

THE OAK TWIG

Spring 2025



PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Happy New Year!

We welcome all of our new members. We have a great get-together on the 1st Saturday of the month at 9:30 AM at Pickles where you can catch up on news of the activities in AAUW, ask questions about programs, suggest new programs, and just visit with like-minded women.

RED DRESS PROJECT: We had the largest community outreach and education event called The Red Dress Project which was held from November 15 -17 at the Thousand Oaks Grant R. Brimhall Library. There was a display of red dresses with accompanying stories of Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women. There was a panel discussion in the afternoon. We had a silent auction which raised money for funds for a young woman in the Ventura County Indian Education Program. The exhibit drew about 300 visitors, with 130 more attending a speaker's panel Nov. 17, organizers said.

HOLIDAY PARTY: We had a wonderful gathering at our Holiday Party in December. We donated to the Harbor House: Harbor House Adopt a Family Donations. Julie Land, one of our long-time members, sang accompanied by her husband.

IBC LUNCHEON: AAUW Thousand Oaks participated in the IBC (Interbranch Council Luncheon) at Los Robles Green in January. We heard from Archana Maniar, an Infectious Disease specialist and a Professor of Medicine at UC Davis Health System. Her first novel is Dry Spells which was published in May 2024.

WOMEN'S HISTORY PROJECT: Lori Peters presented the Women's History Project at the Thousand Oaks Library March 6. The women presented were:

TURNING OVER PRESIDENCY TO BETTY STAPLEFORD: As we decided at the beginning of this year our Presidency would be shared by Sally Hibbits until November, me until March, and Betty Stapleford for the rest of the physical year.

We are soliciting nominations for Officers for Next Year. We will be forming a nominating committee. So if you are called, we have a number of positions that need to be filled. You can start as a Director at Large. Let me know, nfargotsteing@yahoo.com.

Here are our open leadership positions:

President

Vice-President

And directors at Large. We also need volunteers on our committees.



A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF LIVING IN FEAR

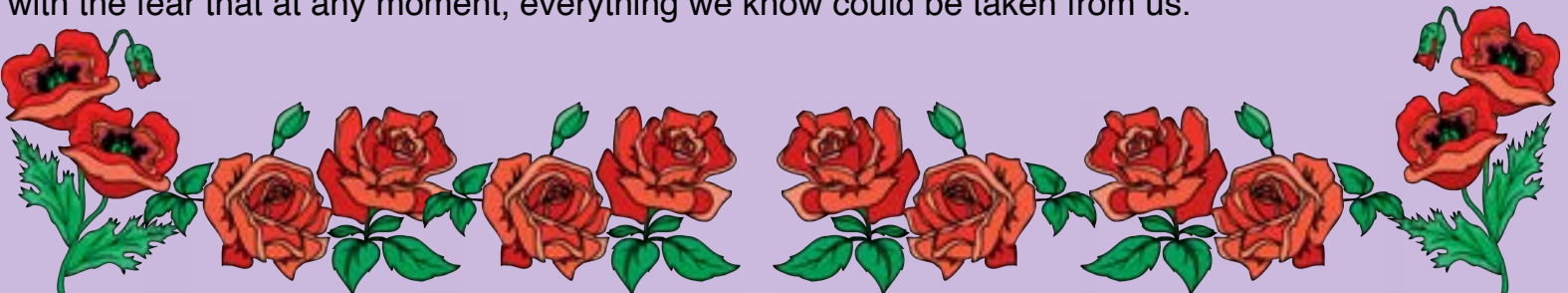
By A Member of the Latino Youth Leadership Group
(Used with permission)

I am a senior at Thousand Oaks High School, balancing AP classes, sports, and extracurriculars while navigating the challenges of being a first-generation student. I am the first in my family to be born in the U.S., but despite this, the fear of deportation looms over us every day.

My older brother, a Dreamer under DACA, was only four years old when he was brought here. He grew up in this country, worked tirelessly to earn his university degree, and has built a life here. Yet, his future remains uncertain. If he is deported, everything he has worked for will be taken from him. However, my deepest fears are for my parents, who remain undocumented. They left our village in Mexico 20 years ago in search of a better life, and for years, they have worked hard, paid taxes, and contributed to this country. Yet, there is still no pathway to citizenship for them.

