

Rogan's List



Greetings WFA parents! Fond thanks to the many of you who recommended this book or that movie or the new restaurant in your home city. Keep 'em coming!

Parents who've seen this previously skip this graf, but if you're new to this odd enterprise: three inspirations converged a dozen-plus years ago. As a still-singleton, felt a response was necessary to my expanding circle of married-with-kids friends' annual Holiday Letters, tinged with a certain "here's how life works"-ness. And I loved pal Drew Littman's roundup of his fave movies/books of the year (Drew also originated the *B game/A game* you'll see on next page). Third, I grew up with Roger Angell's annual *New Yorker* rhyming 'poem' of boldface names, & added my own pale imitation after Angell stopped...then *NYer's* Ian Frazier [picked up the tradition](#). Shifted therefore to a 'found poem' of lines from songs by millennial/rising-generation musicians; this year's is after the best-of music page below.

Speaking of poems, a stanza from one long beloved, WS Merwin's *To the New Year*:

so this is the sound of you
here and now whether or not
anyone hears it this is
where we have come with our age
our knowledge such as it is
and our hopes such as they are
invisible before us
untouched and still possible

On to my favorites of 2019. To adapt a venerable Welsh saying, may the best artistic creations of the decade just ending be the worst of the next. To each of you and your wonderful sons and/or daughters here at Wake: here's to a fulfilling, rewarding, rollicking Twenties. Happy New Year, untouched & still possible.

List 2019: Fiction. *Many opportunities this year to lose oneself in fab novel...or find a cause.*

22. Sandra Newman, *The Heavens*. Shakespeare's Dark Lady lands in dystopian future NYC.
21. Michael Parker, *Prairie Fever*. Superb western-US historical tale; great Bookmarks choice.
20. Dana Czapnik, *Falconer*. Teen pickup-hoopster Lucy comes of age; convincing throughout.
19. Jean Kwok, *Searching for Sylvie Lee*. Immigrant-sisters tale with terrific noir twist.
18. Nicole Dennis Benn, *Patsy*. 2nd of three strong coming-to-US novels, this from Jamaica.
17. Maria Kuznetzova, *Oksana, Behave!* 3rd of 3; Oksana takes Florida, post-Ukraine. Delightful.
16. Laila Lalami, *The Other Americans*. Opens "My father was killed on a spring night": hooked.
15. Tessa Hadley, *Late in the Day*. Loved *The Past*; this also explores intimate personal terrain.
14. Sam Lipsyte, *Hark*. LOL'ed my way through this absurdist mirror on our feckless age.
13. Domenica Ruta, *Last Day*. Darker of two best 2019 apocalyptic novels (a growing category).
12. Kimi Eise, *The Lightest Object in the Universe*. More apocalypse—with fewer characters, enabling deeper readerly connection, in painfully realistic how-our-world-crumbles context.
11. Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*. As regular rereader (& avid watcher) of *Handmaid's Tale* this had impossibly high bar; Agnes & Aunt Lydia & the rest got pretty darn close to clearing it.
10. Taffy Brodesser-Akner, *Fleishman is in Trouble*. Grand comic fun masks sad marriage story.
9. Richard Russo, *Chances Are...* Master plot-spinner draws best characters since *Empire Falls*.
8. Téa Obreht, *Inland*. 1890s West cogently recast; & who knew US Army had a Camel Corps?
7. Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. Intrigued by title, stayed for luminous tale, cast as a Vietnamese immigrant's epistle to his (illiterate, adding a layer) mother.
6. Maaza Mengiste, *The Shadow King*. Dear friend (ex-NYU colleague) creates one of most memorable characters (Hirut) in many a year...in Stendhal-worthy meditation on humans at war.
5. Kevin Barry, *Night Boat to Tangier*. Godot-esque opening eventually takes soaring flight.
4. Colson Whitehead, *The Nickel Boys*. Only fiction—in hands of an artist like Whitehead—could adequately capture this horrific reform-school story; deftly feathers in redemption of a sort.
3. Lisa See, *The Island of Sea Women*. Creates unforgettable world—female divers of Jeju.
2. Lucy Ellmann, *Ducks, Newburyport*. Unfolds via one very long—& gripping—sentence.
1. Ann Patchett, *The Dutch House*. Fairytale-level story, complete with wicked stepmother, borne beautifully by Patchett's exquisite prose.

