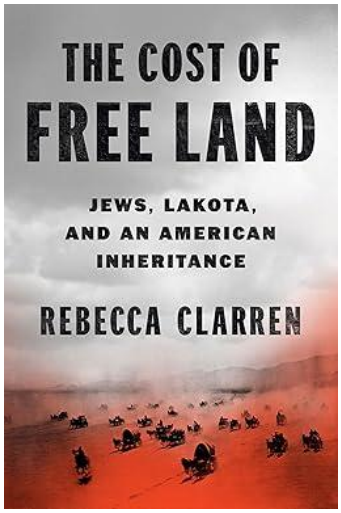
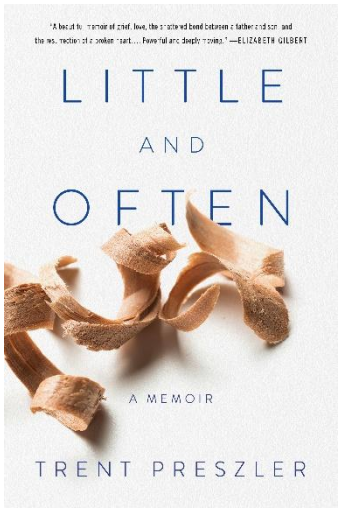


2025

The Cost of Free Land

by Rebecca Clarren

Growing up, Rebecca Clarren only knew the major plot points of her tenacious immigrant family's origins. Her great-great-grandparents, the Sinykins, and their six children fled antisemitism in Russia and arrived in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, ultimately settling on a 160-acre homestead in South Dakota. Over the next few decades, despite tough years on a merciless prairie and multiple setbacks, the Sinykins became an American immigrant success story. What none of Clarren's ancestors ever mentioned was that their land, the foundation for much of their wealth, had been cruelly taken from the Lakota by the United States government.

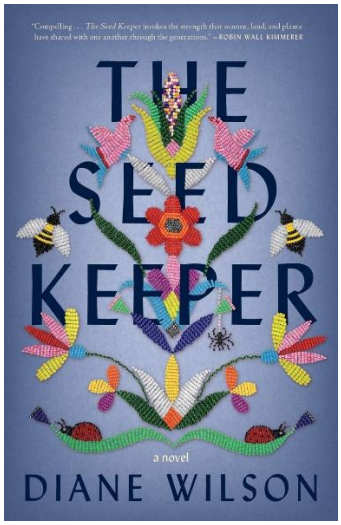


2024

Little and Often

by Trent Preszler

Trent Preszler thought he was living the life he always wanted, with a job at a winery and a seaside Long Island home, when he was called back to the life he left behind. After years of estrangement, his cancer-stricken father had invited him to South Dakota for Thanksgiving. It would be the last time he saw his father alive. Preszler's only inheritance was a beat-up wooden toolbox that had belonged to his father, who was a cattle rancher, rodeo champion, and Vietnam War Bronze Star Medal recipient. This family heirloom befuddled Preszler. He did not work with his hands—but maybe that was the point. While Preszler taught himself how to use his father's tools, he confronted unexpected revelations about his father's secret history and his own struggle for self-respect.

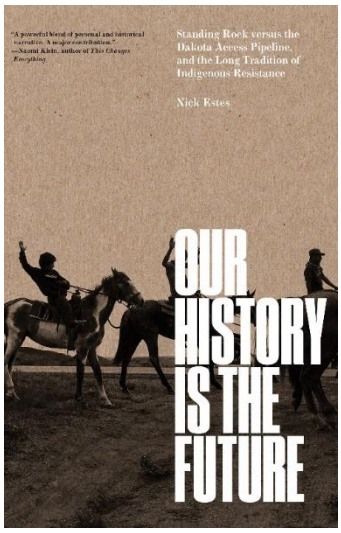


2023

The Seed Keeper

by Diane Wilson

Rosalie Iron Wing has grown up in the woods with her father, Ray, until, one morning, he doesn't return. Told she has no family, Rosalie is sent to live with a foster family in nearby Mankato — where she meets rebellious Gaby Makespeace, in a friendship that transcends the damaged legacies they've inherited. Years later, Rosalie returns to her childhood home and begins to confront the past, on a search for family, identity, and a community where she can finally belong. In the process, she learns what it means to be descended from Dakotah women with souls of iron — women who have protected their families, their traditions, and a precious cache of seeds through generations of hardship and loss, through war and the insidious trauma of boarding schools.