Recently, my mother had “the talk” with my younger brother, a painful conversation that every child of undocumented parents knows too well. My brother, born and raised in Thousand Oaks, is only eight. My mother had to explain to him that she is considered “illegal” and unwanted by many in this country. She told him that if she is ever deported—sent thousands of miles away—he would have to stay under my care until I could afford to reunite him with her. After this talk, he was left crying in sadness the same way I was after my conversation with my mother in 2016. As I approach my 18th birthday in April 2025, I am preparing to take legal responsibility for him, ensuring he has me listed as his guardian in case the worst happens. Although I still feel like a child myself, this is one of the many things I have to face if my parents are deported. On top of being a full-time college student, I will need to find an extra job to support him until he is sent away to a place he has never known, stripped from the only home he has ever had.

If my father is deported, the situation becomes even more dire. As our family’s main provider, his absence would likely mean losing our apartment and facing homelessness. This fear is not just ours—it grips our entire community. My mother, who works as a housekeeper, has received an influx of calls from women in the neighboring city of Oxnard who are desperate for work. They are too afraid to return to the fields where they pick crops, terrified of the increasing ICE sightings in the area. They share stories of neighbors who have been deported and of families torn apart overnight. Now, even the sight of an unfamiliar police officer or someone in uniform sparks fear. This paranoia spreads through our communities, embedding itself into our daily lives and forcing us to live in constant uncertainty. For families like mine, this country is home. And yet, we live every day with the fear that at any moment, everything we know could be taken from us.





MARCH 2025 | ISSUE 19

Public Policy News

A monthly dispatch from the AAUW California Public Policy Team

OVERWHELMED BY NEWS?

Approaching News Consumption in this Era

As we did in December, we are once again checking in with a reminder that, your wellbeing is important. Not only do we see an uptick in policies and actions that run counter to our core values, but we also see/hear a constant stream of news about these changes. You may be feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, fearful, or anxious. Monitoring news on these changes is important, but can be detrimental to your mental health. See p.2 for action items alongside tips on how to balance wellbeing, media consumption, and action.

LOBBY DAYS 2025

April 8-9, 2025

We have had overwhelming interest in this year's Lobby Days event, with 77 people registered to participate in person at the Capitol on April 8th, and 107 people registered to participate via Zoom on April 9th! It is incredibly inspiring and humbling to be part of an organization that is so passionate about advocating to make the world better for women and girls. **We are grateful.**

The Public Policy Committee is now hard at work to form teams and schedule meetings, as well as evaluate bills for our 2025 Legislative Agenda.

From now through March 21st, we will be posting information [HERE](#) on the event logistics and the bill details. Please check back for updates.

For any questions about the event, please reach out to publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org.

SHARING IS CARING

Share PP News!

A humble request to please share PP News more broadly! We want everyone inside and outside of AAUW, including anyone not regularly involved in Public Policy, to have important action tools and updates. **You can also share the link to our [PP News Archive](#).** Thank you in advance!

UPCOMING AAA WEBINAR

DEI in the Balance--Strategies for Moving Forward in Uncertain Times

Thursday, March 20, 2025 10am-11am Pacific.

[Register Here.](#)

BRANCH PUBLIC POLICY CHAIRS' MEETING

NEXT MEETING

Thursday April 3, 2025
at 3:00pm Pacific



ZOOM LINK [HERE](#)

Click [HERE](#) for meeting information.



Unless they fall on a holiday, bimonthly Peer Group Meetings will be held on the first Thursday at 3:00pm Pacific in Feb, Apr, Jun

SIGN UP FOR ACTION ALERTS [HERE.](#)

WHERE IS THAT?



Key links to your public policy resources:

- [Google Workspace](#)
- [Branch liaisons](#)
- Contact us at publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org
- Tell us about your branch public policy events by filling out this [form](#).

Implementation of Project 2025

Our core values are under attack. Take action now.



As Co-Directors Amy Hom and Missy Maceyko outlined in a [webinar](#) in October 2024, the objectives of Project 2025 directly counter the Public Policy Priorities of AAUW California. **With federal policy pronouncements and changes continuing to take place at a head spinning pace**, it is clear that changes are underway to make Project 2025 become reality (track implementation [HERE](#)). To respond to the attack on the people and issues we care about, and to fulfill the mission of our organization, “to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research,” we will continue to compile resources to help you take action to fight back. This is a critical moment, as the changes that are being implemented may have long-lasting impacts, locally and globally.