Their B Game Beats Your A Game: First-rank writers whose '19 work not their best. And still.

- Helen Oyeyemi, *Gingerbread*. Magician of short story turns novelist; burst of an opening fades.
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Water Dancer*. More compelling as peerless non-fiction essayist.
- Dave Eggers, *The Parade*. Another unnamed country/destabilized narrator. Come home, Dave.
- Stephen King, *The Institute*. List regulars know I'm a King fan; mesmerizing plot rushes at end.
- Elizabeth Strout, *Olive, Again*. Cherish the 'prequel,' along w/HBO show; this flagged midway.
- Ben Lerner, *The Topeka School*. Striking poetic voice; prefer that to his plot-minimal prose.
- Neal Stephenson, *Fall*. Not at level of his *Seveneves* or *Cryptonomicon*...but really, what is?
- Nell Freudenberger, *Lost and Wanted*. Love her expert rendering of theoretical physics (!), & dead (?) friend subplot is riveting. Only drawback: not especially engaging narrator.
- Lee Child, *Blue Moon*. Even for us Reacher devotees, the body count here felt gratuitous.

Non-Fiction: *Best-in-show in wide array of categories I pored/rambled through this year.*

- 2020 Aspirants: Pete Buttigieg, *Shortest Way Home*. Tackled ‘em all; Mayor P. most readable.
- Art: JR, *Can Art Change the World?* Reworked 2nd ed. of French street artist-enigma manifesto.
- Art-obiography: Michael Eric Dyson, *Jay-Z*. Gripping, non-hagiographic assessment of legend.
- And Ben Folds, *A Dream About Lightning Bugs*. Winston-Salem locals will cringe...& forgive.
- Biography: George Packer, *Our Man*. Ultra-complex Richard Holbrooke gains biographer worthy of task. *And*: instant-classic Sue Prideaux on Nietzsche (*I Am Dynamite!*).
- Friend-ography: Emily Wilson, *When I Go Back to My Home Country*. Charming, complex tale of legendary poet A.A. Ammons’s sojourns home in the South. He wrote [this poem](#) as thanks.
- Cityscapes: Carlo Rotella, *The World Is Always Coming to an End*. Chicago remade...& remade.
- *And*: Dean Franco, *The Border & the Line*. Identity/interracial encounters in many-textured LA.
- Complex Virtues: Jane Brox, *Silence*. Eloquently contrasts monastery...& penitentiary.
- Concept: Gene Weingarten, *One Day*. Cleverly-conceived portrait; where were *you* that day?
- Courts/Law: Corey Robin, *The Enigma of Clarence Thomas*. Thoughtful, critical, empathetic.
- Defense of Liberalism: Adam Gopnik, *A Thousand Small Sanities*. A persuasive reclaiming.
- Defense of Earth: David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*. Cf. Bill McKibben, *Falter*.
- Disasters: Adam Higginbotham, *Midnight in Chernobyl*. Read it alongside HBO’s *Chernobyl*.
- Essays: Emmanuel Carrère, *97,196 Words*. Nearly every one exquisitely chosen. *And*: Jia Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*. Her singular voice amplifies American cultural perversities/delights.
- Finance: Tom Nicholas, *VC: An American History*. Clear, little-biased account of VC history.
- Food/Wine: Ian Taplin, *Evolution of Luxury*. WFU prof on how wine/art became luxury goods.
- Global/History: Anna Sherman, *The Bells of Old Tokyo*. So evocative felt I was back in 東京.
- *And*: Penny Sinanoglou, *Partitioning Palestine*. How partition politics was/wasn’t worked out.
- Global/Geopolitics: Julia Lovell, *Maoism*. Breadth aplenty, but eye for detail makes this work.
- Global/Travel: Peter Hessler, *The Buried*. Life among Egyptians during/after Arab Spring.
- Memoir: Sarah Broom, *The Yellow House*. New Orleans upbringing: noir & nostalgia.
- #MeToo: Ronan Farrow, *Catch & Kill*. Book version—worth every page—of [NYer article](#).
- *And*: Jodi Kantor/Megan Twohey, *She Said*. Books best read together, for full knaves’ portrait.
- #Occupy: Stephanie Land, *Maid*. Heart-rending microcosmic account of inequity’s toll.
- #Parkland: Dave Cullen, *Parkland*. Radical shift from his *Columbine*, to heroic students after.
- Military: Rick Atkinson, *The British Are Coming*. 1st vol. of much-awaited Revolution trilogy.
- Mountains, Figurative: David Brooks, *The Second Mountain*. Extended paean to eulogy virtues.
- Music: Daryl Sanders, *That Thin, Wild Mercury Sound*. Firsthand account, meticulously retold, of Dylan/studio band recording *Blonde on Blonde* across a Nashville summer. Thanks Lauren!
- Nature: Robert MacFarlane, *Underland*. Learned so much...a whole world deep under our feet.
- Religion: Karen Armstrong, *Lost Art of Scripture*. Our age’s most sure-footed spiritual writer.
- Sporting Life: Melissa Isaacson, *State*. Gripping replay of author’s 1979 state hoops title run.
- University Education: Paul Tough, *The Years That Matter Most*. And how best to curate them.
- US History: Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*. Slaves’ tormentors hardly limited to males. *And*: Alan Taylor, *Thomas Jefferson’s Education*. Insightful reconstruction.
- Well-Being: Akiko Busch, *How to Disappear*. Method & value of ‘slipping out of the picture.’
- *And*: Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing*. Captures anti-‘attention economy’ zeitgeist.

