A NOVEL



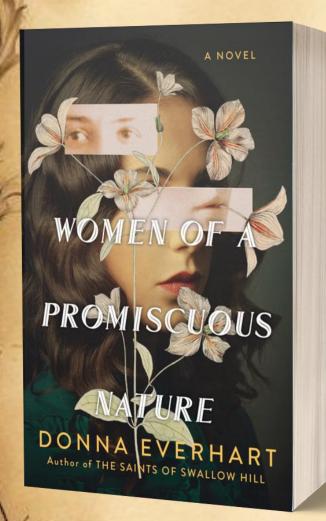
PROMISCUOUS

NAPURE

DONNA EVERHART

Author of THE SAI VIS OF SWALLOW HILL

Book Club Kit Girl, Interrupted meets The Handmaid's Tale in 1940s North Carolina, as a young woman accused of "promiscuity" is unjustly incarcerated in this shockingly timely novel based on the real, long-buried history of the American Plan.



"Both a cautionary tale and a deeply compassionate rendering of women wrongly imprisoned in a system designed to break them, Everhart's propulsive story is filled with injustice, intrigue, and the determination to fight back."

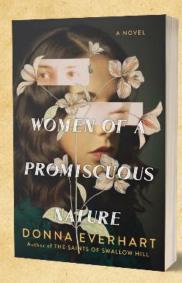
-LISA WINGATE,

#1 New York Times bestselling author of Shelterwood

Women of a Promiscuous Nature by Donna Everhart On Sale 1.27.26/ Historical Fiction ISBN: 978-1-4967-4072-4

# Dear Reader,

As a child, my curiosity sometimes got me into trouble. My mother, while wanting to allow me the freedom to satisfy this inclination, also wanted to keep me safe. For instance, she'd shared the tried and true saying, "leaves of three, let them be," while on a walk in the nearby woods of my childhood home. Later, while on a trip to Maine, I spotted a vine with clusters of three leaves wrapped around a tree near my grandfather's house. Naturally, I put Mom's words to the test. Two days later I was in a hospital with a horrific case of poison ivy - subsequently delaying our trip home to North Carolina.



Fortunately, this insatiable curiosity now serves me well in my writing life. With an equal level of inquisitiveness, I search for topics I hope will resonate with my readers. Personally, I'm drawn to the unusual, hidden, or perhaps dark histories of my home state and Women of a Promiscuous Nature with its unsettling backdrop of the American Plan is a homerun in all three areas. Across the United States, women, under the suspicion of promiscuity, found themselves locked up against their will, forced to endure medical treatments, simply because of a law that enabled facilities like the State Industrial Farm Colony for Women in Kinston, NC to operate for decades.

Exposing this history gave me the opportunity to tell a story about women fighting for their rights while exemplifying an uncommon resilience and fortitude. My hope is you will find this colorful array of personalities inspiring, admirable and most of all courageous against those who believed they were creating a better society.



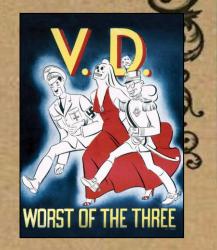
I'm excited to hear what you think about Women of a Promiscuous Nature. If you'd like to share comments or photos on social media, please be sure to tag me and/or use #WomenofaPromiscuousNature so I don't miss them!

Warmest regards,

Donna Everhart, author of Women of a Promiscuous Nature

# The Real History of THE AMERICAN PLAN

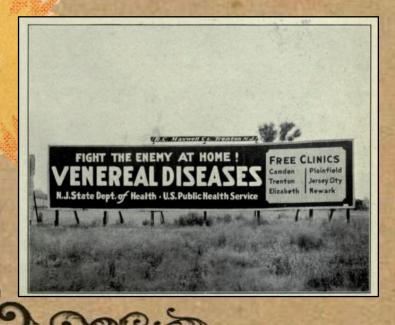
In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the United States entered World War I, fears about public health and morality collided in a troubling way. Lawmakers and military officials became alarmed by reports that American soldiers were contracting sexually transmitted infections at shocking rates, which threatened military readiness.





In the interest of "protecting the troops directly from the evils to which they have been exposed for years and years" (The Commission on Training Camp Activities), Congress passed The Chamberlain-Kahn Act in July 1918.

While the act was framed as a public health measure, it soon became the foundation for what came to be known as the American Plan. This program operated on the assumption that women, rather than men, were the source of moral and physical danger to the troops and to society. It drew on older anxieties about female sexuality and respectability, merging public health with social control.





