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Articles EconLog EconTalk Books Encyclopedia Guides Search



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by date

by author

by category

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Tyler Cowen led the way by listing the ten books that influenced his worldview most strongly. Then co-bloggers **Arnold** and **Bryan** followed. Here are my seventeen, not in order of importance, but in chronological order (the chronology being, of course, when I read them.)

1. I can't remember the name. I read it when I was home sick at about age 12. It was a book on Lincoln that leads off each chapter with a quote from the book-length poem, *John Brown's Body*, by Stephen Vincent Benet. That's when I became a Lincoln fan. I'm no longer a fan of his politics, given what I've learned since, but I loved his persistence. My favorite quote is this one and I took it to heart and made it part of who I've become:

"No-he ain't much on looks-or much on speed-
A young dog can outrun him any time,
Outlook him and outeat him and outleap him,
But, Mister, that dog's hell on a cold scent
And, once he gets his teeth in what he's after,
He don't let go until he knows he's dead."

2. *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen. We covered it in high school, but I read it three times because I loved it so much. I still have to be reminded of the lesson: don't make quick judgments but, instead, get more information when that is low cost.

3. *Yes, I Can*, by Sammy Davis, Jr. I read this during the summer between high school and college. The way he ran his career and the way he dealt with racial discrimination was inspiring.

4. *Elmer Gantry*, by Sinclair Lewis. My aunt, who was more evangelical than the minister she was married to, convinced me that I would burn in hell if I didn't become born again. I kept trying to be born again and I kept failing at it. When I read this book the same summer as #3 above, I relaxed.

5. *The Fountainhead*, by Ayn Rand. I read it in my third month of college. If I hadn't done so, I'm not sure I'd be a libertarian, an economist, or an American. It, and Ayn Rand generally, influenced a huge number of the choices I made, most very good, one very bad that is too personal to talk about.

6. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee. I loved the way Atticus kept his principles while still dealing in an every day world that he didn't create. This helped me work in jobs where Howard Roark would have had trouble. I reread this book every decade.

7. *The Virtue of Selfishness*, by Ayn Rand. This book, more than any other, convinced me that you could actually think about many issues and often resolve them or at least narrow them down. My favorite was her essay on racism as a crude form of collectivism.

8. *Capitalism and Freedom*, by Milton Friedman. Besides learning a lot of economics and some history from this book, I also learned that one can be relatively radical and successful in the mainstream.

9. *The Road to Serfdom*, by Friedrich Hayek. A friend gave this to me for my 18th birthday. When I started to read it, I hated it. I couldn't stand the fact that Hayek treated his intellectual foes with respect rather than attacking them. He kept pulling

his punches. When I picked it up to read about 6 months later, I loved it. Not only did I learn his explicit message, but also I learned a style of debate that I still practice: zeroing in on the issue and assuming good intentions of the "other side."

10. *The Calculus of Consent*, by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. I read this during the year I took off to study economics on my own. My introduction to public choice. I wrote separate fan letters (at age 20) to Buchanan and Tullock. Both answered gracefully and with actual content.

11. *The Theory of Price*, by George Stigler. I read this during that same econ study year. I loved the mix of theorizing and more-than-casual empiricism. After Stigler died, I reread the whole book and realized just how much of what I thought I came up with to use in class, I had learned from Stigler.

12. *University Economics*, by Armen Alchian and William R. Allen. I TAed from this book my first year in graduate school at UCLA. Every Sunday afternoon and evening, I would work my way through a chapter and through every single question at the back of each chapter. I did so just in case some 18-year-old the next day in my TA section asked a question from the back of the chapter. It never happened. But I learned more from this book my first year at UCLA than from any other.

13. *A Guide to Rational Living*, by Albert Ellis. I hit some bumps in my last year in the Ph.D. program at UCLA. I got extreme writer's block and was getting nowhere on my dissertation. I write about this in *Making Great Decisions in Business and Life*, co-authored with Charley Hooper. I went to see a therapist, Roger Callahan, who gave every one of his new patients a copy. That one book has helped me deal with so many life situations.

14. *Lucky Jim*, by Kingsley Amis. This fun book helps me not take academic bulls**t too seriously. I reread it every decade.

15. *How I Found Freedom in an Unfree World*, by Harry Browne. When I was visiting a friend in Australia in 1999, I found this book in his library and decided to reread it. I had first read it the late 1970s. I had the same kind of experience I'd had when rereading Stigler: I realized that I had used a whole lot of Browne's ideas in my life but had thought I had come up with them.

16. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, by Malcolm X and Alex Haley. I loved the story of Malcolm X's struggle and how he turned away from a life of crime and became a very strong man.

17. *The Ropes to Skip and the Ropes to Know*, by Richard Ritti and G. Ray Funkhouser. I learned more about how to survive and thrive in organizations from this book than from anything else in my life. I read it when I started the job at the Council of Economic Advisers and it helped immensely. Moreover, I could see how I had screwed up at the Cato Institute in 1979-80 by not having followed these lessons.

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Shane writes:

Great list! You would do well to link these books to amazon and get the commissions for it. I would be happy to use that as a way to pay you back for all your blogging!

Posted March 18, 2010 1:32 PM

Andrew writes:

I can never understand when I see TKaMB on these types of list. The book was like a