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## FRONT OF THE BUS

Leigh Raiford

*At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*

By Danielle L. McGuire  
Alfred A. Knopf

AT THE DARK END OF THE STREET offers a vital retelling of the by-now familiar history of the civil rights movement: an often-triumphant tale of heroes who, through acts of bravery, forced a nation to confront and better itself. Full of lively, if difficult, storytelling, and buttressed by excellent research, Danielle McGuire's provocative narrative forces readers to rethink what they know about that pivotal moment in U.S. history: its time frame, its actors, its legacy. Placing black women's struggles against rape and sexual violence at its center, McGuire powerfully demonstrates that women's "bodily integrity" was always a key goal of the movement.

From her description of the brutal gang rape of Recy Taylor in 1944 to her closing discussion of the 1975 case of Joan Little, on trial for murdering her jailer as he raped her, McGuire argues that black women organized tirelessly for the right to human dignity. Rosa Parks did not begin her activist career by refusing to give up her bus seat in December 1955; rather, she had long worked as an investigator for the Montgomery NAACP, organizing for the prosecution of the numerous cases of white men's rape of black women. Likewise, the countless African American women who participated in the

Montgomery bus boycott, often described as the start of the movement, did so not simply to counter Jim Crow. They boycotted for more than a year because, as the overwhelming majority of Montgomery's bus ridership, they were sick of being physically molested and verbally abused by white bus drivers, police officers and other riders. From Montgomery to Birmingham to Selma, black women were at the frontlines of the movement, and their long refusal to remain silent put sexual violence at the frontlines as well.

Protection of women's bodies does not always translate into feminist sensibilities. The white supremacist history of whites lynching black men in the name of protecting white womanhood, while white men raped black women with impunity, shows how "protection" can just as easily be patriarchy. Likewise, the call to "protect black womanhood" at times became a means for black men to reassert

dominance by reclaiming traditional gender roles. While McGuire mentions a few such instances, she missed opportunities to consider fraught intraracial gender relations. Still, her book is an important intervention in our commonsense understandings of the civil rights movement.

Through decades of persistent activism starting in the 1930s, long before second-wave feminism took on sexual violence in the 1970s, black women made rape a civil-rights issue. That lesson about the inextricability of antiracism and anti-sexism is one we would do well to re-

member in our contemporary moment. McGuire's book reminds us that there is still much to learn about the movement—and that there is much unfinished business.

LEIGH RAIFORD, an associate professor of African American studies at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (UNC Press, 2011).

## PROJECT BRAINWASH

Audrey Bilger

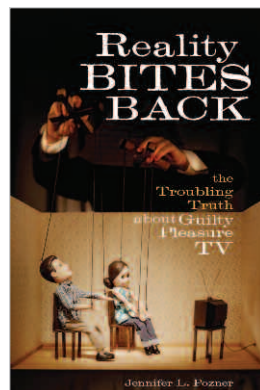
*Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*

By Jennifer L. Pozner  
Seal Press

IF YOU'VE BEEN ANYWHERE NEAR a television set, you know how thoroughly so-called reality TV and its "personalities" have captured the public imagination. Witness President Obama's laughing—and widely disbelieved—claim to the ladies of *The View* that he'd never heard of the *Jersey Shore*'s Snooki.

While many fans see reality programming as innocuous, if mindless, entertainment, media critic Jennifer Pozner argues that such shows cause more damage to self-esteem and cultural perceptions than anything fictional, precisely because they claim to be real. "Most viewers understand to varying

degrees that reality television is an edited form of entertainment," she writes. "Yet we also largely accept the genre's insistence that its cast members are 'real people' who 'actually believe' the cherry-picked, contextless comments we hear them make."



For nearly a decade, as founder and executive director of Women in Media & News, Pozner has sounded the alarm about negative representations of women by media corporations for whom the bottom line is king and male domination, the reigning order. For this, her first book, she watched more than a thousand hours of unscripted programming in order to debunk its myths, such as the idea that the public demands reality TV.

“These shows exist for only one reason,” she declares. “They’re dirt cheap.” Whereas scripted television requires unionized writers and performers and offers limited opportunity for embedded advertisements, reality TV is often completely underwritten by advertisers, who can manipulate content to showcase their products. Another myth is that reality TV can’t put words into people’s mouths. Turns out, it can. Pozner cites an anonymous producer of *The Bachelor* describing a “Frankenbite... where you take somebody saying, ‘of course I’d like to say that I love him’ and cutting the bite together to say ‘of course I love him.’” Virtually every aspect of reality programming is manipulated, scenes mapped out before taping, advertisers writing lines for cast members to deliver.

