Delve Deeper into The Overnighters
A film by Jesse Moss

This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Robert Surratt of the San Diego Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary The Overnighters.

Chasing the American dream, thousands of workers flock to a North Dakota town where the oil business is booming. But instead of well-paying jobs, many find slim work prospects and a severe housing shortage. Pastor Jay Reinke converts his church into a makeshift dorm and counseling center, allowing hundreds of men, some with checkered pasts, to stay despite the congregation’s objections and neighbor’s fears. When opposition to the “overnighters” reaches a boiling point, Pastor Jay makes a decision with shattering consequences.

ADULT NONFICTION

Avery, Samuel. The Pipeline and the Paradigm: Keystone XL, Tar Sands, and the Battle to Defuse the Carbon Bomb. Washington DC: Ruka Press, 2013. This thoroughly researched and wholly engaging book investigates the economic, ecological, political, and psychological issues behind the Keystone XL pipeline, a project so controversial it has inspired the largest expression of civil disobedience since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Gold, Russell. The Boom: How Fracking Ignited the American Energy Revolution and Changed the World. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. Fracking has vociferous critics and fervent defenders, but the debate between these camps has obscured the actual story: Fracking has become a fixture of the American landscape and the global economy. It has upended the business models of energy companies around the globe, and it has started to change geopolitics and global energy markets in profound ways.


Klein, Naomi. This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. the Climate. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. In This Changes Everything Naomi Klein argues that climate change isn’t just another issue to be neatly filed between taxes and health care. It’s an alarm that calls us to fix an economic system that is already failing us in many ways.

Levine, Phillip. What Work Is: Poems. New York: Knopf, 1991. This collection amounts to a hymn of praise for all the workers of America. These proletarian heroes, with names like Lonnie, Loo, Sweet Pea, and Packy, work the furnaces, forges, slag heaps, assembly lines, and loading docks at places with unglamorous names like Brass Craft or Feinberg and Breslin’s First-Rate Plumbing and Plating. Only Studs Terkel’s Working approaches the pathos and beauty of this book. But Levine’s characters are also significant for their inner lives, not merely their jobs.

Peters, Lisa Westberg. Fractured Land: The Price of Inheriting Oil. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014. What does an environmentalist do when she realizes she will inherit mineral rights and royalties on fracked oil wells in North Dakota? Catapulted into a world of complicated legal jargon, spectacular feats of engineering, and rich history, Lisa Westberg Peters travels to the oil patch and sees both the wealth and the challenges brought by the boom. She interviews workers and farmers, geologists and lawyers, those who welcome and those who reject the development, and she finds herself able to see shades of gray in what had previously seemed black and white.

Prud’Homme, Alex. Hydrofracking. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. There may be no more decisive environmental issue in America today than hydrofracking, or “fracking” as it is commonly called, referring to the use of highly pressurized water and chemicals to extract gas trapped in subterranean shale formations.

Silverstein, Ken. The Secret World of Oil. London: Verso, 2014. Oil is the lifeblood of modern civilization, and the industry that supplies it has been the subject of intense interest and scrutiny, as well as countless books. And yet, almost no attention has been paid to one aspect of the modern oil industry: the questionable characters—the fixers, gangsters, and dictators—allied with competing governments and multinational corporations.

ADULT FICTION

Florio, Gwen. Dakota. Sag Harbor, NY: The Permanent Press, 2014. Former brash journalist Lola Wicks chose to stay in Montana, having fallen for the sheriff and gotten a job at the local paper. Now covering the local tribal beat, she is deeply troubled about the death of Judith, a blackfeet girl found dead in the snow. By chance, Lola learns that a number of teenagers have recently gone missing from the reservation, and she pieces together a disturbing picture of young women working as prostitutes in “the patch,” an area in North Dakota where the fracking boom is centered.

Littlefield, Sophie. The Missing Place. New York: Gallery Books, 2014. Set against the backdrop of North Dakota’s oil boom, two very different mothers form an
uneasy alliance to find their missing sons in this
heartrending and suspenseful novel from the Edgar Award-
nominated author of Garden of Stones. The booming North
Dakota oil business is spawning "man camps," shantytowns full
of men hired to work on the
rigs, in towns without enough
housing to accommodate them.
In such twilight spaces, it's easy
for a person to vanish.

Sinclair, Upton. Oill. New
Fashioned out of the oil scandals
of the Harding administration, Oill provides a detailed picture
of the development of the oil
industry in Southern California.
Bribery of public officials, class
warfare, and international
rivalry over oil production are
the context for Sinclair's story of
a genial independent oil
developer and his son, whose
sympathy with the oilfield
workers and socialist organizers
fuels a running debate with his
father.

Steinbeck, John. The Grapes
of Wrath. New York: Viking,
2014. An epic of the Great
Depression, Steinbeck
chronicles the Dust Bowl
migration of the 1930s and tells
the story of one Oklahoma farm
family, the Joads, driven from
their homestead and forced to
tavel west to the promised land
of California. Out of their trials
and their repeated collisions
against the hard realities of an
America divided into haves and
have-nots evolves a drama that
is intensely human yet majestic
in its scale and moral vision,
 elemental yet plainspoken,
tragic but ultimately stirring in
its human dignity.

NONFICTION FOR YOUNGER
READERS

Marrin, Albert. Black Gold:
The Story of Oil in Our Lives.
New York: Albert A. Knopf,
2012. Thick and slippery, crude
oil has an evil smell. Yet without
it, life as we live it today would
be impossible. Albert Marrin
traces the history of oil, from its
geological origins through the
industrial revolution and to its
role in contemporary
international relations. With
graphics, a comprehensive
glossary, and a thorough index,
this work will be a helpful
resource for young adult
readers.

McCully, Emily Arnold. Ida M.
Tarbell: The Woman Who
Challenged Big Business--
and Won! Boston: Clarion
Books, 2014. Tarbell was the
catalyst for exposing the truth
behind corruption and unfair
business practices. She
investigated and published
works about the Standard Oil
Trust for McClure's Magazine
that informed the world of
shady business dealings and
skycrouted her into the public
eye. She wrote inspiring and
engaging biographies on public
figures, her most notable on
Abraham Lincoln. Although
largely forgotten as the country
forged ahead into the 20th
century, her writing of the truth
lives on.

Partridge, Elizabeth.
Restless spirit: The Life
and Work of Dorothea Lange.
During her career, Dorothea
Lange captured some of the
most desperate and beautiful
faces America has seen in
photographs. She did her most
celebrated work in the 1930s
and 40s during the depression
years and the second World
War. Following Lange's life from
her childhood on the Lower
East Side of New York to her
career for the government
photographing starving migrant
workers in California, author
Elizabeth Partridge creates an
intimate portrait of the artist
who put faces on some of the
darkest episodes in America's
history, shedding light on the
struggles of Americans lives
disrupted by migration and
poverty.

Sanna, Emily. Gay Believers:
Homosexuality and Religion.
Broomall, Pa.: Mason Crest
Publishers, 2011. For
centuries, organized religion has
been one of the main forces of
prejudice and rejection of gay,
lesbian, bisexual, and
transgender (LGBT) people. But
the fact is, not all religious
traditions are unfriendly to LGBT
people, and some old ways of
reading the Bible are being re-
exami ned in new and welcoming
ways. While many LGBT people
struggle with the conflicts of
being both religious and gay,
many others are finding support
and inclusion in religious
communities that have entered
the twenty-first century
committed to the full inclusion
of LGBT people.