Even as we are asking you to act, **we want to remind you that your wellbeing is important**. With an uptick in policies and enforcement actions that run counter to our core values, you may be feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, fearful, or anxious. Action is important, but self care is also a political act. Be gentle with yourself and acknowledge your efforts.

We also encourage you to check out this guide on how to read the news more strategically, to still be able to follow events while preventing burnout and protecting your mental health.

You should also consider **staying connected**--with AAUW members and with those outside of AAUW who are engaged in efforts to push back. To this end, here are some examples of individuals, groups, and organizations that are pushing back in different ways:

- direct refusal to comply, [via mass resignation](#),
- showing up in person not only to protest, but also to [support, including showing love for beleaguered federal workers](#) at USAID,
- initiating and sustaining [legal challenges](#).

AAUW California is building out our own action-items database, which is being released to the California Board to review in March, and which will go live for you in April. **Regardless, we will continue to provide a short list of targeted resources each month.**



We ask you to take action by choosing one self-focused, one other-focused, and one political-focused item from the list below. This month the topic area is...

Take Action: Sexual Assault Violence Prevention



Self-Focused: Education

- learn more about [the organizations country-wide](#) that are on the front lines of dealing with sexual assault violence
- read through the resources provided by the [Domestic Violence Awareness Project](#) and [the CDC](#).



Other-Focused: Education & Connection

- whatever you take away from your homework in self-education--be sure to tell one friend about what you learned. You can do this over lunch.
- work with others to [organize an event](#) to raise awareness and dispel myths around gender-based and sexual assault violence in your community.



Politically-Focused: Outreach to Legislators

- [use 5-calls](#) to reach out to federal legislators to oppose the abolition of the Department of Education, which will impact enforcement of existing sexual and gender-based violence protections under Title IX.
- text SIGN PNNWWO to 50409 to contact legislators, urging them to back efforts to get money flowing to relevant organizations and programs to raise awareness about and prevent sexual assault violence (e.g. [Department of Justice](#), [Office of Violence Against Women](#)). See NL article, below, for additional agencies.

Follow [AAUW California's Petitions Page](#) on Resistbot

Prepare for Sexual Assault Prevention Month in April

By Claire Noonan, Member AAUW California Public Policy Committee



Sexual assault violence prevention calls for the creation of safer communities. Addressing the root causes of this kind of violence is difficult as it involves a multipronged approach, including improving street and housing conditions, providing education, and offering support services. We should work to advance policies at workplaces and schools, discuss sexual assault and its consequences with friends and family, and prioritize prevention in our communities.

Official channels for raising awareness about sexual assault violence and creating and implementing the policies needed for prevention has a long history in the United States; however, given the current administration's attack on "DEI," much of this work is now under threat of being dismantled.

Violence awareness began officially when the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) became law in 1984, providing the primary federal funding for domestic violence victims and their children via emergency shelters and related assistance. The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), passed by Congress in 1994, is comprehensive federal legislation to end violence against women. In 2001, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center coordinated the first national Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), building on years of advocacy and awareness-building. In 2009, President Barack Obama officially declared April to be Sexual Assault Awareness Month, which presidents have proclaimed by every year since then.

As part of this wider federal push, awareness-raising and prevention efforts around sexual assault violence have been more firmly embedded in core policies and practices. For instance, the Department of Defense has been trying to create a culture to eliminate sexual assault, requiring a personal commitment from all Service members. Educational institutions have benefitted as well: the final Title IX revisions in April 2024 by President Joe Biden reflected the stronger shift to prevent assault actions on school campuses. These revisions also sought to protect more people, expanding the definition of "sex-based harassment" to include harassment based on sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex stereotypes, and pregnancy. At the state level, in September 2024 Governor Newsom signed eight bills on domestic violence. The legislation created a new victims' services fund using penalties from white-collar crimes and expanded the ability of victims to access restraining orders.

While all of this movement has been positive, by the second week of President Donald Trump's current administration, the Office of Management and Budget had ordered a freeze of all federal financial assistance in all agencies including those that oversee government programs and funding for organizations that provide domestic violence and sexual assault services, such as Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control, and the Department of Justice. Multiple court orders have blocked the freezes from taking effect, but in some cases funds haven't been received for programs aimed at preventing sexual violence.

