewster Ladies Library was going to have to close? Fortunately for us, that is not likely to be the case. But it was the case for the library in the mythical British town of Chalcot. Faced with possible closure, the zany citizens of Chalcot, patrons of the library, organized to stop the closing. And that is the story of *The Last Chance Library*, a pleasurable read from first time author Freya Sampson.

I was fortunate enough to accompany my wife when she had a teaching exchange in the early 1980's to the English Midlands. It was at the height of the Thatcher revolution and the depths of a recession, so much of what is described in the book rings true to me, even if the current version is Boris Johnson conservatism. At issue is what some would describe as draconian cuts to social services. In her own way, by using a library closure as the focal point, author Sampson shows us how irrational and hurtful is the supposedly rational decision to close the library.

The strength of the book is in the characters. They are, at first glance, a motley crew. But, as they form the Friends of Chalcot Library (FOCL), we start to get a fuller picture of each person. The brash Mrs. Bransworth, a woman who tells us that she has been fighting injustice her whole life, is, not surprisingly, a central figure in the Friends. But what about Stanley, a conservative dresser who is always reading the Telegraph and doing the crossword? Is he a FOCL? And, most importantly, what will assistant librarian June Jones do? When she suggests that maybe they should wait to see what the Council will do, Mrs. Bransworth upbraids her. "Are you really that naïve? When I was your age, I'd already been arrested three times for civil disobedience. But we weren't like you bloody millennials, with your avocado on toast and soya lattes; we actually believed in things and were willing to fight for them." Do they believe in the Chalcot Library and are they willing to fight for it? As Sherlock would say, "The game is afoot."

There were events in the book that were quite predictable. Even though from time to time I was able to guess what was coming, it did not take away from the overall read. To her credit, Freya Sampson has written very humanely about the characters in the story, giving them each a full three dimensions. If we now speak about non-traditional college students (anyone in college but not in the 18-22 age bracket), author Sampson has introduced us to non-traditional library patrons. They are not simply there to get a book and leave. They are members of a community, and that community is the library. Enjoy yourself for a few hours by settling in to *The Last Chance Library* for a story that will charm you.

Freya Sampson



I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year

by Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker

reviewed by Jim Mills

For the past half-decade there has probably been no individual worldwide who has been more talked about than Donald J. Trump. As Oscar Wilde has famously stated that situation is to be much preferred to not being talked about. A plethora of books has been written about *The Donald* during that period, books by those who have worked for Trump (Michael Cohen, James Comey, Steve Bannon); by members of the press (Jonathan Karl, Bob Woodward, and the current authors); and by his cousin, Mary Trump. *I Alone Can Fix It* is Leonnig and Rucker's second Trump book following *A Very Stable Genius*. Both titles are derived from Trump's own statements. No one ever accused the ex-president of false modesty or actually any other form of modesty.

The dramatic events of Trump's last year in office have provided much fodder to fill the 518 pages of *I Alone Can Fix It*. Very early in the year Trump was faced with the rapidly growing Covid-19 pandemic. His choice to downplay the severity of the epidemic would plague his presidency for the rest of the year and the prospects of the nation in controlling a once in a century health crisis. He tended not to follow the advice of his public health experts who encouraged mask wearing and avoidance of large crowds. His philosophy became the philosophy of the Republican party at large. The cost of the economic impact of Covid regulations took precedence over the potential pandemic spread and its lethal consequences.

The Black Lives Movement spurred by the killing of George Floyd in May found the president on the other side of the issue, looking at the protests that erupted as a breakdown in municipal law and order requiring the use of federal force in cities around the country. As the authors point out Trump viewed every issue from the perspective of his own re-election prospects. In November, with his loss to Joseph Biden, that turn of events was one he could not accept. For the rest of his term he would continually proclaim that he had actually won the election and that Biden's vote totals were achieved through fraudulent methods. Trump used every tactic at his disposal to force election officials around the country to change the vote totals in his favor. In particular he concentrated on Arizona, Pennsylvania and Georgia pressuring for changes in the vote outcome. He instigated hundreds of legal procedures around the country trying to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, one that he lost by over 7 million votes.

His continual claims that he had really won the election and that his opponents had used fraudulent methods by his opponents led to one of the most tragic events of his presidency and of recent American history. January 6 was the date of the ritual acceptance by Congress chaired by the Vice-President of the electoral vote totals which had been determined the previous month by each state. On that day Trump organized a monstrous rally in Washington of his supporters whom he had incited with his inflammatory rhetoric and instructed to march on the Capitol Building where Joe Biden's electoral vote win was being confirmed by Congress. The results were a violent insurrection with the Capitol being violated for the first time in over 150 years resulting in multiple deaths and the flight of the Congress and their aides. The invading mob cried out to hang the Speaker of the House and Trump's own Vice President, Mike Pence. After five or six hours, order was finally restored by additional police and national guard forces. During this time President Trump did nothing to call off his supporters and instead watched the insurrection on TV.

