



## The Federalist's 2017 Guide To Summer Reading

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It's that time of year again. We've got just under a month of summer left, and hopefully you have one last trip to the beach or the mountains left, where you can take a little time before cold weather and responsibilities close in. So once again, we present The Federalist's guide to books for summer reading. Once again, this list is not limited to new books—but rather, anything that Federalist writers found worthy or interesting. (See [last year's list](#) for even more recommendations.)

**Gracy Olmstead:** With the HBO adaptation of Margaret Atwood's classic dystopia captivating progressives everywhere, it's a great opportunity for conservative readers to consider the original. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a captivating novel, beautifully written, with thought-provoking considerations of freedom, community, and faith. Atwood is a skillful writer, and deserving of praise. She managed to present a truly frightening and honest look at the dangers of fundamentalism—one that should caution both Left and Right.

*Beartown*, by Swedish novelist Fredrik Backman, explores the question of community—what it is, and what holds it together—with thoughtfulness and depth. The author, most famous for his more humorous novel “A Man Called Ove,” here considers darker themes. Beartown's obsession with the victor of its junior hockey team foments a tribalism that threatens to bring out the town's worst vices. But it's a credit to Backman that he manages to bring joy, humor, and goodness to this book amid the bleakness.

Joel Salatin's *The Marvelous Pigness of Pigs: Respecting and Caring For All God's Creation* is all about the way we (as Christians and non-Christians) consume food and steward the earth. It's a rebuke of those who don't consider the massive environmental and spiritual implications of the way they eat—but Joel does try to add grace and humor to his criticism. As this is an exploration of what Christ-centric environmentalism and stewardship should look like, I'd recommend it for every Christian reader interested in the subject.

Currently reading *A Man Called Ove*, also by Fredrik Backman, and loving the curmudgeonly tone of its protagonist. Also reading *The Givenness of Things*, a collection of essays by Marilynne Robinson, which has been sitting on my bookshelf for far too long. Highly recommend.

**Daniel Payne:** Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* is a fantastic three-pronged examination of Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft and the era of progressive journalism in which the two men rose to prominence on the American stage. The book highlights Taft in particular as a president

whose policy accomplishments and famously affable manner are both worth remembering for their unique place in American history.

**Ilya Shapiro:** In this turbulent time when our politics is a mess, our culture is often ugly, and our trust in institutions is at an all-time low, I thought I'd read about another such period: the 1970s. As it happens, David Frum—who's no stranger to getting attacked from all sides, and with whom I certainly don't agree on everything—wrote what's probably the best book about that ridiculous decade. I'm only part way through, but *How We Got Here: the 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (for Better or Worse)*—an unwieldy title befitting its subject matter—is really insightful. Its application to contemporary punditry is somewhat limited because it came out (just) before 9/11, but still, a hearty recommend.

Like many American sports fans who like to broaden their consumption of the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, every July I become obsessed with the Tour de France. The rest of the year I have no idea what's going on in the cycling world—I do a cram session the night before the big race starts—but once the lads start their three-week trek across Gaul, when little else is going on aside from mid-season baseball (and this year, inexplicably, a delayed Wimbledon) it becomes my athletic focus. And so each summer I read a cycling book. This year it's Michael Barry's *Shadows on the Road: Life at the Heart of the Peloton, from U.S. Postal to Team Sky*. Barry began his pro career riding with Lance Armstrong and ended it with current and four time champion Chris Froome. His memoir is engaging.

My friend Tevi Troy, whom I first met on the Bush-Cheney '04 re-election campaign and who went on to several senior administration posts, has written a wonderful little survey of presidential leadership in times of crisis: *Shall We Wake the President: Two Centuries of Disaster Management from the Oval Office* (you can read [The Federalist's full review of the book here](#)). Tevi combines a historian's eye with a policymaker's discernment of the inside story. I'm so glad that it's finally come to the top of my beside-bed reading stack.

**Matt Battaglia:** For comic book fans of all-ages, I recommend Paul Pope's *Battling Boy*. The first volume in Paul Pope's new series, it follows the adventures of a young superhero as he's tasked with defending Arcopolis from a variety of monsters run amok. Pope's a fantastic artist and illustrator whose work tends to teach lessons of personal responsibility and self governance. This is a great book for kids to read instead of the progressive-SJW-flavor-of-the-day books Marvel has been pushing. Also related is Pope's *Batman: Year One Hundred*, which shows a Gotham city under tight watch of an NSA stand-in and a Batman fighting against it. This collection also features a short story where Batman saves Austrian free-market economist Ludwig Von Mises from the Nazis.

Frank Miller lives! *The Dark Knight Returns: The Last Crusade* sees Miller re-teaming with his collaborator from way back on Man Without Fear, John Romita Jr, to tell the story of Batman's "last adventure" leading up to his seminal classic "The Dark Knight Returns." The past few years have seen a resurgence for Miller and this feels more like him than the somewhat lackluster "Dark Knight III: The Master Race." It also is some of the best art Romita Jr. has put out lately.

For adults only, I recommend *Tokyo Ghost* by Rick Remender and Sean Gordon Murphy take us into a not too hard to imagine future where people live within the confines of their devices, constantly doped up on electronic feedback and media. Debbie is one of the few offline and the book follows her struggle to save the love-of-her-life Led from being completely engulfed in his

addictions. It's a "one last job" kind of story that also grapples with addiction, rehabilitation, and the all-consuming Internet age. It's a fantastic book and readers of *The Federalist* should find its message relevant.