# "Social Hygiene" Posters and Materials Centering the Regulation and Vilification of Women's Sexuality



others—boys and girls, men and women—to avoid misery. Self-interest, decency, patriotism, regard for others, all demand clean manhood.

### In Case of Exposure

If a soldier yields to temptation and "falls for" a whore a loose girl, he must take early (prophylactic) treatment.

He ought to take it as soon as possible-within two or

By taking this early treatment he will greatly decrease his chances of getting gonorrhea, syphilis or chancroid.

If he fails to take it and later develops a venereal disease, he will be court-martialed for disobeying General Order No. 17 of 1912.

If in spite of early treatment venereal disease develops, his pay will be stopped during the time he is off duty.

The Government regards sexual intercourse as unnecessary and diseases contracted thereby as not in the

KEEP AWAY FROM THE WHORES



What the War has done to stamp out Venereal Diseases



# **Beware of Chance Acquaintances**



"Pick-up" acquaintances often take girls autoriding, to cafès, and to theatres with the intention of leading them into sex relations. Disease or child-birth may follow

Avoid the man who tries to take liberties with you He is selfishly thoughtless and inconsiderate of y Believe no one who says it is necessary to indulge

# VENEREAL DISEASES

V (Clap and Syphilis) are ruining the health and lives of tens of thousands of men, women and children. They are among the most important causes of insanity, blindness, paralysis, impo-tence, barrenness, miscarriages and many terrible diseases called by other names—they are hard to cure and are sometimes incurable.

They are causing sickness and inefficiency in they are hard to

this plant-they must be wiped out!

## Keep Away from Prostitutes

If you should be foolis

DON'T FALL for adv

THE RESERVE THE PROPERTY OF THE PARTY OF THE





# HEALTHY WOMANHOOD

Healthy womanhood is the hope of every girl. Every woman who looks forward to motherhood wants healthy, well-formed children.

Gonorrhea [sometimes called "clap," etc.] is a dangerous germ disease. It causes chronic ill health, inability to have children, and serious operations on women. Much of the blindness among babies is due to it.

Syphilis in many ways is more terrible than tuberculosis [consumption]. Unless properly treated it may lead to insanity, locomotor ataxia and other forms of paralysis. It is responsible for some physically and mentally defective children. It causes mis-

The United States Government wants every girl and woman to realize these ambitions. The diseases which endanger women and babies more than any others are Venereal Diseases [Gonorrhea and Syphilis].

GONORTHEA [sometimes called "clap," etc.] is a dangerous germ disease. It causes chronic ill health, inability to have children,

Some Infections Innocent. Gon-

some interests and syphilis may be innocently acquired from public drinking cups, towels, etc. Care should betaken in using public tolletsor in handling articles used by infected persons. Anyone suspecting an infection, innocent or otherwise, should see a reputable doctor. "Quacks" and advertising "specialists" should be avoided.



Under the American Plan, military, police, and public health officers were empowered to arrest any woman even *suspected* of having a sexually transmitted infection—or of being a "promiscuous" or "immoral" influence—often with no real evidence. Many of those detained were poor, young, or marginalized—waitresses, factory workers, domestic servants, or simply women walking alone in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time. In many cases, there was no proof at all of infection or illegal activities such as prostitution.

Once arrested, women were quarantined and forced to undergo invasive, often unreliable medical examinations. If positively diagnosed or simply judged to be a public health threat, they were imprisoned indefinitely with no due process in hospitals, jails, or "farm colonies" until authorities deemed them "cured."







# 14 Women Due To Face Court

Fourteen women were arrested early Tuesday on charges of vagrancy, involving morals, police reports disclosed.

Margaret Reed, 56, and Jackie Daniels, 24, were arrested at 531 N. W. Couch street; Lucille Wilson, 50, and Marie Cagcio, 32, were arrested at 905 S. W. 3d avenue; Mary Anason, 48, Nita Johnson, 25, and Lucky Clark, 26, were apprehended at 610 N. W. Davis street.

May Brown, 45, and Louise Allen, 25, were arrested at 208 N. W. 6th avenue, as were Connie Carmen, 25; Dianne Baker, 22, and Ruth Cumming, 24.

Edna Smith, 52, and Billy Law, 25, were taken into custody at 31 N. W. 6th avenue.

### TWO WOMEN FINED

Peggy Knight, 43, and Sally Wilson, 25, convicted on vagrancy charges, involving morals. Wednesday each was fined \$20 by Municipal Judge Julius Cohn. The two were arrested at 120 N. W. 6th avenue.

