

America: Our Stories, Our Democracy

FCDC Book Club · November 2026 to December 2027

Welcome

Over the next fourteen months, we'll read our way from the stories America tells about its founding to the work of building a more equal, connected democracy, one book a month.

We meet the second Wednesday of each month at 7 pm. Our first meeting is Wednesday, Nov 11, 2026, when we'll discuss Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*.

I built the year in four acts, so each book sets up the next:

1. **How We Got Here** (November–February): who the American story has included, and who it has left out.
2. **Who Gets Rights?** (March–June): women, voting, belonging, and the freedom to speak.
3. **How the Systems Work** (July–August): wealth and health, and how history shows up in everyday life.
4. **Democracy at Stake** (September–December): what threatens our democracy, where those fights play out, and how ordinary people push back.

Several months line up with heritage months: Black History Month in February, Women's History Month in March, AAPI Heritage Month in May, and Pride Month in June. The extremism, courts, and organizing months fall during Virginia's 2027 General Assembly campaign, so we'll be reading about the very work we do.

How to use this guide

- **The main selection** is the book we'll discuss at each meeting.
- **Companion books** are optional. They widen the theme with a different voice, era, or angle, for anyone who wants to read more. Some are deeper dives, and some are lighter reads.
- **Pages:** For main selections, I've listed readable pages, meaning the main text only, without notes or index. Companion page counts are the full listing on StoryGraph.
- **StoryGraph ratings** are out of 5, with the number of ratings in parentheses, as of October 19, 2026. A few newer books have only a handful of ratings so far, so take those with a grain of salt.

Planning your reading

A few months ask more of us than others, so here's a heads-up:

- **November 11:** We discuss *A People's History of the United States*, our longest book, which is why it was assigned as early as possible.
- **December 9:** Thanksgiving falls in the middle of this reading window, so start *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World* right after our November meeting.
- **January 13:** *The Rediscovery of America* is the densest read of the year, at about 450 readable pages, and the holidays fall in between. Try to start before our December meeting.
- **February through September** is our steadier stretch, with mains as short as 160 pages. It's a great time to dig into companion books.
- **November 10, 2027:** We'll be reading *A Protest History of the United States* during the final weeks of the campaign. Start in September if you can.
- **December 8, 2027:** Start *The Upswing* right after Election Day on November 2.

Act I: How We Got Here

November 2026 | Whose History Is America?

Meeting: Wednesday, Nov 11, 2026, 7 pm

We start where every story starts: with who gets to tell it. Zinn retells American history from the point of view of workers, women, enslaved people, and Native nations instead of presidents and generals. That question, whose story counts, runs through every month that follows. Loewen brings it home by showing what our own school textbooks left out.

Get a jump start: This one is long, so it was assigned two months ahead. Pace yourself at about 85 pages a week.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	A People's History of the United States , Howard Zinn	~690 readable	4.27 (16,444 ratings)
Companion	A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America , Ronald Takaki	507	4.20 (677)
Companion	Lies My Teacher Told Me , James W. Loewen	383	4.04 (8,045)

Companion	This America: The Case for the Nation , Jill Lepore	160	3.99 (432)
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December 2026 | The Promise of Liberty, and Its Limits

Meeting: Wednesday, Dec 9, 2026, 7 pm

We're reading this in the 250th anniversary year of the Declaration, so it felt right to ask who that promise of liberty was really for. Bell shows the Revolution as a world war that reached from Ireland to India, and he gives real attention to the enslaved and Native people who sided with the British because it gave them a better shot at freedom. Dunbar's true story of Ona Judge, who escaped the Washington household, puts a face on that question.

Get a jump start: Thanksgiving falls in the middle of this reading window, so I'd start right after our November meeting.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	The American Revolution and the Fate of the World , Richard Bell	~360 readable	4.48 (43 ratings)
Companion	The Declaration of Independence: A Global History , David Armitage	300	3.46 (14)
Companion	Never Caught , Erica Armstrong Dunbar	253	3.83 (2,337)

January 2027 | The Nations Before the Nation

Meeting: Wednesday, Jan 13, 2027, 7 pm

Blackhawk answers December's question from the point of view of the people who were already here. His argument is that you can't understand American history without Native nations at its center, and the book won the 2023 National Book Award. Townsend brings it close to home with the Powhatan people of Virginia, whose tribes are still here today. If you read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* years ago, Treuer's book was written partly as its sequel.