Pozner does to reality TV what Jean Kilbourne did to ads in her media critique *Can’t Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*. It reveals the harmful effects of extended exposure to distorted versions of femininity in the media. As she shows in her analysis of more than 150 programs, these shows “glorify stereotypes that most people assume died 40 years ago.” Women are typically depicted as low-IQ gold diggers, men, as domineering, even abusive; everyone behaves as if the struggles for civil and women’s rights and LGBT equality never happened.

Pozner concludes with chapters on media literacy and activism, append-

ing a resource guide for those who want to take matters into their own hands. The stakes are high. As she contends, “Reality TV producers, advertisers and media owners have done what the most ardent fundamentalists have never been able to achieve: They’ve created a universe in which women not only *have* no real choices, but don’t even *want* any.” By taking these programs seriously, by calling them out for their sexism, racism and homophobia and for propping up an outdated and oppressive social order, we can resist their insidious influence.

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AUDREY BILGER, PH.D., is an associate professor of literature at Claremont McKenna College.

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## HUMANS OVER IDEALS

Dara Horn

*Foreign Bodies*

By Cynthia Ozick

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

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IN A CONTEMPORARY LITERARY scene where “serious” means ponderous, where “comic” means juvenile and where “ambitious” means slavishly imitating others, it is pure pleasure to encounter Cynthia Ozick: a morally brilliant comic master whose plots keep the pages turning and whose every sentence sings. Ozick’s latest novel is billed as a “photographic negative” of Henry James’ *The Ambassadors*, with the same plot and the opposite meaning. Readers put off by James’ baroque style have nothing to fear; part of Ozick’s inversion of James is the crisp bite of her prose, and the story, ultimately, is fully hers.

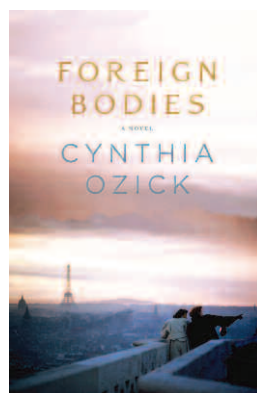
Like James’ 1903 classic, *Foreign Bodies* begins with a middle-aged

American sent to Paris to retrieve a wayward young relative, who turns out to be involved with an older European woman. But Ozick’s brilliance begins with her story’s timing: 1952, in a Europe stripped of its supposed grandeur by genocide and war. James’ Paris was the apex of sophistication to which Americans aspired; Ozick’s Paris is overrun by callow American youth who consider a devastated Europe their sandbox.

Our heroine is Bea Nightingale, a long-divorced Jewish schoolteacher whose brief marriage to a composer has left her with no patience for the pretensions of others. Bea’s rich brother, Marvin, asks Bea to spend her Parisian vacation hunting down his son Julian, who is spinning his wheels while his industrious sister pursues a chemistry doctorate and his WASP mother languishes in a California asylum. In Paris, Bea discovers that her nephew is every bit the child his father thinks he is—except that he has become involved with a Romanian Holocaust survivor, who barter her experience for his innocence. This discovery upends the lives of every character in the book in entirely uncontrived ways, with results ranging from sudden death to redemption.

*Foreign Bodies* destroys the romance of James’ Europe by revealing it as the center of genuine evil, an evil rooted in genocide’s cause: the cherishing of ideals over actual humans. The very convincing humans who populate this book each suffer

from their own form of ideal-worship, and their fates are determined by how fully they repudiate their preconceived notions of who they should become. Like everything Ozick has ever written, this book is actually about ambition, and about what Ozick rightly sees as its opposite: freedom.





“The trouble with liking poetry,” a young Bea muses, “was that it inflamed you, it made you want your life on this round earth to *count*... A mark, a mark, a dent in history, a leaving—even (even!) if not her own.” In lesser hands, such a speech would preface a cynical adieu to dreams. But by the book’s end, Ozick has made Bea’s dreams unexpectedly and comically come true, in a brilliantly precise inversion of what young people believe accomplishment to be. *Foreign Bodies* captures what few writers ever admit: the extreme limitations of art and the enormous unsung influence that all of us have on each person whose life intersects with our own.

DARA HORN’s most recent novel, *All Other Nights* (Norton, 2009), is about Jewish spies during the Civil War.

## DEFIANT DANCING

Mireille Miller-Young

*Strip Club: Gender, Power and Sex Work*

By Kim Price-Glynn

NYU Press

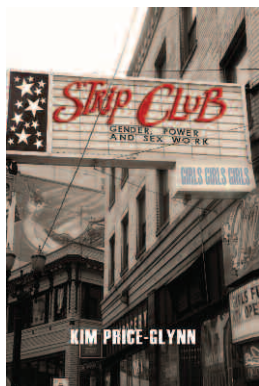
SEX WORK IS ONE OF FEMINISM’S most contentious topics. For decades feminists have fought over its relationship to patriarchy and its role in the commercialization of sexuality. *Strip Club* is a call to put down the boxing gloves and think more critically about the individual women in sex work, particularly in the category known as stripping.