### WOMAN HELD

Arrested on a morals charge at 221 S. W. 6th avenue late Friday, Louise Young, 23, was ordered held for the health department, police reported. Bail was set at \$25.

# Wennen Arrested

Five women were arrested on morals charges late Tuesday,

police reported.

They were Etta May Ross, 22, Negress, apprehended at N. W. 3d avenue and Davis street; Lee O'Connel, 24, and Marie Berg. 35, at 115 N. W. 3d avenue; Peggy Knight, 43, and Sally Wilson, 25, at 120 N. W. 6th

# Women Face Charge Of Moral Vagrancy

Two women, arrested at 224 W. Burnside street, were charged with vagrancy involving morals, late Saturday, according to reports from vice operatives.

Apprehended were Peggy Neil, 24, and Linda Mathews. 28, both of whom were released on \$25 bail, records disclosed.

# Women Arrested On Morals Count

Three women were charged with vagrancy involving morals late Thursday following their arrest by vice operatives, police disclosed.

Barbara Edison, 22, and Alice Smith, 25, were apprehended at 610 N. W. Couch street, and Marie Clark, 27, at 526 N. W. Davis street.

All were released after paying \$25 bail each.

# Women Face Charges

Clara Cohen, 52, and Belle Parr. 25, face vagrancy charges as a result of their arrest at 115 N. W. 3d avenue Monday night, police report.

# MORALS CHARGE PLACED

A charge of vagrancy involving morals was lodged against Dorothy Harris, 25, following her arrest at 1035 S. W. 1st avenue, vice operatives reported Monday. Miss Harris was released on payment of \$25 bail.

### VAGRANCY CHARGED

Jean Lister, 25, of 1517 S. W. 3d avenue, and Jean Poiner, 25, of 119 S. W. Mill street, faced charges of vagrancy involving morals following their arrest by vice operatives, according to reports Sunday.

# WOMEN ARRESTED 2/28 4

Plain clothes police officers Wednesday arrested four women on charges of vagrancy, involving morals, reports dis-closed. The quartet included Barbara Porter, 25; Bonnie Ray. 28; Sally Stanton, 24, of 3 N. W. 3d avenue, and Connie Brooks, 23.

# WOMEN ARRESTED =/ =7 40

Dorothy James and Ruth O'Brien were arrested Tuesday on charges of vagrancy, involving morals, according to police reports. The two were taken into custody at 130 N. W. 6th

# 16 Women Fined In Police Court 7/2141

Sixteen women, convicted on charges of vagrancy, involving morals, paid a total of \$320 in fines Tuesday before Municipal Judge Julius Cohn. Each was fined \$20.

They included Lucille Wilson, Marie Cagcio, Edna Smith, Billie Law, Louis Allen, May Brown, Connie Carmen, Dianne Baker, Ruth Cummings, Nita Johnson, Lucky Clark, Mary Anason, Jackie Daniels, Margaret Reed, June Nelson and Patsy Shay.

# 9 Women Fined

Nine women, charged with vagrancy involving morals, were fined a total of \$195. These included Mary Brown, 417 N. W. Flanders street; Jean Lester, 1517 S. W. 3d avenue; Dorothy Harris, 1035 S. W. 1st avenue; Pearl Schaffer and Betty Clay, 129 S. W. Mill street, and June Nelson, 1624 S. W. 1st avenue.

Each was fined \$20. Mary Johnson, 1331 S. W. 3d avenue; Alice Smith and Ruth Steele. 321 S. W. Jefferson street, failed to appear, so bail of \$25

for each was ordered

# **IMPRISONMENT**



Facilities created under the American Plan took different forms across the country. In some regions, women were confined in city jails or state hospitals; in others, they were sent to rural "farm colonies" designed to promote rehabilitation through labor. The North Carolina State Industrial Farm Colony for Women was one such institution. There, women were expected to perform agricultural and domestic work while undergoing treatment—or punishment—under the guise of reform.

A woman's imprisonment could range from a few days to many months. Inside these institutions, women were often injected with mercury and forced to ingest arsenic-based drugs. If they misbehaved, or if they failed to show "proper" ladylike deference, women could be beaten, doused with cold water, thrown into solitary confinement—or even sterilized.

Medical "treatments" for infections such as syphilis and gonorrhea were often harsh or experimental. One such remedy that appears in Women of a Promiscuous Nature was Salvarsan, an arsenic-derived drug with a frightening panoply of side effects ranging from dermatitis, gastrointestinal distress, and hair loss, to ocular damage, cardiac distress, and edema.