In addition, the current Administration has attacked the Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services and the Office on Violence Against Women, who must now disclose information that may further eliminate funding and resources, such as whether grants are being used to support "removable or illegal aliens or immigrants;" to "promote gender ideology;" or to advance "illegal DEI" programs—although at the time of writing, early challenges have signaled that enforcement of these provisions and denial of funding may be unconstitutional.

As individuals and non-profit organizations, we can take action. We can contact our Congressmembers and state officials to back efforts to get the money flowing to relevant organizations and programs that raise awareness of and prevent sexual assault violence.

We can also act in our local communities to reduce sexual assault violence. We can ask to improve lighting to make streets and other public spaces safer. We can make sure our city, county, and public health officials promote policies for families and children, address economic security, and provide access to safe, stable housing. We can collaborate with community-led organizations that coordinate resources and services that help with trauma, mental health and substance use, all of which lead to sexual abuse. (from CDC-Violence Prevention)

Overall, we can all work to support the organizations country-wide that are on the front lines of dealing with sexual assault violence. Click here for downloadable free materials to share from the Domestic Violence Awareness Project.

Meet the Public Policy Interns!

We are so excited to have them on board and are already impressed by their passion and fantastic work.

MALENA CLARK

Malena Clark is a new AAUW Public Policy Intern and an applied statistics major at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB). Throughout her academic journey, she has actively sought to diversify her educational experience. Passionate about human rights, Malena is dedicated to advocating for systems that protect and uphold these fundamental freedoms. Outside of her studies, she works as an Educational Specialist, supporting high school students with learning disabilities to thrive academically. In addition to her educational work, Malena is the drummer for Trestles, a band deeply involved in the California music scene. Trestles has performed at numerous events, with all proceeds benefiting various charitable causes. Malena's commitment to both education and social impact reflects her dedication to creating positive change in her community and beyond.



MARISOL CARLOS HERRERO



Marisol Carlos Herrero is an undergraduate Political Science student at Long Beach State University, passionate about public policy and community outreach. As an AAUW Gender in Public Policy Intern, Marisol maintains a passion for advancing gender equity through legislation and upholding reproductive rights & liberties. Outside of the AAUW, Marisol is also involved in policy advocacy work with Young Invincibles, where she oversees state and local events that establish power building for marginalized communities, centering on advancing healthcare equity, workforce development, higher education accessibility & civic engagement. Marisol is a first-generation student and daughter of immigrants, and has grown committed to uplifting the rights of underserved communities, dedicated to fostering inclusivity she hopes to continue to empower unheard voices, expand political representation, and advance legislation that truly serves the public.

ROHAN BHARDWAJ

Rohan Bhardwaj is a fourth-year student at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), interning with AAUW's Public Policy division. Growing up in the East Bay area of Northern California, Rohan received an education shaped by ethnic studies, which deepened their commitment to advocacy for marginalized communities. As a first-generation Punjabi Queer individual, they took an early role in activism, laying the foundation for their focus in legal reform. Rohan is now pursuing a major in Political Science: Law, Politics, and Policy, aspiring to become a public interest lawyer and drive systemic change. They hope to emphasize the power of policy in creating tangible progress while advancing social justice through legal avenues. Beyond their academic and advocacy work, Rohan is an avid snowboarder and an active competitor with the CSULB Ski and Snowboarding Club. In their free time, they have been learning how to sew as both a creative outlet and a means of practicing sustainable consumption. Through their efforts in policy, law, and community engagement, Rohan remains committed to fostering equity, representation, and meaningful change in every space they enter.



GROUPS

Coffee & Chat



Coffee and Chat from February 1st 2025



Coffee and Chat from March 1st 2025

We look forward to seeing you on the first Saturday of each month at 9:30 a.m. at Pickles Deli Restaurant, 1940 Kelly Rd., Newbury Park, CA for breakfast and conversation. You will have a chance to meet new people and greet long-time friends for socializing and discussing timely issues. The dates for the next 3 months are: April 5, May 3, and June 7. Hope to see you soon!

For more information, please contact Betty Stapleford at
bstaple4d@gmail.com.



