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## I've been meaning to tell you: a letter to my daughter (book review)

Kathleen McCallister  
William & Mary, [krmccallister@wm.edu](mailto:krmccallister@wm.edu)

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# social sciences

## BIOGRAPHY

**Ahmadi-Miller, Enjeela. *The Broken Circle: A Memoir of Escaping Afghanistan*.**

Little A: Amazon. Mar. 2019. 285p.

ISBN 9781503903784. \$24.95; pap.

ISBN 9781503903760. \$14.95. MEMOIR

Ahmadi-Miller's debut memoir begins with her idyllic childhood in Kabul, Afghanistan, describing days filled with school, social activities, and the comforts of a home with loving siblings and dotting parents. Her life is upended during the 1980 Soviet invasion and the ensuing civil war that ultimately tears her family apart, as her mother makes the difficult decision to leave Kabul for India, seeking urgent medical treatment no longer available in Afghanistan. With the conflict at home escalating, the remaining family members realize they, too, must flee to escape the intensifying violence. Ahmadi-Miller details

It's difficult for any parent to discuss the unpleasantness of the world with a child, and harder still when those aspects include racial politics and prejudice that directly impacts both their lives. Novelist Chariandy (*Brother; Soucouyant*), the son of black and South Asian Trinidadian migrants, makes an elegant foray into that struggle in this letter to his 13-year-old daughter. A memoir of the author's own racial past as well as a meditation on his daughter's present and future, this brief but powerful read conveys the effects of bigotry on people and place and the difficulties of navigating personal identity. Chariandy's lyrical prose heightens and never masks the sharp punch of racism or the fragility of a father's hope for his children. **VERDICT** Slim but not slight, this touching read will be valuable for all parents, especially families with multiracial children, as well as those interested in view-

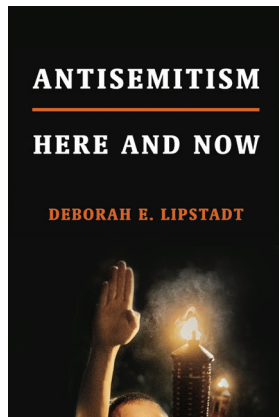
author whose army service included 16 months in Afghanistan, and Ames (contributor, *Newsweek; Harper's*) delve deeply into Bergdahl's complex relationship with his parents, along with his psychological disorders. The authors portray Bergdahl as collateral damage, victimized by the media; military, defense, and intelligence agencies; and politicians. Dense accounts of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would have benefited from a glossary of names, dates, and events, but the details of Bergdahl's court-martial trial are engrossing, eliciting sympathy for his life with schizotypal personality disorder. **VERDICT** The authors raise important questions about the psychological fitness of servicemen and -women and the diminishing chances for fair trials and treatment in a nation as polarized as ours today. This will resonate with readers gripped by C.J. Chivers's *The Fighters: Americans in Combat in Afghanistan and Iraq*.—Karl Helicher, formerly with Upper Merion Twp. Lib., King of Prussia, PA



The business of female friendships; anti-Semitism awareness; radical reformation

the harrowing five-year journey to reunite with her mother in India. Facing incredible hardships, the family navigated brutal terrain, often on foot, in punishing circumstances, frequently lacking basic necessities such as food and water. Throughout the odyssey, the author describes the physical and spiritual growth she experienced as a result of the astounding trek. **VERDICT** The inspirational nature of this memoir will appeal to readers desiring an uplifting chronicle of the resilience of the human spirit.—Mary Jennings, Camano Island Lib., WA

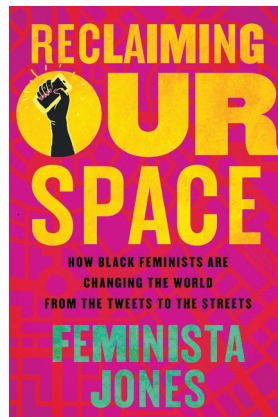
**Chariandy, David. *I've Been Meaning To Tell You: A Letter to My Daughter*.** Bloomsbury USA. Apr. 2019. 96p. ISBN 9781635572872. \$20. MEMOIR



ing the politics of race and racial identity through a personal lens.—Kathleen McCallister, William & Mary Libs., Williamsburg, VA

**Farwell, Matt & Michael Ames. *American Cipher: Bowe Bergdahl and the U.S. Tragedy in Afghanistan*.** Penguin Pr. Mar. 2019. 400p. maps. notes. index. ISBN 9780735221048. \$28; ebk. ISBN 9780735221055. BIOG

In 2009, Bowe Bergdahl deserted his army observation post in Afghanistan with the intention of walking to a nearby base to publicize the flaws of the war. He was soon captured by the Taliban, imprisoned, and tortured for five years in nearby Pakistan, until in 2014, President Barack Obama negotiated his release in exchange for five Taliban prisoners. Farwell, a freelance



**Greenberg, Amy S. *Lady First: The World of First Lady Sarah Polk*.** Knopf. Feb. 2019. 400p. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780385354134. \$30; ebk. ISBN 9780385354141. BIOG

With this highly readable biography, Greenberg (George Winfree Professor of History and Women's Studies, Pennsylvania State Univ.; *A Wicked War*) tells the fascinating and largely unknown story of an unheralded presidential spouse and provides an insightful analysis of gender roles in 19th-century America. Sarah Childress Polk (1803–91) skillfully manipulated cultural expectations for women of her class while forging a companionate marriage that was a true political partnership. Throughout James K. Polk's career as Speaker of the House, governor of Tennessee, and U.S. president, Sarah served as his communications director and managed his correspondence. The author shows how the politically engaged first lady deliberately cultivated a deferential persona in order to adhere to traditional values, and how she served as an example to future conservative women with political power. Greenberg astutely explains that Sarah failed to attain recognition by distancing herself from the emerging suffrage movement, championing the deeply unpopular Mexican War, and acting in the interests of the

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