At 6 PM after his supporters had left the Capitol, Trump tweeted "These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously & viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love & in peace. Remember this day forever." Trump's behavior on this infamous day was described by Republican Senator Mitt Romney. "We gather here today due to a selfish man's injured pride and the outrage of his supporters whom he has deliberately misinformed for the past two months and stirred to action this very morning. What happened here today was an insurrection, incited by the president of the United States. Those who choose to continue to support his dangerous gambit by objecting to the results of a legitimate, democratic election will forever be seen as being complicit in an unprecedented attack on our democracy. They will be remembered for their role in this shameful episode in American history. That will be their legacy."

As this review is being written (September 2021), it has been eight months since the insurrection and Trump has yet been held to account for his actions on that day.

The Amur River: Between Russia and China

by Colin Thubron

reviewed by Jim Mills

The Amur River, listed as the tenth longest river in the world at 2,760 miles, is probably, at least to western readers, the least known major river in the world. A major branch of the Amur, the Onon, originates in the mountains of Mongolia flowing to the sea as the Amur through Siberian Russia following the Russian-Chinese border for 1,755 miles before emptying into the Pacific. In 2018-9, at age 80, the British travel writer, Colin Thubron made a solo trip from the river's source through this sparsely populated region of north-eastern Asia to the sea. His conveyances on this trip included horseback, bus, car, boat and rail. His local guides varied as he progressed on his journey.

For many decades Thubron has been traveling around the world, particularly in Asia, chronicling his exploits in books such as *Behind the Wall* (China), *Siberia*, *To a Mountain in Tibet*, and *Shadow of the Silk Road*. Thubron's career is similar to that of Massachusetts' own travel writer, Paul Theroux. Both Thubron and Theroux travel to areas well beyond the normal tourist haunts emphasizing the dangers to be encountered by the solitary traveler.

Thubron started his journey at 7,000ft in Mongolia threading his way on horseback, with three guides, following the meager origins of one of Asia's major rivers camping along the way. Once reaching the high plateau of Mongolia, he was able to employ motorized transportation and private and commercial accommodations. Upon reaching the Russian border, the remaining trip was primarily in Siberia with a significant sojourn in northern China (Manchuria). In general the author found the Chinese to be more prosperous and industrious than the Russians. For the past 20 years or so the Russian population, job opportunities and economic wellbeing in Siberia have declined significantly. A number of Russians with whom the author spoke had the opinion that Russia today is run by Mafia figures with corruption endemic. Over two years the author was able to visit the entire length of the Amur making it to its mouth where it empties into the Pacific near Sakhalin Island. At one time the Amur was viewed as potential trading route (like the Mississippi) providing an economic boost to the area. However the shifting shoals at the mouth of the river and the fact that the river is frozen for at least seven months of the year meant the river would not be usable as a major commercial route. The towns in the region are mere shadows of any prosperity that they might have experienced during the Soviet period.

The author describes much of the bellicose history of the region going back to the rapid military expansion of Genghis Khan. Through the centuries the armies of Russia, China, Manchuria and in the 20th century Japan have ravaged the area repeatedly destroying entire populations and devastating the countryside. This is the scourge of boundary regions. Despite this history a prominent 19th century visitor from European Russia, the writer Anton Chekhov, found the natives to be reasonably cheerful and quite outspoken. As he pointed out the natives did not fear being sent to Siberia, they were already there. As the author has found out there is a great deal of enmity between the populations on either side of the border, each having developed separately over the centuries. Neither side seemed to have a good opinion of the other.

The author, as a solitary traveler, had a number of run-ins with the police who carefully checked his visas and special permissions. Once he was detained for a while at a local police station. Another time he was interrogated by the current version of the KGB. In one Siberian town he was an inadvertent witness to a major joint Russian-Chinese military maneuver. and knew he must get out of that town as fast as possible. Many of the areas near where he traveled were considered off limits to foreigners. Often he would see the locals pointing him out as a curiosity, one of the rare foreigners to visit the area.

Lone travelers like Colin Thubron and Paul Theroux provide a service for the rest of us arm chair travelers. They sample life in rarely traveled areas and having a passing familiarity with the local languages are able inform the reader of the life experiences of remote peoples and share with us their joys and fears. Most of us will never visit these regions and are enlightened by being exposed to those who have views of those who have such different backgrounds. In general most of the inhabitants of this planet have had a much more difficult time with life than have we and we can see how their views have been shaped by these experiences.



Peril

by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa

reviewed by Don Boink

The book begins with General Milley calling a Chinese General to assure him that the U. S. had no plans to attack any country following the notorious insurrection at our capital. The Chinese were on high alert following the Presidential election fearing that Trump would cause an incident to subvert the election to somehow allow him to remain in office .

To quote the blurb, “This classic study of Washington takes readers deep inside the Trump White House, the Biden White House, the 2020 campaign and the Pentagon and Congress with eye witness accounts of what really happened.” The information included is backed up with documentation and transcripts and government records together with eyewitness accounts.