C MITTORY.

Salvarsan treatment kit for syphilis Photo by the Wellcome Trust Wellcome Images. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Creative Commons license CC BY 4.0

For those who experienced imprisonment, the consequences were devastating. Many lost their jobs, their reputations, their health, and their freedom without ever being charged with a crime.

Few avenues existed to challenge their detention or seek justice.



A detention hospital for "infected women" in 1943 Leesville, LA.

# SAMARCAND MANOR

Dorothy Baker, the Superintendent in Women of a Promiscuous Nature, is haunted by her memories of working at Samarcand Manor, a real-life reform institution that was established in 1918 near Eagle Springs, NC.

Samarcand Manor was created as a state-run "training school" for white girls and young women whom authorities labeled in need of rehabilitation or moral reform. It quickly became part of a broader system of institutional control targeting young women considered wayward, delinquent, promiscuous, or simply difficult. Many of the girls sent there arrived without having committed any crime. They might have been deemed "incorrigible," "feebleminded," or "morally at risk," categories shaped less by behavior than by poverty, family conflict, or a failure to conform to social expectations of female obedience and purity.

Inside Samarcand, life was highly regimented. The institution operated on a model that combined domestic training, agricultural labor, strict discipline, and moral instruction. Daily routines were tightly controlled, and punishments could be severe. By the 1930s, allegations of mistreatment – including harsh discipline, abusive staff practices, and unsafe conditions – were common.





Images from the records of Samarcand Manor, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, Department of Public Safety, Samarcand Manor School, Eagle Springs, North Carolina On March 12, 1931, a group of girls set fire to Samarcand in an attempt to draw attention to their conditions. Rather than being treated as victims of institutional neglect, the girls were charged with arson, and their case became a defining example of how systems meant to "protect" vulnerable young women often failed them.



During WWI alone, more than 30,000 women were detained under the Chamberlain–Kahn Act, and over 15,500 of them were imprisoned.

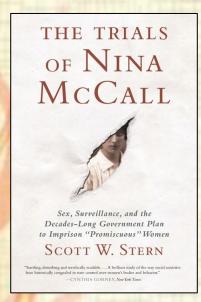
The American Plan's mechanisms of surveillance and detention continued for decades. Throughout this time, public health initiatives were used to justify widespread violations of civil rights, particularly against women deemed "undesirable." Although enforcement ended with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s, related laws are still on the books to this day.

Despite the fact that it represents one of the largest and longest mass quarantines in U.S. history, the American Plan has largely been forgotten. Understanding this history casts light on the experiences of countless women whose stories were never told. It reveals how fear, stigma, and moral judgment can shape policy in ways that strip individuals of autonomy and dignity. It also offers important context for the fictional world of this novel, which brings to life the human cost of a system that blurred the line between protection and punishment, care and control.



# FURTHER READING

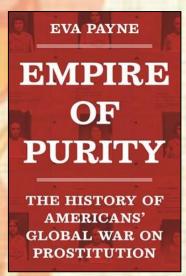
on the real history behind Women of a Promiscuous Nature



# THE TRIALS OF NINA MCCALL: Sex, Surveillance, and the Decades-Long Plan to Imprison "Promiscuous" Women

by Scott W. Stern (Penguin Random House, 2018)

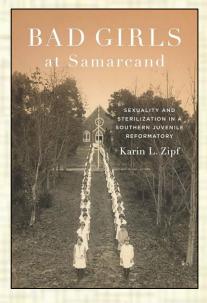
The definitive nonfiction work on the nearly forgotten story of the fight against the American Plan, a government program designed to regulate women's bodies and sexuality.



# EMPIRE OF PURITY: The History of Americans' Global War on Prostitution

by Eva Payne (Princeton University Press, 2024)

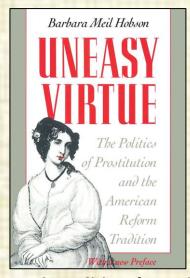
A chronicle of how America's policing of sexuality has been used as a tool to justify government interventions worldwide.



# BAD GIRLS AT SAMARCAND: Sexuality and Sterilization in a Southern Juvenile Reformatory

by Karen Lorene Zipf (LSU Press, 2016)

A detailed study of the State Home and Industrial School in Eagle Springs, referred to as Samarcand Manor, and the school's infamous 1931 arson case.



