

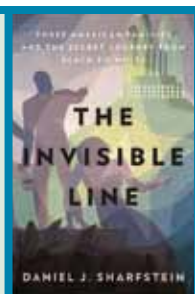
★ **The Invisible Line: Three American Families and the Secret Journey from Black to White.**

By Daniel J. Sharfstein.

Feb. 2011. 400p. Penguin, \$27.95 (9781594202827). 305.800.

Many persons of African American heritage but “white” appearance crossed the color line at times when racial classification had very real and harsh implications.

Legal scholar Sharfstein chronicles the lives of three such families who made the transition from black to white during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Gibsons started as landowners in South Carolina’s backcountry and became wealthy slaveholders and part of the southern elite, producing a senator and a major figure in American commerce. The Spencers owned farmland in eastern Kentucky and eventually Appalachia, scratching out a life as part of an isolated community, in which families were loathe to set hard racial definitions until coal mining and outsiders pressed the broader social mores of the U.S. The Walls gravitated to post-Civil War Washington, DC, and became part of the black elite that challenged racial restrictions until they could no longer resist the temptation to take advantage of the escape their fair skin afforded them. Drawing on archival material, Sharfstein constructs an absorbing history, demonstrating the fluidity and arbitrariness of racial classification. —*Vanessa Bush*



loss of two babies at birth. When her and her husband’s adopted son reached adolescence, Bialosky realized she had to confront the wrenching facts and persistent mysteries of Kim’s life and death. The result is a strikingly lucid, smart, and elegant investigative family history grounded in research into “the act of self-annihilation” and illuminated by literary forays. Bialosky’s mantra is “The more I know, the more I can bear.” Her courageous anatomy of family secrets and tragedies, pain and guilt provides extraordinarily valiant and resonant testimony to the healing powers of truth and empathy. —*Donna Seaman*

Join the Club: How Peer Pressure Can Transform the World.

By Tina Rosenberg.

Mar. 2011. 288p. Norton, \$25.95 (9780393068580). 303.48.

The concept of peer pressure connotes the ability of a group to impose its will upon an individual, to coerce a state of being that might not otherwise exist. It’s what encourages teens to take up smoking and entices inner-city youths to join gangs. And yet, harnessed in an entirely different manner, peer pressure can turn the disaffected into the accomplished, the outliers into the over-achievers. Pulitzer Prize winner Rosenberg inventively examines how creative thinking and critical analysis of group dynamics turned some of India’s lowest caste women into successful entrepreneurs and village leaders, how a group of ragtag Serbian students used street theater to topple a repressive dictator, and why a suburban Chicago megachurch finds its doctrine best disseminated one dinner table at a time. This “social cure,” Rosenberg posits, has the power to channel herd mentality into forces that can bring about positive changes for at-risk individuals, whether they are battling AIDS in South Africa or drug abuse in South Carolina. —*Carol Haggas*

Made for You and Me: Going West, Going Broke, Finding Home.

By Caitlin Shetterly.

Mar. 2011. 256p. Hyperion/Voice, \$23.99 (9781401341466). 306.872.

With this twenty-first-century recession memoir, Shetterly is going to get a lot of feedback from those who have found themselves in similar situations. As she carefully documents in a book that provided the framework for a series of NPR *Weekend Edition* diary installments, she and her husband, along with their pets, hit the highway in 2008, looking for success in California. Leaving Maine was a huge risk for the young couple, but one filled with promise, especially with potential career advancement in the entertainment industry. Instead, they faced rental traumas, an unplanned pregnancy, and the dawning realization that the economic downturn was

personal. Shetterly’s willingness to address her own shortcomings makes for a deeply personal and riveting, alternately funny and poignant read. As the couple, new baby in tow, heads back east to the safety of family, she struggles to find the teachable moment in all that has gone wrong. Forget the *Cleavers*. Shetterly’s is the new American family, and the faster we realize that, the better we all will be at coping. —*Colleen Mondor*

Reading Women: How the Great Books of Feminism Changed My Life.

By Stephanie Staal.

Feb. 2011. 288p. PublicAffairs, paper, \$15.95 (9781586488727). 306.874.

An immersion in feminist literature clarified Staal’s personal philosophies as an undergraduate at Barnard College in the 1990s and shaped her subsequent career as journalist and writer. Moreover, a reintroduction to these seminal works saved her from the postnuptial and postpartum ennui and isolation she encountered as a new wife and mother. Lacking a sense of identity beyond these traditional roles and hoping to reignite her youthful sense of purpose, Staal took the gutsy step of returning to Barnard to audit the “feminist texts” courses that once played such a pivotal role in her life. In reading and analyzing the influential works of such luminary feminist thinkers as Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, Kate Chopin, Simone de Beauvoir, and Katie Roiphe, Staal examines what it means to be a woman in the twenty-first century and asks if and how these writers are still relevant today. Intimate in its reflections and keenly perceptive on a larger scale, Staal’s erudite literary memoir refreshingly embraces women’s eternal quest for self-knowledge. —*Carol Haggas*

YA/C: *In-depth references to an eclectic mix of formative works make this an excellent resource for students of feminist literature. CH.*

★ **Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love.**

By Xinran.

Mar. 2011. 272p. Scribner, \$25 (9781451610895). 306.87430951.

The author of *The Good Women of China* (2002) now offers a gut-wrenching account of Chinese women forced to give up (or worse) their daughters in the 1980s and 1990s because of China’s one-child policy. Implemented to control China’s booming population, the law led to the abandonment and murder of countless female babies, as many families stood to lose land if they didn’t have a son to inherit and manage it. Formerly a popular radio personality in Nanjing, Xinran sought out the sad stories of women whose daughters were taken from them after birth. And not all the families who gave up their daughters were peasants struggling to hold onto their land. Xinran was horrified to witness a father doting on his young daughter on a train, only to abandon her hours later. Xinran gives Chinese women who lost their daughters a voice in this powerful volume, laying bare their raw pain. This eye-opening work is made even more shocking by how recent most of these women’s stories are, even as Xinran counterbalances the heartbreak with letters from families outside China who have adopted Chinese babies. —*Kristine Huntley*

YA/M: *Adoptees of any background will be moved by this book. KH.*



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