Get a jump start: This is the densest read of the year, and the holidays fall right in the middle, so try to start before our December meeting. If time is short, the introduction plus Part II (about 250 pages) covers the founding forward.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	The Rediscovery of America , Ned Blackhawk	~450 readable	4.14 (902 ratings)
Companion	The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee , David Treuer	512	4.26 (1,945)
Companion	Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma , Camilla Townsend	223	3.72 (165)
Companion	Killers of the Flower Moon , David Grann	316	4.15 (63,724)

February 2027 | Race and the American Promise

Meeting: Wednesday, Feb 10, 2027, 7 pm

February is Black History Month, and McGhee carries everything we've read so far into the present. Her argument is that racism costs everyone, white Americans included, from the public pools that were drained rather than integrated to the 2008 housing crash. She writes to persuade, not to lecture, which makes her a great fit for us.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	The Sum of Us , Heather McGhee	~290 readable	4.66 (6,151 ratings)

Companion	How the Word Is Passed , Clint Smith	336	4.76 (12,193)
Companion	How to Be an Antiracist , Ibram X. Kendi	305	4.46 (31,772)
Companion	Just Mercy , Bryan Stevenson	336	4.72 (42,111)

For discussion:

- Smith visits places that tell the history of slavery honestly, and places that don't, including Monticello, just down the road. Where in our own county or state is history told well, or badly?
- McGhee says racism hurts everyone. Kendi says it lives in policies, not just hearts. Where do those two ideas meet, and where do they pull apart?

Act II: Who Gets Rights?

March 2027 | Whose Needs Count?

Meeting: Wednesday, Mar 10, 2027, 7 pm

For Women's History Month, we turn from race to gender and ask the same question: whose needs does the system take into account? Criado Perez shows how much of our world, from car crash tests to medical research to office thermostats, was designed with men as the default. Weiss and Traister then show women turning that frustration into political power, a century apart, which leads us right into April.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	Invisible Women , Caroline Criado Perez	~320 readable	4.34 (44,978 ratings)
Companion	Hood Feminism , Mikki Kendall	287	4.42 (30,038)

Companion	The Woman's Hour , Elaine Weiss	416	4.06 (898)
Companion	Good and Mad , Rebecca Traister	320	4.40 (4,308)

For discussion:

- Criado Perez shows a world designed around a "default man." Kendall asks which women mainstream feminism treats as the default. Who is the "default" in our own work: at our events, in our outreach, in who we ask to lead?
- Kendall argues that food, housing, and safety are feminist issues. Which of these show up in Fauquier County, and who's already working on them?

April 2027 | The People's Power: Who Gets a Voice in Democracy?

Meeting: Wednesday, Apr 14, 2027, 7 pm

This month is all about the ballot, because the ballot is the heart of what we do as a committee. Anderson picks up where the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013 and walks through what followed: voter ID laws, roll purges, poll closures, and gerrymandering. Berman gives us the history, Larson gives us Fannie Lou Hamer, and Daley shows ordinary citizens fighting back. Virginia's own story, from the poll tax struck down in 1966 to our state Voting Rights Act in 2021, makes this one personal.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	One Person, No Vote , Carol Anderson	~160 readable	4.41 (1,092 ratings)
Companion	Give Us the Ballot , Ari Berman	384	4.38 (503)
Companion	Walk with Me: A Biography of Fannie Lou Hamer , Kate Clifford Larson	336	4.39 (82)

Companion	Unrigged , David Daley	320	4.31 (45)
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May 2027 | Who Belongs in America?