Longreads. Thanks esp. to Browser, saw more great longreads than ever; here's best, w/links.

D. Helmuth, "[If San Francisco Is So Great, Why Is Everyone I Love Leaving?](#)" *Curbed SF*. Agh.

R. McIntyre, "[In Memory of Yellowstone Wolf 926F](#)," *Outside*. "Until the last moment of her life...she always figured out a way to survive, to carry on." O poignancy!

I. Dreiblatt, "[A Theory of the American TV Commercial](#)," *Believer*. Lingers far longer than ads.

D. McCloskey, "[Learning to Love Trade w/China](#)," *Reason*. "If we import more from China than we export to China, we make up difference with engraved portraits of Ben Franklin."

E. Mandery, "[Teaching Ethics in Appalachia](#)/Bridging America's Partisan Divide," *Politico*. "Liberal New Yorker" comes to App State U., finds a possible path to restoring US comity.

M. Shaer, "[Scientists Giving Dead Brains New Life](#). What Could Go Wrong?" *NY Times Mag*. Brains kept alive after "death"—& vexing ethical dilemmas raised thereby.

V. Stivers, "[Cooking With Lampedusa](#)," *Paris Review*. Truly original: literary meals, w/recipes.

G. Haigh, "[India's One-Man Golden Age](#)," *Tortoise*. Cricket's Virat Tohli: plausibly best ever.

V.R. Newkirk, "[The Great Land Robbery](#)," *Atlantic*. Black farmers systematically defrauded.

