A Blessing over Ashes: The Remarkable Odyssey of My Unlikely Brother by Adam Fifield (A cross-cultural meeting between Middle America and Cambodia, A Blessing Over Ashes is an unusual story that combines classic coming-of-age events with the sad history of a young refugee from the devastated Cambodia of the last decades. Soeuth—the refugee—came to live with the Fifield family at the age of 14.)

A Hundred Little Hitlers: The Death of a Black Man, the Trial of a White Racist, and the Rise of the Neo-Nazi Movement in America by Elinor Langer (This book focuses on the 1988 murder of an Ethiopian man, Mulugeta Seraw, by three skinheads in Portland, Oregon. Langer, author of Josephine Herbst (1983), is herself a native of Portland, and she recounts the case from interviews with the killers, all of whom pled guilty and avoided trial.)

A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (Harvard scholar Goldhagen, author of the bestselling and controversial Hitler's Willing Executioners, turns to a question left unanswered in his earlier work: to what extent are Catholics and the Catholic Church morally culpable for the Holocaust?)

A Place to Stand by Jimmy Santiago Baca (Anyone who doubts the power of the written word to transform a life will know better after reading poet Jimmy Santiago Baca's wrenching memoir of his troubled youth and the five-year jail stint that turned him around.)

Bamboo and Butterflies: From Refugee to Citizen by JoAn D. Criddle (a biography and an oral history. In a series of vignettes written in “first person” format, it tells the story of the daughters and extended family of Ean Bun, and their fleeing from Cambodia to America.)

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo A. Anaya (When a curandera comes to stay with a young boy, he tests the bonds that tie him to his culture and finds himself in the secrets of the past.)

Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam by Andrew X. Pham. (It is an exploration into the meaning of home, a descriptive travelogue, and an intimate look at the Vietnamese immigrant experience. There are beautifully illuminated flashbacks to the experience of fleeing Vietnam and to an earlier, more innocent childhood.)

Facing Death in Cambodia by Peter Maguire (This remarkable book takes the reader deep inside the minds of a culture so hard to penetrate that I am returning this year to Cambodia just to attempt to understand the obvious - here is a country in a state of denial.)

Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter by Adeline Yen Mah (The story of an unwanted Chinese daughter growing up during the Communist Revolution, blamed for her mother’s death, ignored by her millionaire father and unwanted by her Eurasian step mother. A story of greed, hatred and jealousy; a domestic drama is played against the extraordinary political events in China and Hong Kong. Written with the emotional force of a novel but with a vividness drawn from a personal and political background. "Falling Leaves" has become a surprise bestseller all over the world.)
The Gate by François Bizot (French ethnologist Francois Bizot's The Gate offers a unique insight into the rise of the Khmer Rouge. In 1971 Bizot was studying ancient Buddhist traditions and living with his Khmer partner and daughter in a small village in the environs of the Angkor temple complex.)

Getting Away With Genocide: Cambodia's Long Struggle Against the Khmer Rouge by Tom Fawthrop and Helen Jarvis (This book covers the history of Cambodia since 1979 and the various attempts by the US and China to stop the Cambodian people from bringing the Khmer Rouge to justice.)

Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (Daniel Goldhagen that posits that ordinary Germans not only knew about, but also supported, the Holocaust because of a unique and virulent "eliminationist antisemitism" in the German identity, which had developed in the preceding centuries.)

Hiroshima by John Hersey (John Hersey wrote an important little booklet about the effects of the bomb upon the lives of six Hiroshima residents who survived the blast.)

Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez by Richard Rodriguez (the story of Mexican-American Richard Rodriguez, who begins his schooling in Sacramento, California, knowing just 50 words of English, and concludes his university studies in the stately quiet of the reading room of the British Museum.)

In the Absence of Sun: A Korean American Woman's Promise to Reunite Three Lost Generations of Her Family by Helie Lee (Lee's bestselling debut, Still Life with Rice (1996), created quite a stir. It chronicled Lee's grandmother's 1950 escape from northern to southern Korea during a civil war that separated the Koreas and tore Lee's grandmother's family apart, as her eldest son, Lee Yong Woon, did not make it out of the north.)

Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America by Nathan McCall (Gripping and candid, this autobiography tracks McCall's path from street-happy hustler in a working-class black neighborhood in Portsmouth, Va., to a three-year prison term for armed robbery, a decision to rehabilitate himself, and his successful struggles as a journalist, finally reaching the Washington Post.)

Of Long Memory: Mississippi and the Murder of Medgar Evers by Adam Nossiter (In the 1950s and 1960s Southern segregationists frequently argued that the Civil Rights movement in the South was the work of "outside agitators" rather than local blacks. Southern blacks were said to be satisfied with the social, political, and economic status quo. Ironically, even recent books and films (e.g., Mississippi Burning) more sympathetic in their portrayals nonetheless have perpetuated the image of Southern blacks as passive people, with the principal impetus for change coming from Northern civil rights organizations and the federal government).

Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare by Philip Short (Towards the beginning of this massive biography, Short cautions readers against dismissing the terror of Pol Pot's regime as the incomprehensible work of evil men. Instead, Short argues, the explanations for the Khmer Rouge regime, which resulted in the death of over one-fifth of Cambodia's population, or 1.5 million people, are "rooted in history."
Rain of Gold by Victor E. Villasenor (Rain of Gold is the story of three generations of the author's family's migration from revolutionary Mexico in the 20th century to California.)

Song of Saigon: One Woman's Journey to Freedom by Anh Vu Sawyer and Pam Proctor (This is the poignant, well-told story of Sawyer, who, at the age of 20, fled her native Vietnam just as the North Vietnamese stood poised to capture Saigon. Anh Sawyer tells of her harrowing escape, along with throngs of other panicked Vietnamese, through the American Embassy and onto a boat overcrowded with other refugees.)

Still Life With Rice by Helie Lee (Lee traveled from California to Korea to recapture the life of her grandmother. Hongyong Baek (b. 1912) grew up in northern Korea, the daughter of wealthy parents, and at 22 entered into an arranged marriage and began a life of servitude to her husband.)

Ten Thousand Sorrows by Elizabeth Kim (Ten Thousand Sorrows starts with its young narrator watching her mother's murder; improbably, things go downhill from there. "Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood," Frank McCourt famously wrote in Angela's Ashes).

The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag by Chol-hwan Kang and Pierre Rigoulot (After the division of North and South Korea, Kang's family returned to North Korea from Japan, where his grandparents had emigrated in the 1930s and where his grandfather had amassed a fortune and his grandmother became a committed Communist.)

The Girl in the Picture: The Story of Kim Phuc, the Photograph, and the Vietnam War by Denise Chong (Ill you have to do is say "the girl in the picture" and any American who was politically aware during the Vietnam War will conjure up the image of a little Vietnamese girl running down the road, her naked body scorched by napalm, her face contorted in pain.)

The Unwanted: A Memoir of Childhood by Kien Nguyen (The son of a wealthy Vietnamese woman and an American businessman, Nguyen was nearly eight when Saigon fell to the Vietcong. For the next decade he and his family endured hardships brought on by the privileged lives they had enjoyed under the capitalist regime.)

Thirteen Senses: A Memoir by Victor E. Villasenor (The book's humorous opening at the 50th-anniversary renewal of Villasenor's parents' wedding vows, the "bride" refuses to say "obey" as her sister catcalls from the front pew about the groom's unreliability gives way to a series of simplistic feminist diatribes followed by a nasty family squabble.)

To Destroy You Is No Loss: The Odyssey of a Cambodian Family by JoAn D. Criddle (With the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, 15-year-old Teeda and 15 members of her upper-class family were among millions driven from Phnom Penh into the countryside. Now living in America, Teeda here recounts a terrifying, slavelike existence.)
When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge by Chanrithy Him (Born in Cambodia in 1965, Him lived from the age of three with the fear of war overflowing from neighboring Vietnam and suffered through the U.S.’s bombing of her native land. However, thanks to her loving and open-minded family, her outlook remained positive—until 1975, when the Khmer Rouge seized control and turned her world upside down.)