

# Nonfiction

## ★ In the Valley of Mist: Kashmir: One Family in a Changing World

Justine Hardy. Free Press, \$25 (224p) ISBN 978-1-4391-0289-3

Hardy (*The Wonder House*) draws on her 12-year relationship with the Dar family to recount the story of modern-day Kashmir—part pastoral idyll, part war zone. Hardy writes, “There is no single casualty of war, no one noun that sums up what has been lost,” and she paints a moving portrait of the ravaged communities and landscape, weaving in analysis of how the political machinations of Pakistan and India have quelled or intensified the conflict. She contrasts the sleepy valley she encountered decades ago to the Dar family’s Kashmir, which has witnessed the 1989 uprisings and strikes, martial law, deadly “encounter killings,” mass migrations of Pandits (Kashmiri Hindus), increasing religious orthodoxy and the widespread disruption of education, health care, economic prosperity and family and social life. Hardy’s deep familiarity with the region—she has reported on the Kashmir conflict for close to 20 years—allows her to present complicated and conflicting points of view from reformed jihadists, Indian generals, Pandit refugees and various members of the Dar family. Her reporting is admirable and gilded by lyrical prose and evocative description. (June)

## Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs

Ray Takeyh. Oxford Univ., \$27.95 (320p) ISBN 978-0-19-532784-7

Since the 1979 revolution that transformed Iran, some U.S. decision makers have treated the Islamic Republic as a political monolith, ignoring internal disagreements and political factions in favor of broadly painting Iran’s leadership as “evil.” Takeyh (*Hidden Iran*) argues credibly that this approach has been to our own peril, as the foreign policies of Iran are often an expression of domestic politics, no matter how opaque these politics may seem to outsiders. Rather than continue to try to contain Iran by means of “a broad-based Arab



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*I.F. Stone is the subject of American Radical (reviewed below).*

alliance,” an approach that’s been failing for decades, Takeyh argues that the U.S. must instead “conceive a situation whereby Iran... sees benefit in limiting its ambitions.” In his previous book, Takeyh expressed an unassailable optimism that “Iran will change” and was on an inexorable path to greater openness—almost regardless of who was in power. Takeyh is more pessimistic in his predictions now, writing that Iran has “confounded the West’s anticipation of a forward historical progression.” By failing to acknowledge his own shifting understanding of the situation, Takeyh misses an opportunity to provide a genuinely honest—however inconsistent—assessment. (June)

## I’m Down: A Memoir

Mishna Wolff. St. Martin’s, \$23.95 (288p) ISBN 978-0-312-37855-4

Humorist and former model Wolff details her childhood growing up in an all-black Seattle neighborhood with a white father who wanted to be black in this amusing memoir. Wolff never quite fit in with the neighborhood kids, despite her father’s urgings that she make friends with the “sisters” on the block. Her father was raised in a similar neighborhood and—after a brief stint as a hippie in Vermont—returned to Seattle and settled into life as a self-proclaimed black man. Wolff and her younger, more outgoing sister, Anora, are taught to embrace all things black, just like their father and his string of black girlfriends. Just as Wolff finds her footing in the lo-

cal elementary school (after having mastered the art of “capping”: think “yo mama” jokes), her mother, recently divorced from her father and living as a Buddhist, decides to enroll Wolff in the Individual Progress Program, a school for gifted children. Once again, Wolff finds herself the outcast among the wealthy white kids who own horses and take lavish vacations. While Wolff is adept at balancing humorous memories with more poignant moments of a daughter trying to earn her father’s admiration, the result is more a series of vignettes than a cohesive memoir. (June)

## American Radical: The Life and Times of I.F. Stone

D.D. Guttenplan. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, \$30 (592p) ISBN 978-0-374-18393-6

At his death, reporter and amateur classicist I.F. Stone was hailed as an “iconoclast of journalism,” “a dogged investigator and a concise and clever writer,” “an American institution” and “a journalist’s journalist.” At the same time, he was called wrongheaded and accused of being a KGB agent. In this sometimes workmanlike but often animated biography, Guttenplan (*The Holocaust on Trial*) provides a lively portrait of a journalist who was as passionate about radical politics and getting a story right as he was about ballroom dancing. Drawing on interviews with Stone’s family and friends, the complete archive of Stone’s writings—including fragments of letters—and two previous biographies of Stone, Guttenplan traces his subject’s life and career from Stone’s early upbringing as Isidor Feinstein in Philadelphia and his days as a college dropout to his birth as one of America’s premier journalists in the pages of the *Nation*, *PM* and eventually his own *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*. A brilliant gadfly and independent thinker, Stone was at once cozy with New Deal politicians and union leaders. He reported undercover from Palestine as he accompanied Holocaust survivors through a British blockade and became a hero of America’s Jews. Guttenplan’s lively biography brings back to life a man whose work has often been forgotten but whose writing and life provide a model for the kind of freethinking journalism missing in society today. (June)