



# While We Watched

## DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



**This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Constance Zack, (MLIS) of the School Library Association of Rhode Island, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *While We Watched*.**

A timely depiction of a newsroom in crisis, *While We Watched* follows Ravish Kumar for two years as he battles a barrage of fake news, falling ratings and the resulting cutbacks while struggling to maintain fact-based analyses. Will his show survive or become a swan song of reason - drowning out in sensationalism, misinformation, and ratings-driven editorial decisions?

## **Contributors**

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# ADULT NON-FICTION

**Albright, Madeleine. *Fascism: A Warning*. Harper, 2018.**

A personal and urgent examination of Fascism in the twentieth century and how its legacy shapes today's world. A Fascist, observes Madeleine Albright, 'is someone who claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is utterly unconcerned with the rights of others, and is willing to use violence and whatever other means are necessary to achieve the goals he or she might have.' The twentieth century was defined by the clash between democracy and Fascism, a struggle that created uncertainty about the survival of human freedom and left millions of innocent people dead. Given the horrors of that experience, one might expect the world to reject the spiritual successors to Hitler and Mussolini should they arise in our era. Madeleine Albright draws on her experiences as a child in war-torn Europe and her distinguished career as a diplomat to question that very assumption. Fascism, as Albright shows, not only endured through the course of the twentieth century, but now presents a more virulent threat to peace and justice than at any time since the end of World War II. The momentum toward democracy that swept the world when the Berlin Wall fell has gone into reverse. The United States, which has historically championed the free world, is led by a president who exacerbates popular divisions and heaps scorn on democratic institutions. In many countries, economic, technological, and cultural factors are weakening the political center and empowering the extremes of right and left. Contemporary leaders such as Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un are employing many of the same tactics used by Fascists in the 1920s and 30s.

**Fowler, Andrew. *Shooting the Messenger: Criminalizing Journalism*. Routledge, 2018.**

Under the pretext of fighting terror and protecting national security, democratic governments and some politicians since 9/11 have been scrutinizing legitimate journalism and criticizing the motives and findings of those who are most needed to keep our elected officials honest. This overall criticism of journalism in general has instead enabled the dishonest and those with ulterior motives to flourish as legitimate sources are questioned. Democracy will not survive unless honest journalism based on fact is encouraged and the voices which seek to tell us the truth are never silenced or disparaged.

**Jaffrelot, Christophe and Cynthia Schoch. *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Princeton University Press, 2021.**

Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, one of the world's largest democracies has veered toward policies of intolerance and authoritarianism. Modi has drawn upon a personal charisma and new ways of reaching out to voters with diverse communication tools to build a large base of zealous supporters. Utilizing Hindu nationalism, Modi has grown increasingly popular while he has helped to diminish the powers and status of Muslims and Christians. This has resulted in attacks against scholars, intellectuals and journalists. Once a vibrant and respected democracy under Modi, India is becoming

an authoritarian state which suppresses dissent and is growing less tolerant of both ethnic and religious minorities.

**Parenti, Michael. *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*. St. Martin's Press, 1986. Revised 2022.**

This book explores the issues that the news media faces in defining and controlling our view of the world. How do we know how much or what is true? How much subtle manipulation and maybe even unintended bias is employed in the ways in which information is imparted to the general public? With an overview of several major controversial news events over the years, Parenti questions whether it is even possible to present an undistorted and unbiased view of events.

**Paxton, Robert O. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Knopf, 2004.**

Paxton focuses on defining fascism by looking closely at what fascists actually did historically. Fascism as we know it emerged in Europe in the early 20th century with the rise of Mussolini in Italy and the fascist transformation of Germany. What is the anatomy of fascism? It may start with identifying people who disagree with the political leader as “enemies of the state.” It goes on to label journalists as liars and enemies and ends with repression and even imprisonment. Uniformed gangs intimidate dissenters with violence. Books and other reading materials, especially newspapers, are censored and then banned. Paxton shows clearly why some countries readily adapted fascism while others resisted and he wonders if and where it can exist in today's world.