J. Fan, "[The American Dream is Alive in China](#)," *Palladium*. Resonates w/my 25 years of visits.

S. Harlan, "[Reasons That Your Faculty Retreat is Not Actually a Retreat](#)," *Avidly*. Touché.

M. Desch, "[How Political Science Became Irrelevant](#)," *Chronicle of Higher Ed*. Put briefly: rigor > relevance. 🙄

J. Bridle, "[The Render Ghosts](#)," *R/D*. Peak modernity; seems out of a William Gibson novel.

A. MacGillis, "[The Tragedy of Baltimore](#)," *ProPublica*. Nuanced account (by a local).

E. Carrère, "[Who is the Real Dice Man?](#)" *The Guardian*. Fans of a 60s cult novel—whose lives are often weirdly affected after reading—thrill to author's quasi-expose.

M. Housel, "[Five Lessons from History](#)," *C*. "The dead outnumber the living 14:1; we ignore [their] accumulated experience at our peril."

E. Gårding, "[A Theory of Very Nearly Everything](#)," *Plus Maths*. Skim equations; stay for ideas.

G. Garcia Marquez, "[How I Began to Write](#)," *Paris Review*. Maestro of letters reminisces.

C. Whitlock, "[At War with the Truth](#)," *Washington Post*. Our age's Pentagon Papers. And: A. Kroll, "[Meet the Lawyers...](#)" *Rolling Stone*. Profiles in eco-courage, esp. Earthjustice's Caputo!

L. Haas, "[#ETTU? Notes on Cancel Culture](#)," *New Republic*. Sweeping #MeToo synthesis.

1. A. Stone, "[Thinking About One's Birth](#)," *Aeon*. Death anxiety: universal. What about *birth* anxiety? Fascinating meditation...1st of 2019 **quartet on life's cycles**, following.
2. A.H. Petersen, "[How Millennials Became the Burnout Generation](#)," *Buzzfeed*. Sparked class's most intense discussion among my youngest-millennial (18-21) students.
3. L. Miller, "[A Joyful Testament to Middle Age](#)," *The Cut*. "I joke more; I try to laugh more, I have to. I feel more and hurt more and fear more. And I love more." 'Joyful' only partly ironic.
4. M. Taubert, "[Choosing a Good Death](#)," *Quillette*. Palliative-care doc's meditation on his extraordinary experiences will move you to tears...and, inevitably, deep reflection.

G. Travis, "[How the Boeing 737 Max Disaster Looks to a Software Developer](#)." Instructive (if long) account of tragedy. Aviation fans also see Langewiesche's [account of Malaysia Air 370](#).

M. Bjornerud, "[Reading Seawater](#)," *Inference*. Why is the sea salty? No, really: why?

C. Newton, "[The Trauma Floor](#)," *The Verge*. Extended sojourn among Facebook's valiant—and often traumatized—15K-strong team of content moderators. Painful, essential read.

M. Scott, "[Indonesia's New Islamist Politics](#)," *NY Review Books*. Essential window into future.

"[Rethinking the Numbers on Inequality](#)," *The Economist*. Revisits widely-accepted lament that the inequality gap—in US & most countries—is wide...& growing.

A. Brooks, "[Your Professional Decline Is Coming](#) (Much) Sooner Than You Think," *Atlantic*. Most-discussed piece in my circles this year; depressingly provocative, though w/note of hope.

J. Lepore, "[The Lingerings of Loss](#)," *New Yorker*. Astonishingly beautiful remembrance.

B. Holmes, "[Inside the Secret Team Dinners](#) that Built the Spurs Dynasty," *ESPN Magazine*. Michelin stars! Fine wines! Who could resist sitting down with Pop after this? Not me...



