

Read to Lead



“ In politics, it is not enough to know what’s right. To succeed, your command of a subject must be so secure that you can persuade people you are right. And then you must activate them... How do you accomplish this? The surest way to acquire a wide range of useful knowledge is to read every day.

”

by Morton C. Blackwell

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Leadership Institute Founder and President Morton C. Blackwell with President Ronald Reagan.

Morton C. Blackwell

Morton Blackwell is the Founder and President of the Leadership Institute. Widely experienced in and out of government, Mr. Blackwell served three years in the Reagan Administration as Special Assistant to the President for Public Liaison.

In 1984, Mr. Blackwell left the White House Staff to work full-time as the president of the Leadership Institute, his educational foundation which increases the number and effectiveness of conservative activists and leaders in the public policy process. To accomplish this mission, the Institute identifies, recruits, trains, and places conservatives in government, politics, and the media.

Introduction

Some people bluntly say they don't read. They say they would read if only they had the time.

I will also be blunt: You have time to do what you choose to do. The more you read, the better you lead -- and the more you enjoy it.

People who don't read cheat themselves. By not reading, you limit what you can achieve, make mistakes you could avoid, and miss opportunities that could improve your life. Soon, as the gaps in your knowledge become apparent to others, you must reconcile yourself to not being taken seriously.

Before going any further, I must make clear that I do not urge you to spend the rest of your days nestled in a cozy spot at the local library. Far from it.

At a February 1965 meeting of a U.S. intellectual group, the Philadelphia Society, the conservative thinker, author, and activist Frank Meyer pointedly cautioned, "God forbid that any of us should read books and write books and do nothing else."

Actively involved in politics since the early 1960s at the local, state, and national levels, I understand the importance of action. Nothing moves unless it is pushed. Political activists elect candidates, pass or repeal laws, and determine public policy. But while boundless energy and enthusiasm are essential in activists, something else is necessary. To be successful leaders, activists must also be well-informed.

Why You Should Read

“ After you have accumulated a lot of knowledge about how the world really works, you can become highly effective. ”

In politics, it is not enough to know what's right. To succeed, your command of a subject must be so secure that you can persuade people you are right. And then you must activate them.

You should have such a mastery of the issues that you can frame your arguments to anticipate and render ineffective your opponent's arguments. You should know all you can learn about what works and what doesn't work. How do you accomplish this? Schooling alone will not suffice. All knowledgeable people are largely self-taught.

You can learn in three different ways:

1. By personal experience

You can learn by trial and error. Known also as the school of hard knocks, trial and error is the most painful way to learn anything. I can't deny that this school teaches its lessons well. Its drawback, however, is that by the time you graduate -- if, indeed, you ever graduate -- you're too old to go to work. Students who study only at this school learn things only the hard way. No matter how diligent a student you are of the school of hard knocks, you cannot learn by first-hand experience everything you should know.

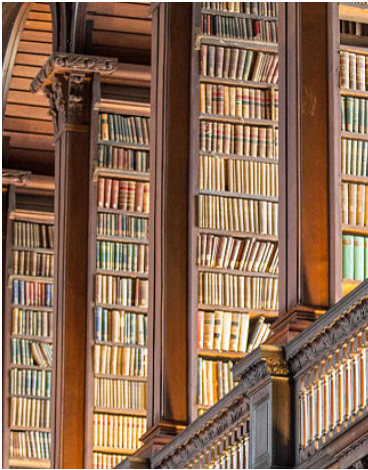
2. By observation

By paying attention to what goes on around you, you can learn from the experience of others. Careful observation is invaluable to anyone in any field, from sports to science to politics. But again, you cannot be everywhere. Everyone's individual power of observation is necessarily limited.

3. By studying the experience of others

You can't experience or observe everything, but you can, by reading, learn from the experiences of your contemporaries, the previous generation, and those who lived ages ago. You can learn from them all by reading their works and books about them.

After you have accumulated a lot of knowledge about how the world really works, you can become highly effective and achieve many things important to you.



“I would put a child into a library (where no unfit books are) and let him read at his choice.”

-Samuel Johnson

The surest way to acquire a wide range of useful knowledge is to read every day.

My introduction to books came early, before I started school. We had a lot of books in our house. First, my parents regularly read aloud to me. After I learned to read, they did what Samuel Johnson advised other parents to do more than 200 years ago:

I would put a child into a library (where no unfit books are) and let him read at his choice. A child should not be discouraged from reading anything that he takes a liking to, from a notion that it is above his reach. If that be the case, the child will soon find it out and desist; if not, he of course gains the instruction; which is so much the more likely to come, from the inclination with which he takes up the study.

