

BOOKS

NATIONAL BEST-SELLERS THE NEW YORK TIMES FICTION

1. 'Gray Mountain,' John Grisham
2. 'All the Light We Cannot See,' Anthony Doerr
3. 'Hope to Die,' James Patterson
4. 'Revelation,' Stephen King
5. 'The Escape,' David Baldacci
6. 'Tom Clancy: Full Force and Effect,' Mark Greaney
7. 'Leaving Time,' Jodi Picoult
8. 'Redeployment,' Phil Klay
9. 'The Burning Room,' Michael Connelly
10. 'Flesh and Blood,' Patricia Cornwell

NONFICTION

1. 'Killing Patton,' Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
2. '41,' George W. Bush
3. 'Yes Please,' Amy Poehler
4. 'What If,' Randall Munroe
5. 'Unbroken,' Laura Hillenbrand
6. 'Humans of New York,' Brandon Stanton
7. 'Not That Kind of Girl,' Lena Dunham
8. 'Being Mortal,' Atul Gawande
9. 'As You Wish,' Cary Elwes with Joe Layden
10. 'The Innovators,' Walter Isaacson

PAPERBACK FICTION

1. 'Gone Girl,' Gillian Flynn
2. 'The Alchemist,' Paulo Coelho
3. 'The Martian,' Andy Weir
4. 'Orphan Train,' Christina Baker Kline
5. 'Dark Places,' Gillian Flynn
6. 'Fifty Shades of Grey,' E.L. James
7. 'Sharp Objects,' Gillian Flynn
8. 'Americanah,' Chimamanda Adichie
9. 'The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry,' Gabrielle Charbonnet
10. 'The Strange Library,' Haruki Murakami

Rankings reflect sales for the week that ended Dec. 27 at thousands of venues where a wider range of general interest books are sold nationwide.

LOCAL BEST-SELLERS BOOK PEOPLE FICTION

1. 'All the Light We Cannot See,' Anthony Doerr
2. 'Ancillary Justice,' Ann Leckie
3. 'Station Eleven,' Emily St. John Mandel
4. 'The Strange Library,' Haruki Murakami
5. 'The Martian,' Andy Weir
6. 'Ready Player One,' Ernest Cline
7. 'Inherent Vice,' Thomas Pynchon
8. 'Dept. of Speculation,' Jenny Offill
9. 'Americanah,' Chimamanda Adichie
10. 'The Goldfinch,' Donna Tartt

NONFICTION

1. 'The Life-Hanging Magic of Tidying Up,' Marie Kondo
2. 'Wild,' Cheryl Strayed
3. 'Yes Please,' Amy Poehler
4. 'Steal Like an Artist,' Austin Kleon
5. 'Show Your Work,' Austin Kleon
6. 'The Power of Habit,' Charles Duhigg
7. 'The Empire of the Summer Moon,' S.C. Gwynne
8. 'Deep Down Dark,' Hector Tobar
9. 'Unbroken,' Laura Hillenbrand
10. 'Small Victories,' Anne Lamott

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

1. 'Scorpion Mountain,' John Flanagan
2. 'The Book With No Pictures,' B.J. Novak
3. 'Brown Girl Dreaming,' Jacqueline Woodson
4. 'Little Owl's Night,' Divya Srinivasan
5. 'Thank You, Bear,' Greg Foley
6. 'The Little Prince,' Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
7. 'Bad Magic,' Pseudonymous Bosch
8. 'The Day the Crayons Quit,' Drew Daywalt
9. 'Goodnight Moon,' Margaret Wise Brown
10. 'Once Upon an Alphabet,' Oliver Jeffers

Rankings for hardbacks and paperbacks combined for the week ending Jan. 4.

TEXAS TITLES

UT's Sánchez, a poetic journey, and a reformer

By Charles Ealy  
cealy@statesman.com

GEORGE I. SÁNCHEZ  
Carlos Kevin Blanton  
Yale University Press, \$45



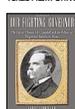
A&M's Carlos Kevin Blanton makes a bold statement at the beginning of this new biography, and he sets out to prove it.

"In a sentence, George I. Sánchez of the University of Texas is the single most important Mexican American intellectual between the Great Depression and the Great Society," writes Blanton. Blanton considers Sánchez to be iconoclastic. Born in 1906 to a poor mining family, he "became," by the 1930s, one of the only Mexican Americans in the country to hold a doctoral degree, attaining the status of a leading intellectual of his community while in his late twenties. "He began his career as an Albuquerque public school teacher and administrator, then attended graduate school in Texas and California. Afterward, he worked at the New Mexico State Department of Education through the Great Depression, eventually losing his job due to political retaliation. But in 1940, he acquired a tenured position at the University of Texas, having written that same year his magnum opus, "Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans."