GROUPS

High Tea

Save the Date
July 26th
2:00PM - 4:00PM

Happy Hikers

Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. 2-3 miles
Rain cancels | Bring water
Leader - Melanie Ashen (805) 497--6773

April 1 - Hill Canyon in Santa Rosa Valley
Carpool from Oaks Mall near Firestone Tires 9:00 a.m.
April 15 - Chesseboro Canyon
Call Melanie for details



Happy Hikers from February 18th 2025
Jean, Cindy, Melanie & Eloda



GROUPS

Lunch Bunch Book Group

The Lunch Bunch Book Group meets on the third Thursday of the month at restaurants in the community. Our next meeting will be March 20, 2025, at 12:30 pm at Le Pain Quotidien, 2728 Townsgate Road, Westlake Village. We would love to have others join us for a tasty lunch and good conversations and reviews of the book we are currently reading. If you have any questions, please contact Sharon Dyer at (818)903-4645 or email creationsbysharon@prodigy.net.

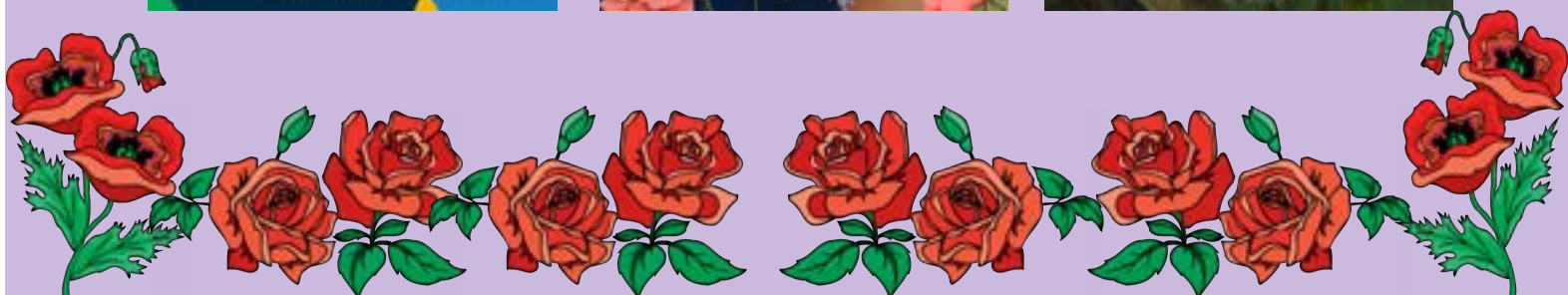
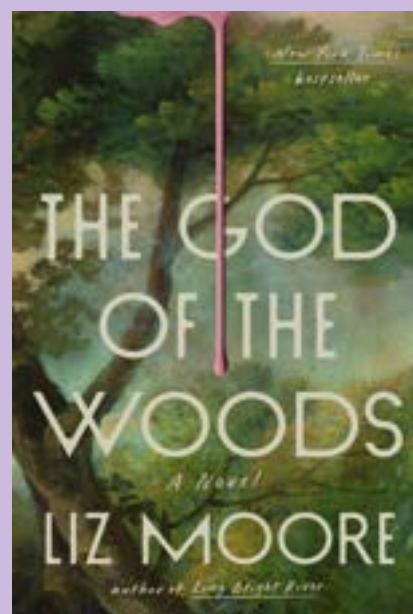
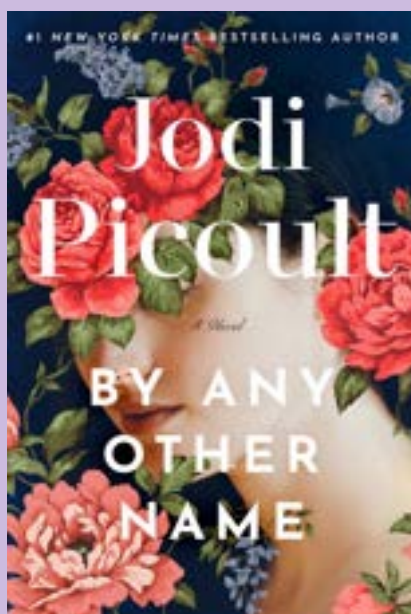
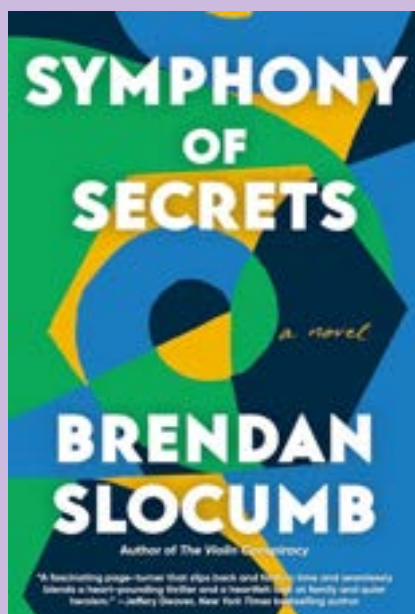
Our March book selection is *Symphony of Secrets* by Brendan Slocumb. This is the current Thousand Oaks Library One City One Book.