2022

Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance
by Nick Estes

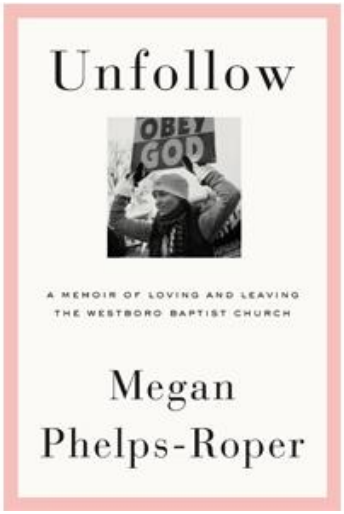
In 2016, a small protest encampment at the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota, initially established to block construction of the Dakota Access oil pipeline, grew to be the largest Indigenous protest movement in the twenty-first century. Water Protectors knew this battle for Native sovereignty had already been fought many times before, and that, even after the encampment was gone, their anticolonial struggle would continue. In *Our History Is the Future*, Nick Estes traces traditions of Indigenous resistance that led to the #NoDAPL movement. *Our History Is the Future* is at once a work of history, a manifesto, and an intergenerational story of resistance.

2021

The Children's Blizzard
by Melanie Benjamin

On January 12, 1888, a mild day in Dakota Territory turned into a deadly blizzard. Because students had gone to school without their heavy coats, many young schoolteachers were faced with a life-and-death decision: allow the children to start for home and risk freezing to death, or keep them in the schoolhouse and risk being trapped without sufficient fuel?

Author Melanie Benjamin offers a fictionalized take on the notorious storm that swept through Dakota Territory. The novel, based on oral histories, is a gripping tale of survival amidst and after the storm.

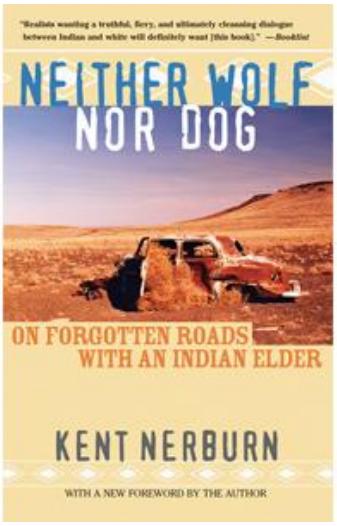


2020

Unfollow: A Memoir of Loving and Leaving the Westboro Baptist Church
by Megan Phelps-Roper

The granddaughter of infamous religious zealot and Westboro Baptist Church pastor Fred Phelps, Megan Phelps-Roper grew up protesting funerals with the extremist group before leaving the Westboro Baptist Church — and by extension, most of her family — behind in 2012 and eventually moving to Clark, SD.

Unfollow chronicles her life in Kansas from childhood through adulthood, her departure from the church during her mid-20s, and the unlikely series of events that led her to South Dakota.



2019

Neither Wolf Nor Dog: On Forgotten Roads with an Indian Elder
by Kent Nerburn

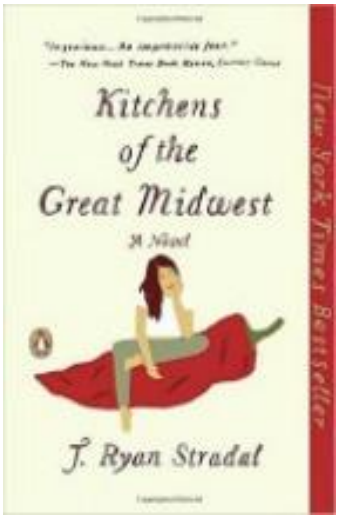
Against an unflinching backdrop of 1990s reservation life and the majestic spaces of the western Dakotas, *Neither Wolf nor Dog* tells the story of two men, one white and one Indian, locked in their own understandings yet struggling to find a common voice. In this award-winning book, acclaimed author Kent Nerburn draws us deep into the world of a Native American elder named Dan, who leads Kent through Indian towns and down forgotten roads that swirl with the memories of the Ghost Dance and Sitting Bull, meeting a vivid cast of characters along the way. An unlikely cross between *On the Road* and *Black Elk Speaks*, *Neither Wolf nor Dog* takes us past the myths and stereotypes of the Native American experience, revealing an America few ever see.