**Luma Simms:** For writers who love the craft and desire to improve (no matter how long they've been writing) I recommend *Do I Make Myself Clear? Why Writing Well Matters* by Sir Harold Evans, a master journalist and editor of Henry Kissinger. It is witty and informative, infects the reader with a sincere desire to improve. He does push the limits of political jabs; that, I could have done without. But I liked the book so much that I can forgive his admiration for Obama.

For those interested in how America is in the midst of an unprecedented opioid epidemic, look no further than *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic* by Sam Quinones. I promise, it is not a social science book that will put you to sleep. It is very well researched, analysis interweaved with stories perfectly paced—you won't be able to stop turning the page.

For those curious or anxious about our current political chaos and calamities, read or re-read Plato's "Republic." While you're at it, watch or listen to Paul Cantor's lectures on political thought in Shakespeare. Access for free at the Great Thinkers website; Cantor uses the Signet editions of the plays.

Finally, I recommend Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky is a master of the human soul, and a prophet, as Henri de Lubac calls him in *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, another book I highly recommend. Happy reading!

**Anna Mussman:** In the 1890s, an anonymous author offered a solution to mothers who claim they have no time to read. She quoted a woman who explained her successful cultivation of the mind by saying, "I always keep three books going — a stiff book, a moderately easy book, and a novel, and I always take up the one I feel fit for!"

A "stiff" book I recommend to anyone interested in education (a category which includes, I hope, all parents) is *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* by Stratford Caldecott. Although the later sections of the book are unlikely to be applicable to readers who do not share Caldecott's Roman Catholic faith, the opening chapters are immensely useful in considering the real purpose of education without falling into reactionary extremes. I particularly appreciate his discussion of the conflict between teacher-centered education vs. student-centered education.

A moderately easy book I recently finished is John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*. It's a fabulous resource for anyone interested in understanding the timeless building blocks of good stories. Lots of manuals on writing tell aspiring authors to do various things, but Truby actually shows the reader how.

Two days ago I finished W. R. Gingell's *Masque*. A murder mystery in the style of Georgette Heyer that is also a retelling of Beauty and the Beast, it's set in a fantasy world full of wit, style, and dangerous magic. It's great fun and you should read it, too.

**Mark Hemingway:** Living in the DC area, it seems like everyone I know who is in the military or otherwise in the national security orbit has read *Ghost Fleet* by P.W. Singer and August Cole. Singer is known as a futurist who focuses primarily on war, and instead of writing dry policy papers at his think tank, he broke down and wrote a technothriller with Cole to illustrate the

issues involved in twenty-first-century warfare. I finally broke down and read it, and I see why it's so popular in the Pentagon.

The book centers on the near future with an economically damaged United States on the brink of war with China and Russia. While the book is fiction, the various amazing things that happen are all footnoted, explaining how the ideas and weapons in the story are drawn from existing technology. Making it even more relevant, it also deals a lot with hacking and cyberwarfare. Imagine Tom Clancy meets William Gibson with a story ripped from current headlines. The book is as entertaining as it is terrifying about the fragile state of America's national security.

For years, people have been gushing about Mark Helprin to me and I never got around to reading him until this year. Many of you reading this are probably already fans, but for those of you who remain unfamiliar, you should rectify that. He's something of a giant among American writers, and along with Saul Bellow, he's about the only openly politically conservative author who's very well regarded by the literary establishment. (His entry in *The Salon.com Guide to Contemporary Authors* is comically begrudging, it's basically "We concede he writes exquisite prose BUT CAN YOU BELIEVE THE WAY HE DEFENDS CAPITALISM?!")

Anyway, after seeing him offer some insightful commentary on a panel in Washington, I went home and picked up the paperback of *A Winter's Tale* I've been carting around since college and read it. It really is a singular book, and at first I wasn't sure what to make of it, bordering on dislike. Eventually I surrendered my cynicism completely, and fully gave myself over to Helprin's sprawling Dickensian tale about a magical realist version of New York. Had I read it in high school, I have a feeling would have been obsessed with it. As an adult reader, I was happy enough to dissect the craft and admire Helprin's boundless imagination.

I've long loved Charles Portis. The movie versions of his book *True Grit* have made his work famous without proportionate appreciation for the author and the source material. Portis' books were even out of print for long periods of time, which is absolutely criminal, because he's an utterly brilliant writer whose comic mind is basically without equal among American writers of the last century.

I recently reread *Dog of the South*, a first-person novel about a man named Ray Midge chasing his runaway wife and her lover on a long road trip from Arkansas to Belize. Along the way, various insane things happen, not the least of which is that Midge picks up an incredibly eccentric, disgraced doctor as a travelling companion: "I learned that he had been dwelling in the shadows for several years. He had sold hi-lo shag carpet remnants and velvet paintings from the back of a truck in California. He had sold wide shoes by mail, shoes that must have been almost round, at widths up to EEEEEEE. He had sold gladiola bulbs and vitamins for men and fat-melting pills and all-purpose hooks and hail-damaged pears."

You spend the whole book laughing so hard, you almost don't notice the sadness of Midge's plight sneaking up on you. Anyway, there's been a Portis revival in recent years, but he's still tragically underappreciated. Don't be the last to know he's one of the greatest, and certainly one of the funniest, American writers of the last century.

Well, that about does it. I'll leave you with this quote from the great abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher: "There is a temperate zone in the mind, between luxurious indolence and exacting

work; and it is to this region, just between laziness and labor, that summer reading belongs.”  
You’ve got the whole month of August ahead of you. Go get in the zone.