**Price, Lance. *The Modi Effect: Inside Narendra Modi's Campaign to Transform India*. Quercus, 2015.**

An in-depth analysis of how Modi and his team used sophisticated high-tech methods never before seen to win the election in India in 2014. Using a variety of powerful technologies like social media, mobile phones and the Internet, Modi put together a glamorous campaign that portrayed him as a forward thinker with new ideas that would bring India to the forefront of democratic countries. He even utilized 3D holograms to visit places in the far reaches of India that he could not visit in person. With these impressive technological tactics, he won over millions of supporters, especially young people who responded well to his use of the tools of modern technology.

**Rachman, Gideon. *The Age of the Strongman: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy around the World*. Other Press, 2022.**

A look at how authoritarian “strongman” leaders promoting fascist ideas are becoming a growing segment of the political world. In the past decade, the world has seen a rapid rise to power of new authoritarian figures. This has happened in Moscow, Beijing, Budapest, Warsaw, Bolivia, Delhi and even Washington. Their leadership is often based on intolerance for non-nationals and minorities and open hostility to democracy and liberal ideas. They claim to stand up for ordinary people against the educated elite and they encourage a cult of personality. They claim that patriotism belongs only to them and those who support them. Rachman's analysis of these strongmen finds common themes

among them and even some interaction as they subtly support each other and the leadership cults that often develop.

**Snyder, Thomas. *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Tim Dutton Books, 2017.**

A historian of fascism offers a guide for surviving and resisting America's turn towards authoritarianism. On November 9th, millions of Americans woke up to the impossible: the election of Donald Trump as president. Against all predictions, one of the most-disliked presidential candidates in history had swept the electoral college, elevating a man with open contempt for democratic norms and institutions to the height of power. Snyder draws from the darkest hours of the twentieth century to provide hope for the twenty-first. As he writes, "Americans are no wiser than the Europeans who saw democracy yield to fascism, Nazism and communism. Our one advantage is that we might learn from their experience. *Twenty Lessons* is a call to arms and a guide to resistance, with invaluable ideas for how we can preserve our freedoms in the uncertain years to come.

**Stanley, Jason. *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Random House, 2018.**

Alarmed by the pervasive rise of fascist tactics both at home and around the globe, Stanley focuses here on the structures that unite them, laying out and analyzing the ten pillars of fascist politics--the language and beliefs that separate people into an 'us' and a 'them.' He knits together reflections on history, philosophy, sociology, and critical race theory with stories from contemporary Hungary, Poland, India, Myanmar, and the United States, among other nations. He makes clear the immense danger of underestimating the cumulative power of these tactics, which include exploiting a mythic version of a nation's past; propaganda that twists the language of democratic ideals against themselves; anti-intellectualism directed against universities and experts; law and order politics predicated on the assumption that members of minority groups are criminals; and fierce attacks on labor groups and welfare. These mechanisms all build on one another, creating and reinforcing divisions and shaping a society vulnerable to the appeals of authoritarian leadership. By uncovering disturbing patterns that are as prevalent today as ever, Stanley reveals that the stuff of politics--charged by rhetoric and myth--can quickly become policy and reality. Only by recognizing fascist politics, he argues, may we resist its most harmful effects and return to democratic ideals.

**Sunstein Cass R. *Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America*. Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow, 2018.**

With many of the political events of recent years, many people in the United States and around the world are fearing that democracy as we know it in America is coming to an end. There is fear that Sinclair Lewis' satirical novel, *It Can't Happen Here*, written during the pre-war days of the 1930s as fascism was taking root in Europe, could finally be coming true. Is the freedom under democratic rule that the United States symbolizes really secure? What are the signs we need to watch for to save our democracy? Can authoritarianism really happen in America?

# ADULT FICTION

**Koestler, Arthur. *Darkness at Noon*. Macmillan, 1941.**

A fictional portrayal of an aging revolutionary, this novel is a powerful commentary on the nightmare politics of the troubled 20th century. Imprisoned by the political party to which he has dedicated his life, Nicolas Rubashov paces his prison cell, examining his life and remembering his tempestuous career. As the old intelligentsia is eradicated to make way for the new, he is psychologically tortured and forced to confess to preposterous crimes. Comparing himself to Moses, led to the Promised Land but refused entry, he sees only darkness at the end of his life where once he saw such promise for humanity.

**Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935.**

This satirical novel depicts the campaign and subsequent election of popular Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, as President of the United States. Windrip has run a campaign based on patriotism, a return to traditional values, fear, and far-reaching social and economic reforms. Immediately after his election and with the help of paramilitary forces, Windrip enacts a coup which gives him totalitarian rule. His actions follow almost exactly the patterns of fascist governments that were being created at the time in both Germany and Italy. Journalist Doremus Jessup strongly opposes Windrip's regime and fights to restore democracy. A sobering look at how easily a country can be taken over fascism.

**Roth, Philip. *The Plot Against America*. Random House, 2005.**

A novel based on the supposition that Charles Lindbergh was elected president in 1940. During World War II, a Jewish family in New Jersey observes the fictional political rise of aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, a beloved aviator who captures the presidency in spite of his extreme right beliefs and innate racism. His widespread popularity blinds many to his fanatical beliefs and turns the nation toward fascism.

# YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

**Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2020.**

This book describes what modern authoritarian leaders have in common and explores how they may be stopped. Ours is the age of authoritarian rulers: self-proclaimed saviors of the nation who evade accountability while robbing their people of resources and corroding or destroying democracy. They also draw on models from the past to show how Vladimir Putin rehabilitates Soviet tyrant Joseph Stalin and Donald Trump praises Libyan despot Muammar Gaddafi and Jair Bolsonaro.

**Dadge, David. *Silenced: International Journalists Expose Media Censorship*, Prometheus. 2005.**

Dadge present fourteen stories from journalists from around the world talking about the very real obstacles and threats they have faced in telling their stories. He has examples from undeveloped countries where freedom of speech has been openly suppressed as well from western countries where journalists have faced more subtle forms of repression and censorship. All examples provide evidence of journalists willing to fight hard for uncensored journalism, freedom of speech and the rights of people to truth.

**Davis, Kenneth C. and Cindy Kay et al. *Strongman, the Rise of Five Dictators and the Fall of Democracy*. Henry Holt and Company, 2020.**

A nonfiction account of some of the deadliest dictators in modern history"-- What makes a country fall to a dictator? How do authoritarian leaders acquire their powers? Davis profiles five of the most notoriously ruthless dictators in history. The examines their personal lives and historical periods, and shows how these factors shaped the leaders they'd become.

**Forman, Gene et al. *The Ethical Journalist: Making Responsible Decisions in the Digital Age*. Wiley/Blackwell, 3rd Edition, 2020.**

A thorough examination of the ethics of journalism, written by four experienced journalists. Provides many examples from real life along with case studies and essays. Addresses new topics arising in journalism.

**Hood, Stuart. *Introducing Fascism: A Graphic Guide*, Icon, 2015.**

A graphic guide to the political movements and nineteenth century ideas which created Fascism. Follows the movement to the present time and its alignment with conservative ideas and values.

**Marino, Andy. *Narendra Modi, a Political Biography*. HarperCollins, 2015.**

Provides a look at Modi's early life and how he rose to fame and power through the political ranks of 21st century India. Also includes his own detailed explanations of his personal views on religion and politics.

**Rafael, Rivqa. *Resist Fascism. Crossed Genres, 2018.***

This anthology of science fiction and fantasy examines a variety of effective ways that people can fight back against fascism, particularly governmental fascism which has been slowly eroding democracies the world over. We currently see fascist movements rooted in violence and hatred being seen as symbols of pride. Rights are being eroded and fascists are operating in the open without fear of punishment. Resist Fascism offers many practical means by which ordinary people can effect change and thwart the swing towards fascism.

**Tames, Richard. *Fascism (Ideas of the Modern World). Hodder, Stoughton, 2000.***

A look at how fascism developed and evolved in Italy and Germany in the early 20th century. Describes Franco's Spain along with similar governments and fascist movements in other countries with a look at modern neo-fascist groups and their leaders.