2018

Informing the News: The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism
by Thomas E. Patterson

As the journalist Walter Lippmann noted nearly a century ago, democracy falters "if there is no steady supply of trustworthy and relevant news." Today's journalists are not providing it.

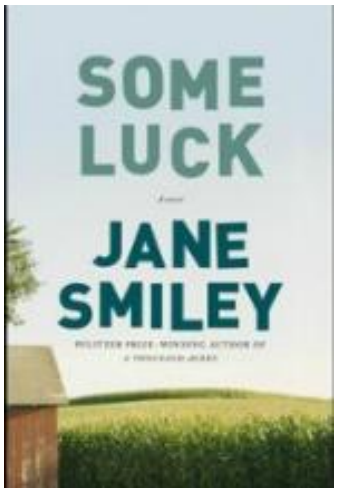
In *Informing the News*, Patterson proposes "knowledge-based journalism" as a corrective. Unless journalists are more deeply informed about the subjects they cover, they will continue to misinterpret them and to be vulnerable to manipulation by their sources. Patterson calls for nothing less than a major overhaul of journalism practice and education.



2017

Kitchens of the Great Midwest
By J. Ryan Stradal

Born into a food-obsessed family, Eva Thorvald finds her solace and salvation in the flavors of her native Minnesota. From Scandinavian lutefisk to hydroponic habaneros, each ingredient represents one step in Eva's journey as she becomes the chef behind a legendary pop-up supper club, culminating in an opulent feast that's a testament to her spirit and resilience.

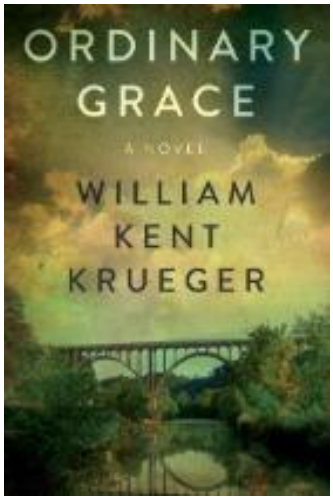


2016

Some Luck

By Jane Smiley

On their farm in Denby, Iowa, Rosanna and Walter Langdon abide by time-honored values that they pass on to their five remarkable children: Frank, the brilliant, stubborn first-born; Joe, whose love of animals makes him the natural heir to his family's land; Lillian, an angelic child who enters a fairy-tale marriage; Henry, the bookworm who's not afraid to be different; and Claire, who earns the highest place in her father's heart. Moving from post-World War I America through the early 1950s, *Some Luck* gives us an intimate look at this family's triumphs and tragedies, zooming in on the realities of farm life, while keeping a panoramic eye on the monumental changes that marked the first half of the twentieth century.

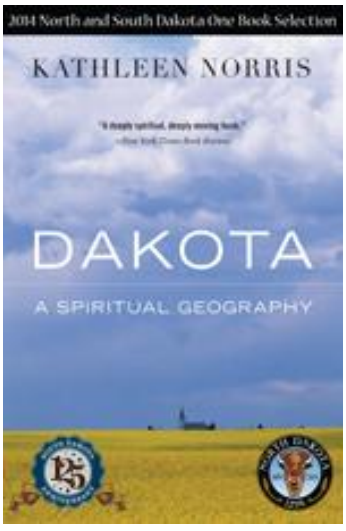


2015

Ordinary Grace

By William Kent Krueger

In this novel, set in southern Minnesota, Krueger explores the issue of spirituality and his own childhood, writing about issues he's grappled with from a young age. The book is a brilliantly moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God.

