Newsweek/Daily Beast “Book Bag”--five favorite books on the American West, by Ivan Doig

The American West as Living Space, by Wallace Stegner. Once when I asked a prominent historian what he thought of the many writings by Stegner, novelist and English department star at Harvard and Stanford, about the background and development of the West, he didn’t hesitate: “He hits the nail on the head every time, damn him.” This trio of essays, a mere 86 pages of text delivered as a set of university lectures, is a marvel--composed nearly 30 years before fracking, pine beetle kill of forests from Colorado to British Columbia, unprecedented fire seasons with suburbs on the front line--of exploring his great theme of the country west of the rain-halting 98th Meridian, the clash of its ecologies and its cultures.

Monte Walsh. By Jack Schaefer. Not *Shane*? Why? Schaefer’s lesser known but more valid western novel is big, long, gabby with ranch dialect that sounds just right to my bunkhouse-trained ears, and is our best portrait of the cowboy as drifter and what happens to him when he slows down and the times catch up with him. Made into a pleasurable movie starring Lee Marvin--worth seeing just for Jack Palance as a good guy.

The Legend of Colton H. Bryant. By Alexandra Fuller. I surprised myself in listing this one, hidebound as I am against the blurring of non-fiction and fiction. But Fuller manages to mix real reporting and pumping of sources with dialogue reconstructed from before she was on the scene, to tell a heck of a story of a ranch kid turned oilfield roustabout, his off-the-wall buddies, and the wife and family that tried to contain his unsprung behavior. Contemporary and heartbreaking, as is the author’s portrayal of a Wyoming selling itself and its people for oil and coal.

Fools Crow. By James Welch. ”Now that the weather had changed, the moon of the falling leaves turned white in the blackening sky and White Man’s Dog was restless.” The late James Welch, himself Blackfoot and Gros Ventre, wonderfully transports us back to a tribal time in the very first sentence. Jim and I were close friends and maybe the only writers who grew up in proximity to the rough Blackfoot Reservation town of Browning, Montana. Perhaps because of the tribal toughies he hung around then, he never employed the softened term “Native Americans,” and *Fools Crow* is a a powerful epic of the time--1870--when Indians were Indians, in their proud but doomed effort to keep their way of life and in the purview of advancing whites willing to massacre to stamp it out.

Bless Me, Ultima. By Rudolfo Anaya. This Southwestrn classic is lyrical and often enough mystical in evoking the coming of a very old woman thought to be a curandera, a miracle worker who could heal the sick with herbs and remedies, into the upbringing of an impressionable seven-year-old Chicano boy, and how beautifully they clicked. Pause often in this one to hear Anaya’s lovely prose roll through your ears: “When she came the beauty of the Ilano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth.”

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Becky, hi--

Here's a copy of the Newsweek/Daily Beast set of 5 favorite books about the West that Glory scored for us for publication day, and as I explained to her, it's old-fashioned hard copy by snail mail because we're so currently overwhelmed on the email front by a touchy problem Carol has hit as the executor of a friend's estate, and things fly back and forth in all-consuming fashion just now. Anyway, I thought you might like to have a look, and I'd appreciate any of your editor's magic you care to sprinkle in. I've told Glory to transmit it to Jimmy So, the Book Bag guy at the Beast, so that's off your and Lily's plate, but asked her to check with you for any changes before doing that.

Onward.

Best, Ivan
Glory, hi--

Here in old-fashioned hard copy is the Daily Beast set of 5 favorite books about the West, and I should explain that we’re so currently overwhelmed on the email front--Carol is the executor of a friend’s estate and things fly back and forth in blizzard fashion just now—that cleaning up my draft on my old computer and popping it into snail mail for you to transmit it to Jimmy So is the best we can do at the moment. It should reach you on Monday. Carol assures me the email blitz will cool down. I’m also sending a copy to Becky, for her eagle editorial eye to look over, so please check with her if she sees any editing to be done, OK?

Jimmy should feel free to contact me directly by phone (preferable) or email if he needs to.

Again, thanks for this nifty placement.

Best, Ivan
Glory, hi--Nice get on the Daily Beast Book bag. I'll do the 5 American West faves--is there an email where I can send them directly to Jimmy So or do I route them thru you?

Best,
Ivan

On Jun 5, 2013, at 1:03 PM, Plata, Glory wrote:

Hi again, Ivan — So as mentioned, editor Jimmy So at the popular news website Newsweek/Daily Beast is a fan of yours, and has asked if you would be willing to write about your five favorite books (fiction or nonfiction) on the American West for their “Book Bag” column. Examples of other authors' Book Bags can be found here: http://www.thedailybeast.com/features/book-bag.html

They would only need you to write 3-4 sentences about each book for submission by the end of this month, and the finished piece will post on Sweet Thunder’s publication date.

Would you be interested in this? If you’re not keen on the topic of Westerns, do you maybe have five favorite books with a journalism theme that could work? Themes that have to do with the new book are best.

Thanks,
Glory

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BOOK BAG

WHAT SHOULD YOU BE READING?