Although stripping is a key part of the \$8- to \$13-billion adult entertainment industry and has become trendy in mainstream media—from cable shows like *G-String Divas* to films like *Showgirls*,

from celebrity “stripper-cise” videos to pole-dancing instruction on *Oprah*—strippers themselves remain marginalized. Their labor, as sociologist Kim Price-Glynn points out, is physically and emotionally demanding, yet it is ignored, devalued and sorely misunderstood.

To study stripping, Price-Glynn spent 14 months as a cocktail waitress in the Lion’s Den, a tacky, small-town strip club. She observed and interviewed the men running the club—managers, bartenders, bouncers and deejays—and its primarily white, blue-collar patrons, as well as the strippers and other cocktail waitresses. As Gloria Steinem did with her 1963 investigation into the work of Playboy bunnies, she exposes the intricacies of gendered power as well as the burdens of feminized work in spaces dominated by males. She saw how management kept dancers in check by using “formalized male surveillance and the disparagement of strippers,” while male patrons exercised verbal and physical abuse.

Although strippers paradoxically had more control over their pay than other Lion’s Den workers, they held the least authority in their work environment, exploited not just as women but as workers. The rigid division of labor by gender, the system



of authority controlled by men and for men’s benefit, and the club’s dilapidated condition fostered hostile conditions and a general lack of regard. Not only did management ignore the women’s requests to repair the stage, which was known to cut dancers’ bodies, it turned a blind eye to their harassment by patrons. Manage-

ment failed to compensate strippers for the value of their labor, forcing them to rely on tips from “dollar

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—Eleanor Smeal, Publisher.

dances” and lap dances.

Disdained and devalued, the “strippers struggled against overwhelming odds to transform, resist and cope with their work,” Price-Glynn writes. They employed strategies to deal with its emotional toll, creating boundaries between their professional personas and personal identities. Twenty-year-old Destiny, one of the few African American strippers at the club, took showers with chemical bleach so she could “see all the dirt that comes off.” Roxanne, 33, agreed, “Oh god, yes, you scrub a little harder when you get out of here.” They were affected not just by the dingy work environment but by the disparagement of sexual labor that identified them as deviant and dirty.

Price-Glynn contrasts the aspirations of the strippers with the club’s design, rules, expectations and practices, all of which served to exploit

their labor. She argues that without listening to sex workers and addressing their abuse and lack of power, feminists will never take the real battle—the one against structural oppression—to the ring.

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MIREILLE MILLER-YOUNG *is an assistant professor of feminist studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, where she teaches on gender, race, sex work and pornography.*

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## AUGUST 6

Julie Phillips

*Hiroshima in the Morning*

By Rahna Reiko Rizzuto

Feminist Press

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IN 2001, RAHNA REIKO RIZZUTO left her home in New York to spend six months in Hiroshima, Japan. She had

already published one successful novel, *Why She Left Us*, based partly on her mother’s experiences in an internment camp for Japanese Americans. Now she had a grant to research a new work of fiction. She wanted to know more about the Japanese Americans, some deported from the U.S., who were in Hiroshima when the bomb fell on August 6, 1945. She sought to understand this “small group of people who, after having obeyed every rule and requirement of citizenship, found themselves abandoned in the rubble of the end of the world.” She wondered, “When you are being torn in two directions, how do you decide who you are and where you belong?”

She hoped the answers would help her understand her own identity as a mixed-race daughter, an ambivalent wife and mother. She was 37, had been in a relationship with her husband for more than half her life, had sons ages 3

## bookmarks | GREAT READS FOR FALL 2010

### I’m Black When I’m Singing, I’m Blue When I Ain’t and Other Plays

By Sonia Sanchez

Duke University Press

From the poet, playwright, civil rights activist and prominent member of the Black Arts movement comes five beloved dramas, two previously unpublished plays and three essays on her art and activism.

### Teacher at Point Blank: Confronting Sexuality, Violence and Secrets in a Suburban School

By Jo Scott-Coe

Aunt Lute Books

In this heart-wrenching memoir of 11 years in a public high school, the former English teacher describes a system that stifles educators. She writes of professional isolation, deadening expectations and frustrated students who misdirect their resentment into violence against one another.

### Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera

Edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba,

with Georgina Guzmán

University of Texas Press

This anthology gives identities to the hundreds of women murdered over the past two decades in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Contributors argue that the women were victims of systemic sexual violence caused by globalization and international trade agreements.

### I’m in the Band: Backstage Notes from the Chick in White Zombie

By Sean Yseult

Soft Skull Press

In this revealing, photo-filled memoir, Yseult provides a backstage pass to the world of heavy-metal music, where she fought for equality as the lone woman band-member on the scene.