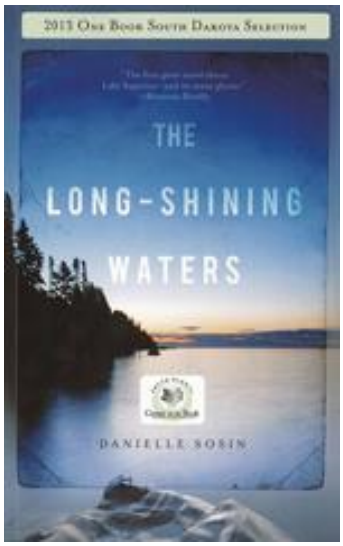


2014

Dakota

by Kathleen Norris

Kathleen Norris's first nonfiction book, *Dakota*, published in 1993, was praised by critics, writers, and readers alike. The New York Times Book Review named it a Notable Book of the year, and Norris also received the New Visions Award from the Quality Paperback Book Club and the Society of Midland Authors Award for 1993. Norris and her husband, fellow poet David Dwyer, moved from New York City to her late grandmother's home in Lemmon, SD. Norris lovingly describes the vast and starkly beautiful landscape, experiences with extremes of weather, and the townspeople. She touts the rewards of monastic life, which leads her to a deeper understanding of herself.



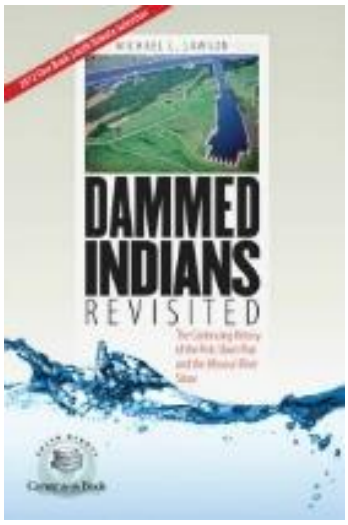
2013

The Long-Shining Waters

by Danielle Sosin

Lake Superior, the north country, the great fresh-water expanse. Frigid. Lethal. Wildly beautiful. *The Long-Shining Waters* gives us three stories whose characters are separated by centuries and circumstances, yet are connected across time by the place they inhabit.

This book was the winner of the Milkweed National Fiction Prize, and a finalist for a Minnesota Book Award and The Midwest Independent Bookseller's Choice Award.



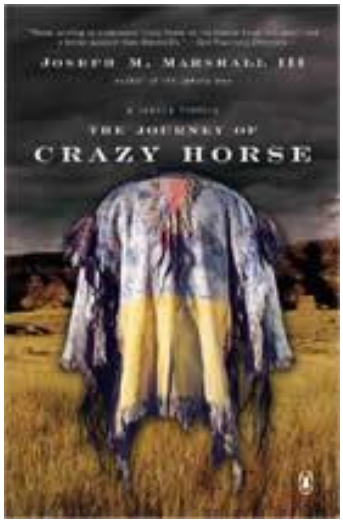
2012

Dammed Indians Revisited: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980

by Michael Lawson

Lawson's classic work, *Dammed Indians: The Pick-Sloan Plan and the Missouri River Sioux, 1944-1980*, provided the factual basis for Congressional legislation establishing tribal recovery trust funds for five Sioux tribes in compensation for reservation infrastructure lost to Federal dam projects.

What began as a purely academic exercise for Lawson in the 1970s eventually found a real-world application between 1996 and 2002 that has significantly benefited the Sioux people. Lawson has since updated his original work with six new chapters, including two that describe the process by which the tribes were able to gain recovery trust funds from Congress.



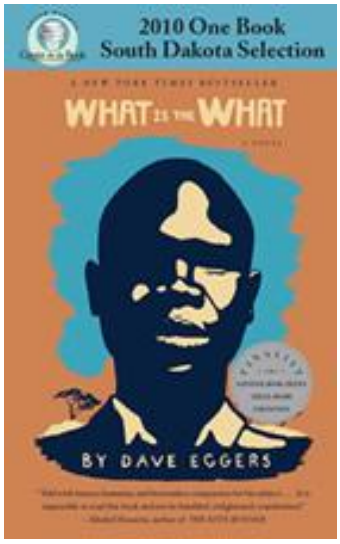
2011

The Journey of Crazy Horse: A Lakota History

by Joseph Marshall III

The history of our state abounds with stories of struggles and perseverance, stories of impassioned individuals facing treacherous winters and impossible odds. Perhaps no person better epitomizes the struggles faced by so many in the early years of our territory than Oglala Lakota leader Crazy Horse.