Movies/TV. Amid all #MegaDisney fuss, plenty of excellent filmic fare. *If you're looking for...*

- Game of Thrones fix: Quite moving HBO doc *The Last Watch*, behind scenes of final season.
 - Beautifully shot, meandering plot: *Last Black Man in San Francisco* and *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood*. Cinematography of both brilliant; languid unfolding less so ('til bang-up endings).
 - Teen angst, in Hughes/Apatow tradition: *Booksmart*. Molly Ringwald, move on over.
 - Teen angst, in Shia LaBeouf tradition: *Honey Boy*. Shia wrote...& plays his own felonious dad.
 - Grateful Netflix was invented: *Irishman*; *Marriage Story*. Just stream 'em.
 - Grateful animation was invented: *Toy Story 4* (as subtly profound as predecessor); *Ce Magnifique Gâteau* (astonishing stop-action revisiting of Belgium's colonization of Congo).
 - 2 Kleenex boxes: *The Farewell*. Oscars galore in Lulu Wang's (near, I hope) future.
 - Power of Music, I: *Blinded by the Light*. Springsteen tunes make life worth living.
 - Power of Music, II: *Yesterday*. Beatles tunes keep Earth spinning. Worse of two, if picking.
 - Must-sees you haven't heard of: *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Celine Sciamma!); *Amazing Grace* (Aretha!) *Monos* (that cast!); *Yellow Rose* (Diane Pargas!); *I Was at Home, But...* (Jakob LaSalle!); *Transit* (Franz Rogowski!); *Atlantics* (Mati Diop!); *High Life* (Claire Denis!).
 - Heard too much of, but watch anyway: *Avengers: Endgame* (aka *Avengers XXVIII*, approx.).
 - Docs that Roc: *63 Up* (best in this beloved series for 35 years); *For Sama* (terrifying Aleppo toll, felt first-hand); *Apollo 11* (will stir you right out of year-end ennui); *Honeyland* (Haditze, 50-ish Macedonian beekeeper, a fave movie character of 2019).
 - Disturbing concept, ends redemptively: Off-every-wall tragicomic *Jojo Rabbit*. Thanks Jen!
 - Disturbing concept, ends disturbingly: *Midsommar*, w/compulsively watchable Florence Pugh.
 - Superheroine award: Bree Larson, *Captain Marvel*. Despite daft plot devices, Larson a gamer.
 - Superhero award: Joaquin Phoenix, *Joker*. Film polarized critics, but Phoenix earns an A.
 - See on big screen: *1917*. Panoramic high drama almost too much to take in at one viewing.
 - OK on small screen: *Ad Astra*. Tho big-budget space film, drama in intimate familial moments.
 - See on no screen: *The Goldfinch*. Cinematic novel to adapt from, strong cast...& just plain bad.
 - Shot on tiny screen: Innovator Soderbergh's *High Flying Bird*, stirring tale made on his iPhone.
 - Terrifying: Not horror films, but edge-of-seat: *Us* (Nyong'o showcase); *The Lighthouse*.
 - Best of TV: *Fleabag* (skip to Season 2, then join us fans' praying it's not done); *Chernobyl* (painstakingly recreates not just nuclear-winter terrors, but life in the USSR).
 - Millennial whodunit: *Under the Silver Lake*, with topnotch Andrew Garfield & Riley Keogh.
 - Vintage whodunit: Also year's best ensemble cast; *Knives Out* is great, heart-pounding fun.
 - Modern whodunit: *Parasite* justly on many critics' best-of lists, w/twists you never see coming.
- All three dark comedies' ultimate villains: the 1%. Filleting of privilege marks *fin-de-decade*.

Music. *Tough on the biz, yes, but Spotify/YouTube et. al. highlight plethora of new voices.*