We will be attending An Afternoon with Brendon Slocumb on April 27th with lunch beforehand at location to be determined.

The April book selection is *By Any Other Name* by Jodi Picoult.

The book will be discussed on April 17, 2025, at 12:30 pm. The restaurant is to be determined.

The May 15th meeting at 12:30 pm we will be reviewing the book *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore. The restaurant is to be determined.



GROUPS

Daytime Book Group

The Daytime Book Group has been in existence for many years.
But we would love to welcome new members to add the regulars.

We meet on the 4th. Monday of each month, except when holidays interfere, at the Thousand Oaks Library in the Conference Room of the Children's Library at 10 a.m. And we choose the books to read and discuss for the year by consensus. Our dates and books for the next 4 months are:

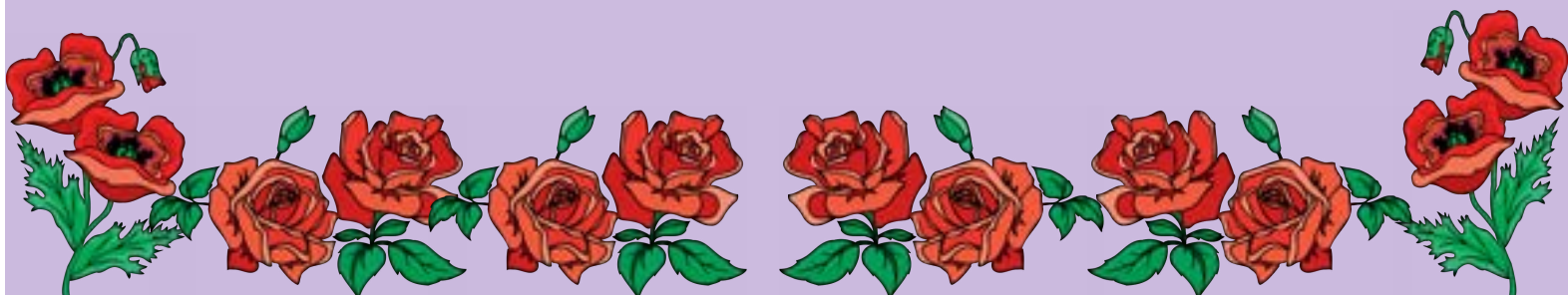
March 24 – West With Giraffes by Lynda Rutledge **or** Symphony of Secrets by Brendan Slocumb

April 28 – The Little Liar by Mitch Albom

May 19 – The Salaryman's Wife by Sujata Massey

June 23 – By Any Other Name by Jodi Picoult

For more information, please contact Betty Stapleford.