This iconic hero is best known for his prowess on the battlefield, yet a closer look at his life reveals a complex figure made up of much more than the war stories and heroic legends. It captures the life and times of one of our state's most revered men, providing insight into the historical contexts that formed his character, beliefs, and later shaped him into a leader.

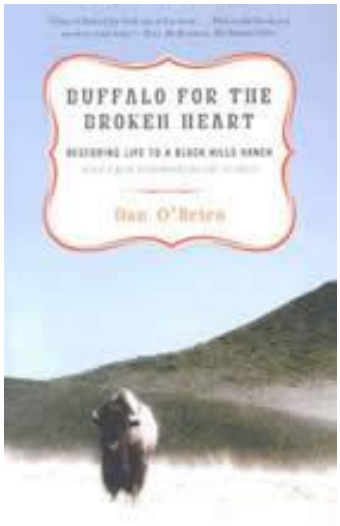


2010

What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng
by Dave Eggers

What Is the What is the epic novel based on the life of Valentino Achak Deng who, along with thousands of other children—the so-called Lost Boys—was forced to leave his village in Sudan at the age of seven and trek hundreds of miles by foot, pursued by militias, government bombers, and wild animals, crossing the deserts of three countries to find freedom. When he finally is resettled in the United States, he finds a life full of promise, but also heartache and myriad new challenges.

Moving, suspenseful, and unexpectedly funny, this book is an astonishing novel that illuminates the lives of millions through one extraordinary man.

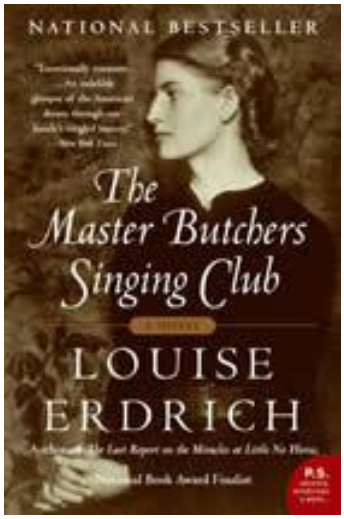


2009

Buffalo for the Broken Heart
by Dan O'Brien

For 20 years Dan O'Brien struggled to make ends meet on his cattle ranch in South Dakota. But when a neighbor invited him to lend a hand at the annual buffalo roundup, O'Brien was inspired to convert his own ranch, the Broken Heart, to buffalo.

Starting with 13 calves, "short-necked, golden balls of wool," O'Brien embarked on a journey that returned buffalo to his land for the first time in more than a century and a half. *Buffalo for the Broken Heart* is at once a tender account of the buffaloes' first seasons on the ranch and an engaging lesson in wildlife ecology.

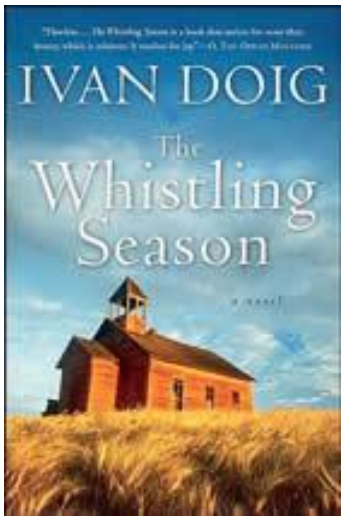


2008

The Master Butchers Singing Club
by Louise Erdrich

Having survived World War I, Fidelis Waldvogel returns to his quiet German village and marries the pregnant widow of his best friend, killed in action. With a suitcase full of sausages and a master butcher's precious knife set, Fidelis sets out for America.