- JARV IS, “**Must I Evolve?**” Covers 14 billion years since Big Bang in wildly lively 6:41.
- Making Movies, “**No Te Calles.**” *Sin justificación/Se muere la nación.* ¡Protest!, never catchier.
- Baby Rose, “**Mortal.**” Deserves Eilish (below)/2019 fame; hard-hitting lyrics & sensuous R&B.
- Blacks’ Myths, “**Redbone.**” Jazz fused with protest poems: potent brew.
- Rainbow Kitten Surprise, “**Heart.**” Pride of Boone (NC) less irreverent, still super-tuneful.
- Ozzy Osbourne, “**Under the Graveyard.**” Yes, Oz-man still above ground—& hardly reduced.
- A\$AP Ferg, “**Jet Lag.**” “See ‘em turnin’ on they brothers/Like Fredo to me...”
- Jai Paul, “**He.**” Oft-claimed heir to Prince throne, back after 7 years with kickin’ two-track EP.
- Charli XCX, “**White Mercedes.**” Way beyond Boom Clap days; best hook on a full CD’s worth.
- Fat Soul, “**The War Is Over.**” Scandanavia’s best indie outfit unilaterally declares peace.
- Stormzy, “**Vossi Bop.**” Finest UK grime MC’s rapid-fire lyrics...in irresistible English accent.
- Barnes Courtney, “**99.**” “High-strung, young & dumb/We had no fear”: anti-millennial anthem.
- Grimes, “**4Æm.**” Broke the Net when sample leaked a year ago; full version upholds the fuss.
- MIKA, “**Tomorrow.**” Earworm pop with sneaky substance. More ALL-CAPS standouts:
- BROCKHAMPTON, “**SUGAR.**” Ironically-titled “boy band,” this Texas rap collective bangs.
- HAIM, “**Summer Girl.**” But for Lana’s latest (see below), year’s definitive summer tune.
- Aisha Badru, “**Water.**” Taps into another dimension (“People are water/They need to be free”).
- Emily Scott Robinson, “**Better With Time.**” I’m a sucker for nostalgic-sweet slide-guitar tunes.
- ML Buch, “**I Feel Like Giving You Things.**” A great Ash discovery—like half the choices here.
- Bruce Springsteen, “**Hello Sunshine.**” Still the Boss—& still spinning signature subtle irony.
- The Highwomen, “**Crowded Table.**” #MeToo in lyrical majesty; hope a tour is in the works.
- Better Oblivion Community Center, “**Dominos.**” Two faves—Oberst/Bridges—in joint effect.
- Drake, “**Money in the Grave.**” Two inventive 2019 albums from hardest-working music superstar; this best of his year wasn’t on either (solo release, with smooth Rick Ross guest turn).
- Hank, Pattie, & the Current, “**A Better Way.**” Classical-bluegrass blend insanely appealing.
- Brittany Howard, “**History Repeats.**” Her potent brew: 70s R&B/60s politics/2020s sensibility.
- Branford Marsalis, “**Cianna.**” Tuneful LP from jazz’s reigning sax-master peaks on this 7:32.
- Billie Eilish, “**bad guy.**” Not as swept away as every millennial/Gen Next, but yeah.
- Clairo, “**Alewife.**” Not as Gen-Z famous as Eilish, but should be; debut *Immunity* is all that.
- Andrew Bird, “**Sisyphus.**” Thrusts you believably into the doomed rock-pusher’s mind.
- Maggie Rogers, “**Back in My Body.**” Debut album hit 2.5 years after “Alaska”; worth the wait.
- Pedro Capó, “**Calma.**” My fave of bumper ’19 crop of Latin music (*Despacito*; *Con Calma*...).
- Solange, “**Binz.**” Like an afterthought, at 1:51...then wouldn’t leave my head.
- FKA twigs, “**holy terrain.**” Top cut on saddest album since David Gray/*White Ladder*.
- J.S. Ondara, “**Saying Goodbye.**” From Nairobi to NYC, inimitable catchy sound.
- Sharon Van Etten, “**Seventeen.**” Replaces Stevie Nicks as author of that most awkward year.
- King Princess, “**Ain’t Together.**” Heartache soulfully laid bare.
- Lana Del Rey, “**Doin’ Time.**” Sweet-slow sound of my 2019 summer.
- Mandolin Orange, “**Wolves.**” Extended metaphor for a divorce/breakup works achingly well.
- Vampire Weekend, “**This Life.**” Try their haunting acoustic Electric Lady Studio version.
- Lizzo, “**Truth Hurts.**” It’s her (100 percent!) world; we’re just living in it.