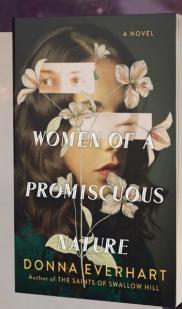
# UNEASY VIRTUE: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition

by Barbara Meil Hobson (University of Chicago Press, 1990)

An examination of the politics of commercialized sex, from the 1840s to the sexual revolution of the 1970s.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
TO SPARK CONVERSATION AND ENHANCE YOUR READING OF WOMEN OF A PROMISCUOUS NATURE

Dorothy Baker is passionate about reform, and seeks to transform the women in her charge so they fit into society views of what's appropriate. Her beliefs are typical of the day, as are the terms used to describe certain individuals. By today's standards, they would be considered unacceptable. Considering the time period, do you believe Baker was cruel, or were her methods a "means to an end"? What similarities do you recognize within these institutions as compared to an actual prison?



- 2. Stella Temple lives in a highly dysfunctional home with a mother suffering from mental illness and an abusive father. In her case, do you think placement at the Colony was beneficial?
- 3. Ruth Foster lives independently and doesn't understand why this is a problem. Why do you believe it was?
- 4. Baker's personal and professional life is filled with triumphs and failures. What did you admire most about her? What did you dislike most? Do you think she got away with too much?
- 5. Stella's intelligence and eagerness to please win Baker over. What did you think of their relationship? Do you think it was helpful to Stella, or do you wish her outcome were different?
- 6. Many women, like Ruth, were often scared or intimidated into submitting themselves to these facilities. Sometimes husbands turned their wives in if they felt dissatisfied with their home life. Women didn't receive due process through a court system. Why do you think women were the primary focus of immoral behaviors and not men?
- 7. The novel is about the mass incarceration of women suspected of promiscuous, immoral, or lewd behavior. Were you aware of this history? Have you heard of the Chamberlain-Kahn Act, also known as the American Plan? Did you know about "farm colonies," detention centers, etc., where women were forced to stay and endure debilitating treatments? Are there other mass incarcerations you can think of similar to this?
- 8. Men, whether in the service or not, if found carrying an infection, underwent treatments while going on with their lives. Considering the era, do you find this disparity "normal"? Why?
- 9. Some of the same laws are still in effect today. Can you think of a recent time period when the law/s allowed the government control over individuals?

Ruth gets out bowls and then goes to the pantry. She believes food ought to taste good and can be a way to offer comfort. To be fed with care and thoughtfulness instills a sense of well-being. Her mother was an excellent cook, and Ruth grew up eating food cooked with attention to small details. For this first task, she makes a couple small adjustments to the biscuit recipe. They're not significant, or even all that creative, but might help make a difference.

--Women of a Promiscuous Nature, page 136

# Cathead Biscuits (with Ruth's adjustment)

# Ingredients

- 4 cups Southern all-purpose flour (not self-rising)
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 8 tablespoons of chilled butter, cut into cubes
- 2 cups buttermilk
- About 1 teaspoon of sugar

Adding a bit of sugar to this traditional recipe is what I believe makes all the difference. — Ruth

### Instructions

Preheat oven to 500 degrees.

Combine dry ingredients and then cut in the butter until it resembles coarse crumbs.

Add the buttermilk and mix until just combined.

Turn the dough onto a counter and knead lightly, folding 4-5 times.

Roll dough about 1-inch thick and cut out the biscuits using a lightly floured biscuit cutter, tin can, or rim of a drinking glass.

Place on a greased cooking sheet and bake until golden brown on top, about 10-12 minutes.

Be careful not to overwork the dough or else your biscuits will be tough.

After cutting out the first round of biscuits, don't squeeze the scraps into a ball to re-roll. Instead, just stack them up and roll that out. Don't re-roll more than once.

# Donna's Meatloaf

### Ingredients

2 lbs hamburger (85/15 ratio)

2 eggs

1 onion, chopped

1 can tomato sauce, divided

½ cup milk

1 sleeve saltine crackers, crushed

Garlic powder

Salt

Pepper

### Instructions

- 1) Preheat oven to 350°F.
- 2) Mix hamburger with eggs, onion, celery, ½ can tomato sauce, milk, crackers, garlic powder, salt and pepper. Put mixture into an 8 x 8 pan.
- 3) In small mixing bowl, pour remaining tomato sauce, add in ¼ cup ketchup, 1 tsp mustard, and 1 tbsp of brown sugar. Stir. Spread over meatloaf.
- 4) Bake for about 50-55 minutes (or internal temp of 165)

Remove from oven and let sit for 5-10 mins before serving.