Meeting: Wednesday, May 12, 2027, 7 pm

April asks who gets a voice. May asks who gets to belong at all. Ferrera's collection gathers short, personal essays from people growing up between cultures, and it's one of the easiest reads of the year, since you can dip in and out. The companions widen the circle: Lee on how every group, from the Irish and Germans to today's newcomers, has been told it doesn't belong; Vargas on life as an undocumented American; and Danticat on her uncle, who sought asylum and died in immigration detention. Many of our own families have an immigration story, and that's a great place to start the conversation.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	American Like Me , edited by America Ferrera	~310 readable	4.35 (2,144 ratings)
Companion	America for Americans , Erika Lee	423	4.27 (369)
Companion	Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen , Jose Antonio Vargas	256	4.37 (4,742)
Companion	Brother. I'm Dying , Edwidge Danticat	272	4.25 (1,398)

June 2027 | The Right to Speak, Believe, and Belong

Meeting: Wednesday, Jun 9, 2027, 7 pm

Every group we've read about so far had to fight for the right to speak before it could win anything else. Finan tells that story, from abolitionists to suffragists to civil rights marchers, and

closes out Act II. Strossen, a former ACLU president, makes the hard case for answering hateful speech with more speech instead of censorship. Jones brings it down to the local level, where school boards and libraries are on the front lines.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	Freedom of Speech: A People's History , Christopher M. Finan	~250 readable	4.08 (17 ratings)
Companion	Free Speech: A History from Socrates to Social Media , Jacob Mchangama	528	4.23 (72)
Companion	Hate: Why We Should Resist It with Free Speech. Not Censorship , Nadine Strossen	232	3.83 (62)
Companion	That Librarian , Amanda Jones	269	3.77 (1,544)

Act III: How the Systems Work

July 2027 | The American Wealth Divide

Meeting: Wednesday, Jul 14, 2027, 7 pm

After a year of history and rights, we look at how it all shows up in daily life, starting with money. Desmond's argument is uncomfortable but important: poverty sticks around because the rest of us benefit from it, through cheap goods, low wages, and tax breaks that mostly go to the comfortable. Smarsh's memoir of growing up poor in rural Kansas may feel close to home in a rural county like ours.

Book	Pages	StoryGraph
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Main	Poverty. by America , Matthew Desmond	~190 readable	4.37 (16,129 ratings)
Companion	Evicted , Matthew Desmond	432	4.53 (22,867)
Companion	Heartland , Sarah Smarsh	299	3.77 (3,091)
Companion	Maid , Stephanie Land	288	3.82 (19,104)

August 2027 | The Right to Health: Who Gets Care?

Meeting: Wednesday, Aug 11, 2027, 7 pm

Poverty and health go hand in hand. Nuila is a doctor at a Houston public hospital funded by local taxpayers, and he follows five uninsured patients through a system that wasn't built for them. Einav and Finkelstein then offer a national fix: free, automatic basic coverage for everyone. Skloot adds a Virginia story, since Henrietta Lacks grew up on a tobacco farm in Clover, Virginia, before her cells were taken at Johns Hopkins in 1951.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	The People's Hospital , Ricardo Nuila	~330 readable	4.43 (797 ratings)
Companion	We've Got You Covered: Rebooting American Health Care , Liran Einav and Amy Finkelstein	304	4.08 (60)
Companion	The Pain Gap , Anushay Hossain	304	3.66 (927)

Companion	The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks , Rebecca Skloot	369	4.24 (73,624)
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For discussion:

- Henrietta Lacks's cells built a medical industry while her family couldn't afford health insurance. Nuila's patients face that same gap between what medicine can do and who it reaches. How much has changed since 1951?
- Skloot shows why many Black Americans have real reasons to distrust the medical system. How should that history shape the way we talk about health care with our neighbors?
- Could a county-funded hospital like Nuila's work here?

Act IV: Democracy at Stake

September 2027 | The Forces Against Democracy: Money, Misinformation, and Extremism

Meeting: Wednesday, Sep 8, 2027, 7 pm

Stewart picks up the money thread from July and follows it to the movement working against our democracy, reporting from inside its conferences, strategy sessions, and churches. Cook shows what conspiracy thinking does to real families, and Pape adds the data on political violence, including his view of social media as an accelerant rather than the cause. Snyder ends the month where we need to end it: with what ordinary citizens can do.