In Argus, North Dakota, he builds a business, a home for his family—which includes Eva and four sons—and a singing club consisting of the best voices in town. When the old world meets the new—in the person of Delphine Watzka—the great adventure of Fidelis's life begins.

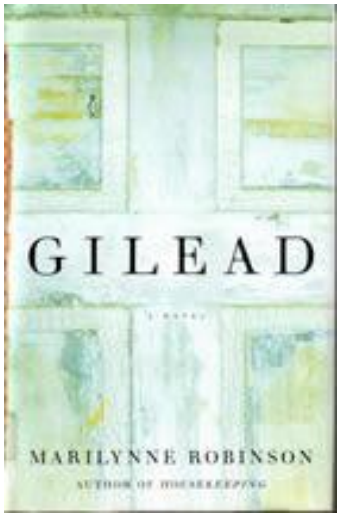


2007

The Whistling Season

by Ivan Doig

In the unforgettable fall of 1909, Rose Llewellyn and her brother, Morris Morgan, bring west with them "several kinds of education"—none of them of the textbook variety—and life is never again the same in Marias Coulee, Montana.

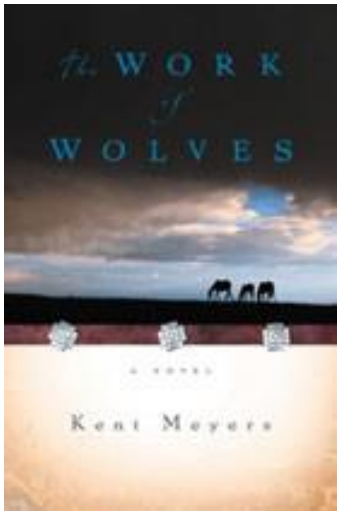


2006

Gilead

by Marilynne Robinson

Twenty-four years after her first novel, *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson returns with a story about fathers and sons and the spiritual battles that still rage in America's heart. In the luminous and unforgettable voice of Congregationalist minister John Ames, *Gilead* reveals the human condition and manages to convey the miracle of existence itself.



2005

The Work of Wolves

by Kent Meyers

When 14-year-old Carson Fielding buys his first horse—a run-down, wild-eyed roan—from the wealthiest rancher in his South Dakota border town, he learns a hard lesson about dealing with powerful men. Years later, Carson grudgingly agrees to work for the rancher, training his horses and teaching the rancher's wife, Rebecca, to ride.

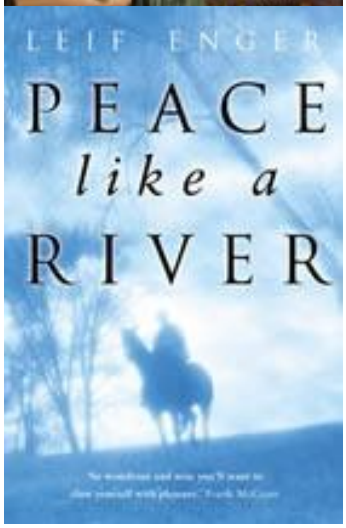
Carson and Rebecca fall in love, angering her vengeful husband, who sets off a cruel chain of events that shocks even the most hardened residents of the town. With the help from friends at the nearby Lakota reservation, Carson challenges the ranchers' rule, fiercely determined to protect what he holds most dear.

2004

The Art of Mending

by Elizabeth Berg

It begins with the sudden revelation of astonishing secrets—secrets that have shaped the personalities and fates of three siblings, and now threaten to tear them apart. In renowned author Elizabeth Berg's moving new novel, unearthed truths force one seemingly ordinary family to reexamine their disparate lives and to ask themselves: Is it too late to mend the hurts of the past?



2003

Peace Like a River

by Leif Enger

Leif Enger's best-selling debut is at once a heroic request, a tragedy, and a love story, in which "what could be unbelievable becomes extraordinary." Enger brings us eleven-year-old Reuben Land, an asthmatic boy in the Midwest who has a reason to believe in miracles. Along with his sister and father, Reuben finds himself on a cross-country search for his outlaw older brother who has been controversially charged with murder.

Their journey unfolds like a revelation, and its conclusion shows how family, love, and faith can stand up to the most terrifying of enemies, the most tragic of fates.