GROUPS

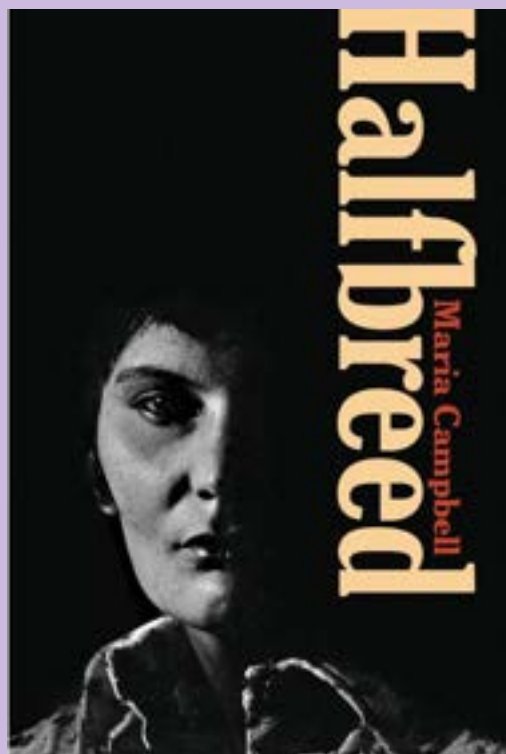
Unity & Diversity Book Group

Our reading focus will travel northward to an interesting memoir titled *Halfbreed*, by the Canadian indigenous Metis author, Maria Campbell. This book has been extensively reissued and therefore, it is important to read the most recent release dated 2019 or more recent. The earlier editions were highly edited, in fact, censored! This is the correct edition and cover.

The book is very short, but the content is profound from what I read and hopefully gives us more of an insight into the issues of the Metis people in Canada.

It was decided that our next meeting would be Thursday, May 1 at 3 PM. Aysha Hussain has kindly offered her home for our next meeting and she lives in Moorpark at 11343 Broadview Drive. Carpools can be arranged.

Thank you very much and I look forward to having our conversation in May about this interesting Canadian memoir



SPEECH TREK

Six participants competed in this year's Speech Trek which was held at the Newbury Park Library. All three local high schools were represented: Thousand Oaks, Newbury Park, and Westlake. The topic this year was as follows: Climate change is happening. The effects are widespread and touch upon almost all aspects of our life on this planet. Select one area of impact and explore the effect climate change is having on women in the USA and around the world.

The winners are: first-place, Harmony Pandey from Thousand Oaks High School; second-place, Riley Shin from Newbury Park High School; and third-place, Mira Jiang from Westlake High School. They will receive a certificate and checks for \$400, \$300, and \$200 respectively. The other participants were Abril Cedeno, Greceldy Hau, and Yejin Kim.

On March 15th the video of Harmony Pandey will be judged in the state competition. This video may be viewed at <https://youtu.be/H8qICCOHfGM?si=FhGnllteOf3en44b>. The winners of the state competition will be announced at the California AAUW annual meeting on April 26. Watch the eblast for the link.

As Chair of this event, I wish to thank all who volunteered to help. The judges were: Sharri Lear, Cindy Speakman, Susan Goetz, and Melanie Ashen. The Ballot Counter was Norma Drew. The Timers were Sharon Dyer and Sakeena Ali. The coaches were Marcine Solarez, Betty Stapleford, Annika Kanugo, and David Birchman. The greeters and supervisors of the contestants were Liz Priedkains and Narda Fargotstein. All were equally important in making this event successful.

Next year there will not be a state competition. This means that we are free to choose our own topic. Please email any suggestions to aauwspeechtrekto@gmail.com or call or text Eloda at (310)809-0926.



Photo 1-Greceldy Hau, Yejin Kim, Riley Shin, Abril Cedano, Harmony Pandey, and Mira Jiang



TECH TREK

We have raised enough money this year to send five girls to the Summer STEM Tech Camp, which will be held at UCSB. Our heartfelt thanks go out to everyone who has generously supported this program. Your financial contributions are deeply appreciated by the young women who now have the opportunity to attend this incredible camp. Thank you for making their world a little brighter.

With the cooperation of CVUSD, eleven girls have successfully navigated the complex application process and will participate in a group interview on Sunday, March 16. Thank you, especially to Nancy Taylor-Walker and Sharri Lear, who are going to assist in the selection process this year coupled with two of our returning teen Tech Trek campers.

The selected participants for Tech Trek 2025 will be announced in the next issue of this newsletter, where you can learn more about them.

We always need adult members who can act as Dorm Moms, which is a very fun experience and if you have a special STEM talent, we can definitely use you as one of our teacher/experts! For more information please go to <https://www.aauw-ca.org/tech-trek/> If you would like to support this camp in any way, please contact Sally Hibbitts.



WOMEN IN HISTORY

This event was presented by the One Spark Academy and AAUW in honor of Women's History Month at the Community Room of the Thousand Oaks Library. A sizable crowd of parents, teachers, AAUW members, and other members of our community gathered to view this event. First, we were informed of how this program started thanks to Stacey Hindy and those who supported her in her desire to become a doctor. Next we viewed a short video about how Women's History Month started: first as a week with the Proclamation issued by President Jimmy Carter in 1980 and then as a month starting in 1987 when Congress passed Public Law 100-9. Then we were introduced to the young women who would be portraying this year's choices of remarkable women.