Found Musical Poem, 2019

(Lyrics from millennial/rising-generation, randomly assembled; all songs are on previous page)

Know that I am here and in the poem of my mind
Sullen, twisted words finding their way in every line

I think that you're all the same
Constantly being led astray

Oh, take this veil from off my eyes
My burning sun will, some day, rise

Hallelujah, holy lion, word to Judas
How I'm supposed to trust what you say is the truest?

Truth hurts/Needed something more exciting

I've been cheating through this life
And all its suffering
Oh Christ; am I good for nothing?

I just don't want to be back in this place again
I mean, I done cried a little
Tried a little, failed a little
I don't wanna do it again

If you pray for me, I know you play for keeps
Calling my name, calling my name
Taking the feeling of Promethazine away

But you know I'll be alright
Eighth grade was never that tight

My soul? So cynical

Now may I ask if you can find it in your spirit
To leave us all alone and go and mind your f*in' business

And if you're not feeling ready
There's always tomorrow

Sources: Rogers, Van Etten, Del Rey, Brockhampton, Lizzo, Vampire, Howard, fka twigs, Clairo, eilish, Stormzy, Better Oblivion CC

Podcasts. *New List category; had more of these recommended to me (especially by students/recent grads) than any other art form.*

15. Remembrance of things past: [*Mobituaries*](#). Mo Rocca's indispensable eulogies, far & wide: people, also places and things (e.g., representation, via black Congressmen of Reconstruction).

14. Behavior, fast & slow: [*The Hidden Brain*](#). My students' reliably favorite topic: behavioral psychology. Shankar Vedantam draws on *Nudge*-style insights to explain why we act as we do.

13. Behind the music: [*The Jump*](#). Iconic musician Shirley Manson (Garbage) draws out many of most interesting (& most private) figures in contemporary pop/rap/indie scene.

12. Athlete's-eye view: [*Pull Up*](#). Star Blazers guard CJ McCollum does serviceable job of sports interviews (Simmons still gold standard), but 'from the court' perspective makes this a gem.

11. The past brought alive: [*You're Dead To Me*](#). Each episode introduces historical figure/s in highly entertaining fashion; you'll never forget how the Aztecs lived (for example).

10. The future brought nearer: [*Secret History of the Future*](#). Always-intriguing glimpses ahead.

9. Earth Day all year long: [*Richest Hill*](#). Who knew a Superfund-cleanup narrative could stay so riveting? Looking forward ardently to Episode Six. Hat-tip to Saskia.

8. US politics, comparatively: [*Rough Translation*](#). Conceptually brilliant: echo-chamber issues in Washington as seen abroad, from race/class in Brazil to French employees of McDonalds.

7. Spoken-word maestro: [*Have You Heard George's Podcast?*](#) Eponymous George the Poet spins stories rippling out from his own consciousness to race, class, music, & Life Itself.

6. Art world captured: [*Beyond the Studio*](#). From sympathetic how-to tips for artists to clearest explanation ever of the contemporary art market, Amanda & Nicole cover it all.

5. Authentically vulnerable celebrity: [*Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend*](#). 'Lonely at the top' a tedious cliché, but rich personal texturing here always compelling. Unbeatable guest list helps.

4. Original sin bared: [*1619*](#). Most instructive and anguishing part of *NYT* landmark 1619 Project.

3. OG still on top: [*Serial*](#). Sarah Koenig's two days at WFU whetted appetites for Season 4.

2. Feel-good variety show: [*Dolly Parton's America*](#). Amid world of hurt/division, Dolly heals.

1. The perfect crime: [*Crime Story*](#). HBO creative mastermind Kary Antholis's treasure trove of terrific interviews, *Serial*-esque true-crime tales, Expert Witness commentary, much much more.

Restaurants. First a moment of silent sorrow at Hominy Grill's closing... & on to US standouts from 2019. Yeah, I eat out a lot, usually at new-to-me/locals-rec'd places. Why waste a meal?