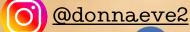
# Country Style Potatives Ingredients 6 medium to large potatoes 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter Milk or cream Salt and pepper Fresh parsley Instructions • Peel potatoes and dice into cubes - not too large and all of a similar size. Put into a pot with just enough water to cover Add ½ stick of butter (4 tablespoons), salt and pepper. • Boil uncovered until the potatoes start to come apart. • Remove from heat. Add another ½ stick of butter and a thick, milky, buttery stew. • Add parsley and serve.



Donna Everhart is a USA Today bestselling author known for vividly evoking challenges of the heart and the complex heritage of the American South in her acclaimed novels. A finalist for the Southern Book Prize, she is the recipient of the prestigious North Carolina Society of Historians Award of Excellence, the SELA Outstanding Southeastern Author Award from the Southeastern Library Association, the Lucy Bramlette Patterson Award from the General Federation of Women's Clubs of North Carolina, and her novels have received a SIBA Okra Pick, an Indie Next Pick, and three Publishers Marketplace Buzz Books selections. Born and raised in Raleigh, she has stayed close to her hometown for much of her life and now lives just an hour away in Dunn, North Carolina.

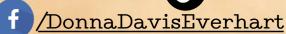
# Visit Donna online:

# www.DonnaEverhart.com



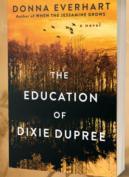


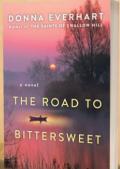
@DonnaEveTok

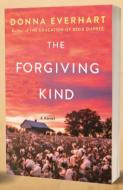


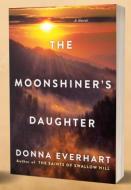
#WomenOfaPromiscuousNature

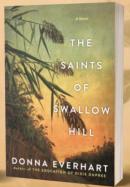
Also by Donna Everhart:















"A masterful blend of painful history and characters that will stay with you long after you turn the last page."—Connie Laing, GREAT RIVER REGIONAL LIBRARY

(St. Cloud, MN)

"How have most of us never heard of the American Plan? This novel, perfect for book clubs, will right that wrong and start important conversations about the ongoing topic of women's freedom and autonomy."—Lady Smith, THE SNAIL ON THE WALL (Huntsville, AL)

"A shocking and timely story that exposes a haunting injustice."—Molly Barnard, WASHINGTON COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM (Abingdon, VA)

"A powerful, unflinching narrative of resistance, resilience, and the fight to reclaim control over one's body and future."—Angela Rines, EASTON AREA PUBLIC LIBRARY (Easton, PA)

"A must read for every woman in America and all the men who love them. "—Angela Redden, READING ROCK
BOOKS (Dickson, TN)

"Women were administered shots of mercury for infections they did not have, sterilized in secret, isolated for days in unsanitary conditions and forced to labor without even a timetable of their release. The cruelty and inhumanity committed under the guise of 'reform' was staggering, yet the women in this incredible, well-researched story endure and protect each other."—Kimberly McGee, LAKE TRAVIS COMMUNITY LIBRARY (Lake Travis, TX)

"Everhart's vivid and complex characters force the reader to really reckon with this dark chapter of American history."—Mara Zonderman, WESTHAMPTON FREE LIBRARY (Westhampton Beach, NY)

"A compelling glimpse into a buried chapter of American history and the ongoing struggle for women's bodily autonomy."—Jaime Linder, PLENTY DOWNTOWN BOOKSHOP (Cookeville, TN)

"Everhart tackles this scandalous and forgotten history, introducing us to both the women who were wronged by the American Plan and those who were tasked with carrying it out."—Jennifer Dayton, FAIRFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY (Fairfield, CT)

"Fascinating and disturbing!"—Stephanie Crowe, PAGE & PALETTE (Fairhope, AL)

"In this stunning, character-driven novel, the lofty goals as well as the terrible cruelty and injustice of the North Carolina Industrial Farm Colony for Women are slowly revealed." —Vicki Nesting, St. Charles Parish Library (Destrehan, LA)

"Ruth, Stella and the others fight for their lives while incarcerated at one of the many facilities in the U.S. set up to house 'promiscuous' women. Physically, mentally and emotionally depleted, this is their story of survival."—Marianne Colton, LOCKPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY (Lockport, NY)

"Using her gift for storytelling, Donna Everhart created a compelling narrative that allows readers to step back in time and experience the American Plan."—Brooke Rawlins,

**HUNTSVILLE-MADISON COUNTY LIBRARY**