# YOUNG ADULT FICTION

**Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Houghton Mifflin, 1986.**

The Handmaid's Tale takes place in the Republic of Gilead which was once the United States. In reaction to a declining birth rate and increasing social problems, the Sons of Jacob overthrow the government and create Gilead, a repressive society based on a Biblical community designed to cure society of its progressive leanings. Offred tells the story of the life of repression and subjugation forced upon the young women, the handmaids, of Gilead. The limitation of women's rights and their subjugation is a significant part of the new society. Women are the lowest-ranking class and are not allowed to own money or property, or to read and write. Furthermore, women are deprived of control over their own reproductive functions and the fertile women are forced to bear children for the "commanders." Tendencies in society today, such as removing the rights of women to control their own bodies, foreshadow the possible direction society could take towards a system such as Gilead. In Atwood's own words: "As with *The Handmaid's Tale*, I didn't put in anything that we haven't already done, we're not already doing, we're seriously trying to do, coupled with trends that are already in progress... So all of those things are real, and therefore the amount of pure invention is close to nil.

**Atwood, Margaret. *The Testaments*. McClelland and Stewart, 2019.**

This sequel or companion volume to *Handmaid's Tale* portrays Gilead after fifteen years as its infrastructure begins to corrupt and weaken.

**Sun, Rivera. *The Dandelion Insurrection*. Rising Sun Media, 2019.**

In a futuristic time in the USA where tyranny rules, basic human rights of the people such as the right to assemble, to disagree with the establishment and to speak their minds have disappeared. Because of this oppression, the *Dandelion Insurrection* is born and Zadie and Charlie have become the inspirational voice of the movement. They rally the masses by evoking the need for love, life and liberty and this ignites the passion needed to bring back human rights. Book One of the *Dandelion Trilogy*.

# BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

**Bohner, Jessica and Sandy. *Your Voice is Your Superpower: A Beginner's Guide to Freedom of Speech and the First Amendment*. City Point Free Press, 2020.**

We all love superheroes with their special powers to make the world a better place. Based on the premise that we all have a superpower which is our voice and the special freedom of speech we have all been granted to use our voice. Using our voice, we can express ourselves, we can help others and we can even change the world. Democracy depends on our freedom of speech.

**Seuss, Dr. *Horton Hears a Who*. Random House, 1954.**

Horton the Elephant is the only one who can hear the tiny residents of Whoville who are living precariously on a tiny speck of dust floating around the world. The mayor of Whoville befriends Horton and begs him to save their tiny world from destruction by those who not only refuse to believe that they exist but who heap ridicule upon Horton for his attempt to save a world full of the insignificant and powerless, calling him a fool. Horton, however, perseveres and brings Whoville to safety because “a person’s a person no matter how small.

**Seuss, Dr. *Yertle the Turtle*. Random House, 1958.**

Yertle, the turtle, wanted to see and control the whole world. He achieves this by standing on the backs of other turtles, who are complicit at first but who begin to resent him. When Mack, the tiny turtle on the bottom, burps, he causes Yertle’s fragile infrastructure to topple. Yertle provides an allegory for the misuse of greed and power that is enabled by abusing the rights of others.

**Matulli, Allison and Clellia Castro-Malaspina. *Your Freedom, Your Power: a Kid's Guide to the First Amendment*. Running Press Kids, 2023.**

The First Amendment grants every citizen five privileges: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and the right to petition the government. In *Your Freedom, Your Power*, middle grade readers get a focused look at their freedoms and rights through the lens of the powerful First Amendment. The book engages children in learning more about their country and their rights and responsibilities. Each section will answer key questions readers may have thought about like: Do I have the right to protest at school? Can I be punished at school for something I say on social media? Why can't I wear whatever I want? Can I text whatever I want? While answering these questions and explaining fundamental legal concepts every kid should know, *Your Freedom, Your Power* shares the fascinating stories behind some of the most important legal cases and social movements that have affected kids' lives and rights.