NYC: *always first dining city in my heart/palate.*

- **Llama San.** Cottage Family tried every dish; best Nikkei (Peruvian-Japanese) cuisine in USA.
- **701West.** John Fraser closing Dovetail a mini-tragedy; opening in Midtown is redemption.
- **Rezdôra.** Rustic Italian in Flatiron: stunningly good from the get-go. Go & get.
- **High Street on Hudson.** Great farewell b'fast before Eliz/Brian decamped for Italy; liked this New American import from Philly so much went back for dinner. Cauliflower Caramelle: yes.
- **The Jones.** Ellen/Kelly return to the Loft 'hood; all of us lamenting Great Jones Café can relax.
- **The Binc.** Over in beeRat's Brooklyn haunts, wash down Parmesan crème brûlée in style.
- **TWA Lounge.** Only JFK layover I can say I've enjoyed, thanks to Gerber Group's as-ever-supreme cocktails (Sunken Bar) & best airport fare you'll ever eat (Jean-Georges).
- **Dirty French.** Missed this Major Food Group sensation when opened, so did brunch, lunch, & dinner on successive visits. From W-S's IdeasCity crew to elegant-palate Ellis, all cheered.
- **Hutong.** Worthy successor in Le Cirque space; Sirio forgotten once neo-Sichuan dishes landed.
- **Gotham Bar & Grill.** Victoria Blamey rules surehandedly over another sacral spot restored.
- **Pastis.** And *another*—this time by Mr. McNally himself. Less scene/better food, Elise/I agree.
- **Ghost Donkey.** Mezcal drinks w/luscious *nachos especiales*; speakeasy style adds to thrill.

Northeast beyond NYC: *missing Philly this year; eager to try Zahav crew's new K'Far.*

- **Seven Reasons,** DC. APSA dining crew here for inventive pan-Latin; happily lingered late.
- **Bistro du Midi,** Boston. All buzzy when opened in '16; settled into delectable groove by now.
- **Rochambeau,** Boston. A+ bistro lunch w/Prof. Morone; squint a bit & you're in the Marais.
- **Anafre DC.** Mexican seafood done delectably. Alfredo Solis's *vuelve a la vida*; weep-worthy.
- **Shojo,** Boston. Usual Chinatown stop is Ruckus, but this new pan-Asian beckoned instead.

Southeast: *first 2020 Houston stop will have me at new Yu-Heugel joint Squable.*

- **Bywater American Bistro,** NOLA. Chef-genius Nina Compton in full effect.
- **Five-Sixty,** Dallas. Wolfgang Puck's highest (five-sixty feet) showcase, a 360-degree view of the Big D. A little too vertiginous for one of our dining crew, but Puck's fare as ever exquisite.
- **Zasu,** NOLA. Sue Zemanick's jewel of a place means "once again"; apt directive to her diners.
- **New Sichuan,** Winston-Salem. Just-so spicing lifts newcomer into running for best NC Asian.
- **Ponce City Market,** Atlanta. From Root Baking Co. to tasty Szechuan: Eataly, A-Town style.
- **Halcyon,** Charlotte. High above the US Mint, salubrious small plates Downtown. Thanks Tre!
- **Dough-Joe's,** Winston-Salem. Food truck turned charming Reynolda Village doughnut heaven.

Cali/West: *great Chicago meal at Jennifer/Sean's (go Deacs!); Indian next up, at Superkhana.*

- **Margot,** Culver City/LA. Best rooftop dining in California...or maybe anywhere.
- **Jax Fish House,** Boulder. Up there with Frasca on Denver-area list. Grazie sempre, K-Don.
- **Daeho,** Japantown/SF. Korean *kalbijim* & wagyu tasting done to perfection.
- **Barbusa,** San Diego. Modern Sicilian treats. Fantastic call by new SD residents Frank/Karen!
- **Tasting Kitchen,** Venice/LA. Now tops my Abbott Kinney list, which is saying a lot.