Although his intellectual contributions to the integration and assimilation of Mexican-Americans are widely recognized today, his stay at the University of Texas had tumultuous moments. His fervor for removing barriers to education earned him enemies, and his activism in the American Civil Liberties Union and the League of United Latin American Citizens stirred controversy. Still, "he played a role in his university's halting embrace of the Center for Mexican American Studies just before his death in the spring of 1972," Blanton writes.

"Sánchez's lifetime mission of integrating his people so that they might claim their rightful, equal place at the table of American life continues," Blanton says. "All students of history, intellectuals, activists, and engaged citizens can stand to benefit from learning more about George I. Sánchez. His struggle is that important."

OUR FIGHTING GOVERNOR  
Janet Schmelzer  
Texas A&M University Press, \$45



As with many new books, the subtitle here tells the thrust of this biography: "The Life of Thomas M. Campbell and the Politics of Progressive Reform in Texas."

Janet Schmelzer, a professor of history at Tarleton State University, tries to put the governorship of Campbell, from 1907 to 1911, into the context of progressive reform throughout the South. As Schmelzer details, Campbell followed in the footsteps of Gov. James Stephen Hogg by pushing through laws involving social welfare, public education and tax reform during his tenure. She traces his life from his early days in East Texas to his career as a lawyer, then as a Democratic Party leader.

She notes that Campbell "embraced the general concept that the state through public agencies and boards had a responsibility for the social welfare of the people, yet he believed that at times local control, not state control, best served the needs of citizens." She also notes, "like many of his southern counterparts, he allowed the status of blacks to remain locked into segregation and the practice of white paternalism."

Schmelzer's book is the only biography of Campbell, and she argues that he deserves a place among other progressive Southern leaders at the time. She specifically mentions Hoke Smith of Georgia, Charles B. Aycock of

North Carolina, Andrew Jackson Montague of Virginia and Benjamin Comer of Alabama. In this regard, she's drawing on the scholarship of Dewey W. Grantham and his book, "Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition." Despite the value of Schmelzer's research and arguments, the book could have used closer editing. I hesitate to point out errors, because we all make them. But I would be remiss if I didn't note that the progressive governor of Alabama was named Bratton Bragg Comer, not Benjamin.

SOUTH SUN RISES  
Valentin Sandoval  
Western Edge Press, \$14.95



Valentin Sandoval, an El Paso videographer and filmmaker, has turned to poetry to write a memoir of his family's journey in

"South Sun Rises." The bilingual edition, translated from the Spanish by Mabel Weber, deals mostly with the life of his mother, whose husband dies before Valentin is born, and who moves to Juarez, then crosses the Rio Bravo, to settle in El Paso. Despite the beauty of the language, the tale is gritty, dealing with gangs, drug wars and rape. "Juarez bleeds, / filling the thirsty river / with the blood of sinners / dumped onto the desert, / left to the vultures, / the ravenous dogs / of the blazing heat, / Narcopreneurs."

Sandoval recognizes that he's been born into a cycle of struggles. But he finds refuge in his verses. "My soil and vegetation / were left out, water neglected, / as the roots almost dried up. / But as I traveled back to the adviser of writing, / I discover yeast within / every letter that I write, / feeds the damp fertile / hunger of my dark spirit / to give back / the life through my words."

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FICTION

Blakely misfires in '70s Austin

By Zane Jungman  
Special to the American-Statesman

Soon after cracking open "A Song to Die For," you distinctly hear a 3-year-old wailing too big for his pants. He comes complete with a treehouse and a "No Girls Allowed" sign. He's from another time and wants to tell all about his boyhood adventures.

At some points, "A Song to Die For" is a lucky western, celebrating adventure in a style pulled straight from Boy's Life. But the novel's lighthearted fable of dream-chasing young masculine heroes gets drowned out by juvenile noises. The humor is derogatory, repetitive and crass enough that you can smell the beer stench. When tested, this Country-Western clicks like a six-shooter with three blanks. It's half-full, lightweight and packs little punch.

Marble Falls musician and novelist Mike Blakely centers the novel on 1970s Austin, a cradle of country music culture, a hotbed of mafia which jobs, a no-man's land where true men find meteoric stardom. From its Stetson hats to its Lucchese boots, "A Song to Die For" runs syrup-thick with pulp.