Get a jump start: If you can, pick up November's main book during these weeks too, since October will be busy with the campaign.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	Money, Lies, and God , Katherine Stewart	~290 readable	4.15 (382 ratings)
Companion	On Tyranny , Timothy Snyder	128	4.30 (23,315)

Companion	The Quiet Damage , Jesselyn Cook	272	4.44 (2,463)
Companion	Our Own Worst Enemies , Robert A. Pape	320	Not yet rated

For discussion:

- Snyder's first lesson is "Do not obey in advance." His second is "Defend institutions." Which local institutions, like our library board, school board, registrar's office, or local paper, most need defending, and what would that look like?
- Stewart shows how lies hold the movement together, and Cook shows what they do to families. Snyder says to "believe in truth" and "make eye contact and small talk." How do we talk with a neighbor or relative who has been pulled in?

October 2027 | Who Is Protected? The Courts, the Constitution, and Our Rights

Meeting: Wednesday, Oct 13, 2027, 7 pm

September shows us the movement. October shows us where it wins: the courts. Litman, a former Supreme Court clerk, explains how today's Court really decides cases, with plenty of humor to keep it from feeling dry. Vladeck covers the emergency rulings that now decide major cases without full hearings, and Sunstein and Lewis remind us what the Constitution and the Court can do when they protect people. Watch for a callback to April, since Anderson and Litman both come back to the 2013 decision that gutted the Voting Rights Act.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	Lawless , Leah Litman	~240 readable	4.07 (690 ratings)
Companion	The Shadow Docket , Stephen Vladeck	352	4.24 (457)

Companion	The Second Bill of Rights , Cass R. Sunstein	294	3.83 (18)
Companion	Gideon's Trumpet , Anthony Lewis	288	3.83 (351)

November 2027 | From Resistance to Change

Meeting: Wednesday, Nov 10, 2027, 7 pm

This is the month we answer back. Virginia's General Assembly elections are on November 2, so many of us will be knocking doors while we read about how ordinary people have changed this country through protest and organizing. McAlevey, a veteran organizer, makes the case for deep organizing over quick mobilizing, and it may be the most practical book of the year for a county committee.

Get a jump start: We'll be reading this during the final weeks of the campaign, with Election Day on November 2. Start in September if you can.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	A Protest History of the United States , Gloria J. Browne-Marshall	~290 readable	4.06 (103 ratings)
Companion	No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age , Jane McAlevey	272	4.32 (446)
Companion	This Is an Uprising , Mark Engler and Paul Engler	368	4.13 (321)
Companion	March (trilogy) , John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell	576	4.71 (617)

For discussion:

- In *March*, Lewis and his fellow students spent weeks in nonviolence workshops before the Nashville sit-ins. What does preparation look like for us before a canvass, a town hall, or a public action?
- Lewis called it "good trouble." Browne-Marshall shows protest has been part of America from the start. When is protest the right tool for a local committee, and when is the ballot box?

December 2027 | The Power of We: Building a More Equal and Connected America

Meeting: Wednesday, Dec 8, 2027, 7 pm

Our capstone pulls the whole year together. Putnam and Garrett show that around 1900, America was as unequal and divided as it is now, and that over the next sixty years we turned from "I" to "we." Then we turned back. Their point is that we've done it before, and we can do it again. Solnit's short essays on hope are the perfect read after a long campaign season, and Klinenberg shows how libraries, parks, and shared spaces hold a community together.

Get a jump start: Thanksgiving falls before our December 8 meeting, so begin right after Election Day.

	Book	Pages	StoryGraph
Main	The Upswing , Robert D. Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett	~340 readable	3.87 (261 ratings)
Companion	Hope in the Dark , Rebecca Solnit	192	3.99 (4,191)
Companion	The Bill of Obligations , Richard N. Haass	240	3.85 (208)
Companion	Palaces for the People , Eric Klinenberg	277	3.93 (1,781)

A Note for Members

Come even if you didn't finish the book, because "I hated it, and disagreed with everything the author said" is valid and worth discussing. Companion books are there for anyone who wants to go deeper, and you're always welcome to bring one you've read into the discussion. If you have ideas for 2028, I'd love to hear them. We already have a list started.