Five students ranging from sixth grade to eighth grade stood before us in clothing befitting the woman they were representing. Then each gave a first-person narrative telling the accomplishments of this woman. Elizabeth Blackwell, America's first woman physician, was portrayed by Peyton Marriott. Juliet Mandap told us about Rachel Carson and her work as a scientist, ecologist, and writer. Bridget "Biddy" Mason, a freed slave and Los Angeles landowner, was represented by Elliette Guerber. The life of Susan Butcher, an Iditarod champion, was portrayed by Violet Brzezinski. The woman writer who wrote the poem that is at the base of the Statue of Liberty, Emma Lazarus, was narrated by Kenzie Richards.

Afterwards we enjoyed brownies, cookies, strawberries, and other treats while we congratulated the students on their outstanding performances and greeted old and new friends. Posters about each of the five women were displayed on the side tables for us to learn even more about these remarkable women.



INTERBRANCH COUNCIL LUNCHEON

As the sounds of enthusiastic greetings and laughter reached a crescendo, the announcement was made that tables would be called to go to the buffet line for lunch. We filled our plates with salad, rice, refried beans, tacos, and enchiladas; returned to our tables; and talked some more.

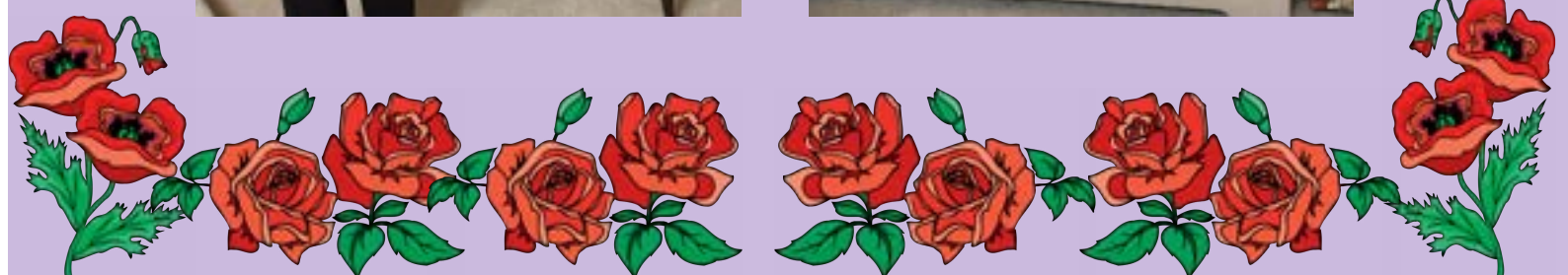
This was followed by the presidents of the three branches introducing their new members, reporting the major functions of the past year, and informing everyone of the activities which were planned for the future. Narda Fargotstein gave our presentation. The Camarillo and Simi Valley branches did likewise.

Then our speaker, Archana Maniar, was introduced and gave her presentation of "Cross Roads and Detours". This Infectious Disease Specialist and Professor of Medicine at UC Davis Health Systems told of her detour into writing which had been a passion of hers since her school days in Simi Valley. Having lived in both Mumbai and the United States she has been able to capture the culture of both in her novel, Dry Spells. As the Goodreads review states, she also "captures the essence of self-discovery". Now Archana has signed a book deal with Lake Union Publishing. We all were drawn into her world and joined her table of family and friends in supporting all her efforts.

The luncheon ended with each table sharing the dates of their birthdays to see who would take home the centerpiece. This was a beautiful plant with white flowers.



HOLIDAY PARTY



WEEKLY E-BLAST

Keep up with forthcoming AAUW or community events that may have been added since the quarterly Oak Twig or get a reminder of programs that you may have forgotten to put on your calendar. That way, you will, hopefully, not miss something you really wanted to do. You will get an email, usually on Sunday afternoon or evening, each week. And if you know of something you need to share with other members, please send it to Betty Stapleford (bstaple4d@gmail) by at least Friday afternoon. We want to keep everyone up to date!