Bill "Creed" Mason, a Vietnam vet and one-hit-wonder country musician, has a golden boy personality that con-

AUTHOR SPEAKS

Blakely will speak and sign copies of his book at 7 p.m. Wednesday at BookPeople, 603 N. Lamar Blvd. He'll be appearing with Robert Knott, who'll sign "The Bridge."

trasts sharply with his corrupt showbiz habit.

Creed engineers a musical comeback with retired legend Luster Burnett. Rapidly the two recruit four bandmates, write songs and fire up the tour bus. As Creed and band survive bad bookings and meetings, his former ex-partner Dixie Houson, alternating chapters follow Texas Ranger Hooley Johnson. Hooley investigates Franco Martini, a hit man suspected of murdering his sister Rosa Martini. While not initially connected, Creed's dreams run afoul of the wrong dudes.

From the get-go, it's clear Creed will bring justice to a depraved entertainment industry. The good men will get the girl.

"This novel's goal isn't the same as Blakely's historical fiction works like "Moon Medicine" or "Comanche Dawn." Authenticity and research just aren't present. Instead, the novel finds fun by injecting Old West lit into 1970s Austin. Blakely's play with genres is funny if not always deep, evoking the joys of a spaghetti western.

Despite hitting an occasional groove, the novel's sour notes are many. Creed and

band's predictable trials feel too thin to support a whole novel.

Adding to the problem, "A Song to Die For" takes a messy toy box approach to storytelling and dumps cowboys, prostitutes, gunfights, car chases and goons all over the floor. It can't make sense of its many parts, or develop its characters into something more than stereotypical crooks, cowpokes and lawmen.

Pacing is another problem. Although billed as a murder mystery, "A Song to Die For" reveals all the culprits and witnesses of the Martini murder early. With most of the surprises blown out, the novel tries to run out the clock with meandering thoughts surreal when Ranger Hooley takes an FBI agent fishing while investigating a murder scene, or when Luster stops bad practice to hunt turkeys in the backyard. With enough distractions to fill a Cabela's catalog, the novel cares more about testosterone fantasies than complex plots.

But the novel's humor leaves the biggest bullet hole in its foot. The jokes consist mostly of derogatory race and gender stereotypes. Every female character purrs, coos or plays cheerleader for the men.

"A Song to Die For" loves to kick the saloon doors in. A few times it crafts western action experiences faithful to the genre. Mostly it offends and confuses with a mess of hypermasculinity. Neither the meta angle nor the country band resurrection angle feels fully developed. The two juvenile halves in this case don't add up to a full story.

KIRKUS REVIEWS

The Austin American-Statesman has teamed up with Kirkus Reviews to bring you select reviews from one of the most trusted and authoritative voices in book discovery.

CAPTIVE PARADISE

James L. Haley  
St. Martin's, \$29.95



The United States' annexation of Hawaii in 1898 was not quite a clear-cut, naked act of economic and military rapacity; it required decades of collusion in the Americanization of this highly strategic Pacific archipelago.

Austin novelist and historian James L. Haley presents a nuanced history that first takes into account the complex and oppressive relationship between the chiefs and the *kanaka*, the people of the land, in an enormously stratified society that was controlled by a system of *kapu* ("set apart, holy, forbidden"). Arriving in 1778, Capt. James Cook recognized the culture as Polynesian, and while their iron and white skins rendered the English sailors god-like in the eyes of the natives, familiarity bred contempt, and in a mellee, Cook was stabbed to death.

With the help of American weapons, King Kamehameha became undisputed chief of the islands. However, the allure of the island attracted Russian, British, French and American vessels. The efforts by Christian missionaries and American advisers, the destruction of the *kapu* system by Queen Ka'ahumanu and the addiction to luxury items (sugar) by the chiefly class helped undermine the native culture.

Haley will speak and sign copies of his book at 7 p.m. Monday at BookPeople, 603 N. Lamar Blvd.

THE YEAR OF LIVING VIRTUOUSLY

Teresa Jordan  
Counterpoint, \$23

Prompted by her 2010 blog of the same name, Wyoming writer Teresa Jordan collects various postings and essays inspired by Benjamin Franklin's list of 13 virtues. Franklin's aspiration, undertaken in his early 20s, was to attempt "the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection." Jordan's yearlong expository expedition led her to examine morality on a weekly basis through a "weave of story and science."

What "started as a way to practice writing," Jordan admits, led to the greater project of finding "a way to practice life." Along the way, the author used each of Franklin's virtues — temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, humility — and the seven deadly sins as a springboard for contemplation.

Jordan incorporates lessons gleaned from formative moments in her own life with those from the biographies of relative unknowns and thinkers as famous as Franklin, and she delves deep into the essence of contrasting modes of being.