### Swan: Poems and Prose Poems

By Mary Oliver

Beacon Press

With her new collection, this winner of the National Book Award for Poetry and the Pulitzer Prize in Poetry once again joyfully celebrates the natural world.

### The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood

By Barbara Almond

University of California Press

The psychiatrist author’s clinical work with mothers as well as her own parenting experience provide the backdrop for this myth-shredding look at maternal ambivalence.

### Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women’s Health

By Gayle A. Sulik

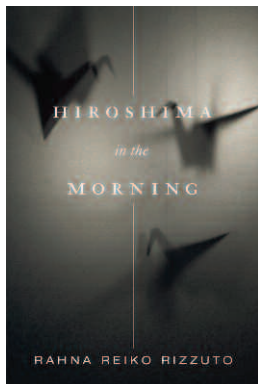
Oxford University Press

Sulik addresses corporate sponsorship of

and 5. She had never traveled alone.

In Japan, a country more strange to her than she expected, she struggles to find her bearings. Once in Hiroshima, she discovers she's just another "peace pilgrim," one of many who come seeking to comprehend a horror that seems beyond meaning. When she speaks to *hibakusha*, survivors of the blast, she realizes they're repeating well-worn stories. Their "answers felt packaged, pre-prepared." How can she add anything to what's been said?

Then, two months after she arrives, planes hit the World Trade Center. The violence of September 11 shocks the *hibakusha*. People who refused to see her now want to talk;



some who have not changed their account in years begin to see their memories in a new light. At the same time, she becomes less sure of her own story. At home, her mother is starting to lose her memory. Her husband longs for Rizzuto to come back and "take up [her] pose inside [their] family frame." Her children are frightened by the events of 9/11, but if she goes back she'll forfeit her grant. She wonders why "mother" has to be "the single, most determining splinter of a

woman's identity."

*Hiroshima in the Morning* is not the novel Rizzuto planned. Instead it is a surprising memoir of her journey and the dissolution of her marriage, intercut with excerpts from the survivors'

narratives. The combination is a hazardous one. She runs the risk of appropriating and trivializing their devastating stories. Yet Rizzuto has the insight and storytelling skill to weave her themes together into a powerful and illuminating whole. Her sense of perspective helps her avoid disaster: Every time she seems about to descend into narcissism, she pulls back. She never stops seeing the *hibakusha* as people; their stories never become just her material. She doesn't come any closer to solving the mystery of Hiroshima. But at least she can offer us a sense of how individual lives are put together from the many "splinters" of choice and fate. ■

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JULIE PHILLIPS writes about books for *the Village Voice* and *the Dutch daily Trouw*. She's the author of *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* (St. Martin's Press, 2006).

breast-cancer fundraising, arguing that it may impede progress toward a cure. Merchandise adorned with pink once brought attention to the disease; now it diverts our focus toward brand names.

### Unmaking War, Remaking Men: How Empathy Can Reshape Our Politics, Our Soldiers and Ourselves

By Kathleen Barry  
Phoenix Rising Press

In her entreaty for the "re-humanization" of soldiers as something other than fighting machines, and her plea for the end to destructive masculinities, Barry calls for nothing less than a paradigm shift by the military.

### Quiet as They Come

By Angie Chau  
Ig Publishing

The heartbreaking short stories in this de-

but collection are told by an extended family of Vietnamese boat people adjusting to life in America. With husbands imprisoned or unemployed and wives becoming breadwinners, marital dynamics are upended and women explore new sexual freedoms.

### The Sacred White Turkey

By Frances Washburn  
University of Nebraska Press

One Easter Sunday on a Lakota reservation, a white turkey inexplicably appears on the doorstep of a medicine woman and her granddaughter. Events that follow stir up a philosophical dispute—one that draws on both Christian and Lakota beliefs on the sacredness of the turkey.

### Rose: Love in Violent Times

By Inga Muscio  
Seven Stories Press

Radical feminist Muscio wrote a previous

call to arms, *Cunt*, that was described as upsetting, empowering and jarring—but never boring. This highly anticipated follow-up, written in her trademark stream-of-consciousness style, challenges society's pervasive violence, from sexual assault to cultural trauma to war.

### Strange Trade: The Story of Two Women Who Risked Everything in the International Drug Trade

By Asale Angel-Ajani  
Seal Press

An anthropologist reports from Italy's racist and sexist prison system, where a Liberian drug courier and a Ugandan member of a drug cartel are incarcerated. Angel-Ajani, whose mother was imprisoned and whose father trafficked in narcotics, reveals what inspired these two to join the growing ranks of African women in the drug-trafficking industry and what it cost them.