THE CITY | HOW I WRITE | HOT READS | LONGREADS | AMERICAN DREAMS | BIG IDEA

BOOK BEAST

Graduation Must Reads

What's the essential book to read before you graduate? We asked some of the nation's leading academics and authors—Junot Díaz, Jill Lepore, Cornel West, and others—to nominate one book that students shouldn't escape campus without having read.

Jill LeporeThere can't be one book; there must be a library; that has got to be the lesson. But, for a start, to ponder the shape and rhythm and meaning of life: Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man together with Charles Dickens's Great Expectations.

READ MORE

Khaled Hosseini's Book Bag

The author of 'The Kite Runner' picks his favorite short-story collections. His new book is 'And the Mountains Echoed.'

Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned

By Wylee TowerThis is an outstanding short story collection, much of it about men on the fringes and the splendid messes they have made of their lives. There are downtrodden divorcees, narcissistic teenagers, rivaling siblings, and men struggling to reconcile with their fathers, brothers, children, and the women in their lives.

READ MORE

Paul Theroux’s Inner Journey

The best travel writing is about the voyage into the space within.
One of the great globe-trotting authors on the books that help us understand the land and its inhabitants.

Some travel books are less about travel—that is a specific itinerary and perambulation—than about an intense experience of a particular place. I think of this as both an inner and an outer journey; what is illuminated is the landscape and the people—the place rather than the traveler or the trip.

10 Advice Books for Graduates

by Roman Krznaric, John-Paul Flintoff

As students leave school and enter their next stage in life, what books can they turn to for practical insights about the real world? Roman Krznaric, author of ‘How to Find Fulfilling Work,’ and John-Paul Flintoff, the author of ‘How to Change the World,’ offer these suggestions.

Roman Krznaric have a slight allergy to all those self-help books that offer tips and tricks for graduates on how to write the perfect résumé or shine in job interviews. What really matters, I believe, is delving into books that help you think hard about your values and talents, and how your career might fit into your wider philosophy of life.

Nathaniel Philbrick’s Book Bag

by Nathaniel Philbrick

The National Book Award-winning chronicler of maritime and American stories picks his favorite history books, from Robert Caro to novels as works of history. His latest book is ‘Bunker Hill: A City, a Siege, a Revolution.’

As an author of narrative history, I read a lot of history books. What follows is a list of the books I find myself returning to years after I first read them. The Powerbroker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York By Robert Carol first read this in the early 1980s when I was a sailing journalist living in Manhattan’s Upper West Side.

Isabel Allende’s Influences

by Isabel Allende

The Chilean magical realism writer shares the books that have influenced her the most. Her new novel is ‘Maya’s Notebook,’ out today.

The Female Eunuch by Germaine Greer. This was the first feminist book I ever read. It was 1970 and I was in my late 20s, working as a journalist. The Female Eunuch showed me the power of articulate, smart, and humorous language to express the anger I felt at the male establishment.
The Thrill of Mary Higgins Clark

by Mary Higgins Clark  
Follow @thedailybeast

She is back with her latest novel, 'Daddy's Gone a Hunting,' but who is the Queen of Suspense's biggest competitor for the royal title? She herself picks the five best in the genre.

Payment Deferred By C.S. Forester
One of the best suspense stories ever written. The reader feels the fear and dread of the killer and the ending is a magnificent twist. Fallen By Karin Slaughter Karin Slaughter always grabs you on the first line and never lets go.

Mary Altaffer/AP  READ MORE

The Tiger Writer

by Gish Jen  
Follow @gishjen

When Gish Jen delivered the Massey lectures in American history at Harvard in 2012, the daughter of Chinese immigrants examined the East-West divide, not only in child-rearing but in fiction writing. Almost every novelist has had to contend with the question of “what is fiction,” and Jen picks her favorite lectures on writing, from Nabokov's attention to detail, to a meditation on Edwidge Danticat's immigrant experience, to Toni Morrison's own Massey lecture.

I have always loved reading writers on writing, and the lectures they give especially. The fact that these are typically addressed to a particular audience, and in response to a particular need or occasion seem to give the writers a special license, with results for the reader that are a bit like a raft trip.

Vincent Yu/AP  READ MORE

For the Birds

by Terry Tempest Williams  
Follow @thedailybeast

Forget the Bible—for author Terry Tempest Williams, there are two books that matter above all others: her Sibley and Peterson bird field guides.

The cover is green linen with the title printed in forest green letters, A Field Guide to Western Birds. An imprint of a swift appears as the heart of the book. The backside of the book offers a seven-inch ruler to gauge the size of any bird viewed.

Image: Louis Galamba  READ MORE

Jackie Collins's Erotic Picks

by Jackie Collins  
Follow @JackieCollins

Fifty what? Puh-lease. Before E.L. James ever appeared on the scene, Jackie Collins was already taking over the publishing world with her raunchily fun novels of sex and intrigue in Hollywood. Her latest is 'The Power Trip', and she has sold well over 500 million copies of her books.

Here are my picks for five majorly sexy and erotic novels involving...