One of the personalities cited is Joe Manchin. The Senator from West Virginia gives Biden fits by his obstreperous objection to the main legislative plan before Congress. How he is dealt with is a fascinating tale of manipulation. *Peril* offers an inside look at the Biden presidency dealing with the pandemic and the fractious divide of the electorate and a world rife with threats and the hovering dark shadow of the former president. The book is aptly titled *Peril*.

Robert Costa (L)
Bob Woodward (R)



The Tyranny of Merit
by Michael Sandel
reviewed by Doug Wilcock

What's not to like about a meritocracy? Plenty, says Michael Sandel in the very important book, *The Tyranny of Merit*. Why would anyone object to a system in which individuals begin on a level playing field and those who can advance the farthest are rewarded the most, while those less able suffer the consequences? Sandel says simply that the winners become hubristic and feel a sense of entitlement while the losers of the meritocratic sorting feel resentful, expressing their anger in ways that tear at the fabric of society. Sandel blames many of America's ills on the type of society we have attempted to build over the last forty years.

Key elements of the meritocracy are the nation's most selective universities. In the book's prologue Sandel looks at the recent college admissions scandal as indicative of the pressure for admission to those universities. Years ago, I attended a summer workshop for teachers held at MIT. A person from admissions told us that MIT could easily accept many more students than they currently do, that there were many applicants well qualified to be at MIT who would be rejected. Sandel reaches the same conclusion, suggesting that if whatever criteria are now used to decide if a student is qualified to be at a selective college became a threshold requirement, then from this pool of qualified applicants a lottery could be used to determine who will get to attend.

A meritocracy is not a just society. Meritocracy is not a remedy for inequality; it is a justification of inequality. In this vein Sandel looks to Thomas Frank, author of *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, who notes that the laser focus on education, especially on selective colleges, may be a misplaced focus. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's productivity increased, yet that increased productivity was not shared with workers whose real wages were stagnant. Frank suggests that this is not an education problem but an economics problem, and that problem is inadequate worker power. He, and Sandel seem to agree that the side effect of a single-minded focus on education is that there has been an erosion of social esteem for those not going to college. Interestingly, I find a glimmer of hope here on the Cape that this is changing. I reason that we are showing an appreciation of the trades, as evidenced by the overwhelming support the communities of the Cape Tech district gave to building a new technical school.

Sandel has much more to say about colleges and universities, particularly those that are most selective. He feels that for colleges and universities the credentialing function plays a greater role than their educational function. He cites the testimony of Brett Kavanaugh at his Senate nomination hearing who, in dodging a question, fell back on his credentials to suggest that he got where he was by "busting my butt." Sandel would like to move away from this credentialing and would like to figure out how to make success in life less dependent on having a four-year degree. Drawing on the work of Isabel Sawhill, an economist at the Brookings Institution, Sandel notes the striking disparity between the support we give to help people go to college (\$162 billion in 2014-15) and what the Department of Education spends on career and technical education (\$1.1 billion). Sawhill notes that other economically advanced countries spend an average of 0.5% of GDP on active labor market programs. France, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark spend over 1%. The U. S. spends 0.1% for the same, less than we spend on prisons.

Sandel zeros in on the financialization of the economy that precipitated the financial crisis of 2008 as yet another aspect of the meritocracy that has gone astray. He suggests that much of this activity, generated by highly educated financial wizards, is speculative, contributing little or nothing to the real economy. He advocates a tax on high frequency trading to replace the payroll taxes that regressively burden workers.

Sandel selects writers across the political spectrum to make a coherent argument against a meritocracy. For example, he draws on the writing of Oren Cass, a conservative scholar, to make the case that worker and family welfare should take precedence over an overly myopic focus on GDP, the signifier of economic efficiency. Similarly, there are no sacred cows that escape Sandel's purview in the damning of the meritocracy. He decries the technocratic language, used particularly by Democrats but shared by many Republicans as well, that emasculates the moral issues that lie behind our everyday decisions. He hates the use of the word smart, the adjective that is supposed to elevate whatever it describes beyond the level of debate. (continued on next page)

To say that Michael Sandel has written an important book for our times is an understatement. I would argue that it should be required reading for our times, especially for Congress and the President. If we are ever to regain social solidarity, that work will begin with dismantling the tyranny of merit.

Michael Sandel



“Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man.”
— Benjamin Franklin

“We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day.”
— Edith Lovejoy Pierce

“In the New Year, never forget to thank to your past years because they enabled you to reach today! Without the stairs of the past, you cannot arrive at the future!”
— Mehmet Murat ildan

“I hope you realize that every day is a fresh start for you. That every sunrise is a new chapter in your life waiting to be written.”
— Juansen Dizon, [Confessions of a Wallflower](#)

BLL Winter Book Sale
Every Sunday
January through March
from 1 to 4
in the Library Basement