In time, I moved on from my family’s books to my grammar school library and then to the well-stocked children’s section of the East Baton Rouge Parish public library. From there I went to the well-stocked library of my junior high school, where I read, if not all, at least a large percentage of its books. After this, at my small rural high school, I read every book in that school’s library at least once.

Sometimes my reading is systematic. I took a decade, ending a few years ago, to read at my cabin in the Blue Ridge mountains everything I could about the Roman Republic and the Greek city-state era. I believed the experience of people in those semi-democratic periods might be applied helpfully to modern day America.

Well-written history books have all the drama of novels and the added merit of being (generally) true. And I systematically read many political biographies. Anyone interested in the public policy process should read biographies and autobiographies of political leaders. Histories and biographies, even if the authors are unsympathetic to conservatives, unfailingly contain a trove of information about how to succeed in the public policy process.

“ Almost every day you can reclaim, by reading, some of your time which otherwise would be wasted.

”

The art of politics cannot be as exact as, say, mathematics or chemistry, because it is so much more complicated. A number doesn't care if it's added or subtracted; a chemical doesn't care about its history or its future. Understanding people requires wisdom, not just knowledge.

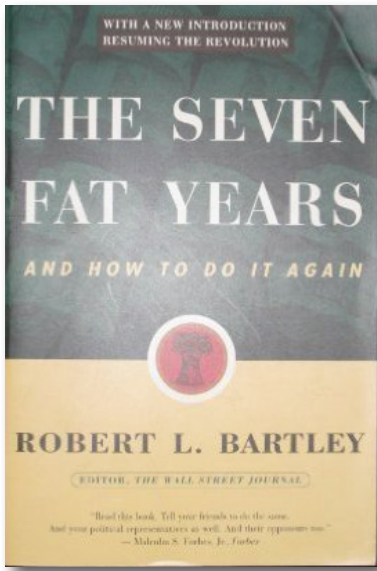
You have time to read, if you want to, every day. Read in bed before you go to sleep. Read when you wake up in the morning. Read while your car is being serviced. Read on airplanes. Read during the dull parts of meetings you have to attend. Read while you're waiting in those long lines to get your driver's license renewed. Almost every day you can reclaim, by reading, some of your time which otherwise would be wasted.

You don't have to finish a book before starting another. Most well-educated readers read two or more books at the same time. Read some in one book. If you temporarily tire of it, read some in another for a change. There is no shortage of useful books available.

Over the years, I have often been asked to recommend books I consider of particular value for conservatives. What follows is a core library of 26 books, most of which can be found in libraries, in good used-book stores, and from online services. I introduce the authors in alphabetical order. Every conservative leader should read (and re-read) these books. You can get all of these from sources at the end of this booklet.

No one could agree with every view expressed in these books. In some matters the authors have opposing views. But any conservative will find merit in each one.

Twenty-Six Books You Should Read



1. *The Seven Fat Years* by Robert Bartley

Bartley, the former editorial page editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, expertly and succinctly refutes the revisionist history of the Reagan years invariably handed down to us by the hostile media. This book tells the true story of the revitalization of the U.S. economy during the 1980s.

2. *The Law* by Frederic Bastiat

A Frenchman who lived during the 19th century, Bastiat was a journalist, an economist, and a politician. *The Law*, his most famous work, is concerned primarily with economics in the context of traditional values. Though I consider all the books on this list worthwhile, I have given away to Leadership Institute students more copies of *The Law* than any other book.

3. *Up from Liberalism* by William F. Buckley, Jr.

Those who came of age politically in the 1980s or later can hardly comprehend the influence Bill Buckley had on the modern conservative movement.

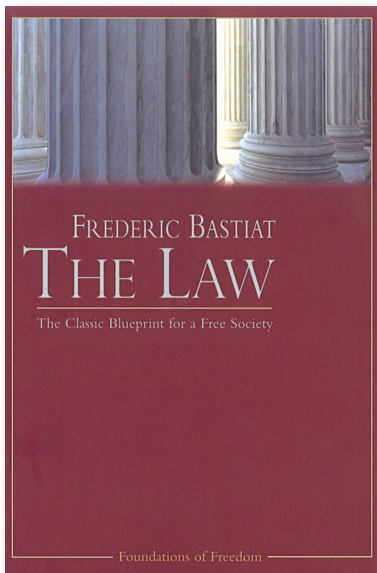
He was, by far, the most attractive and thrilling conservative intellect for decades, and more than equal in debate to any leftist intellectual, as we learned on many occasions. Conservative students of my generation, confronted with an overwhelmingly leftist (and often unbearably smug) faculty, were greatly reassured by the knowledge that Buckley could smash the arguments of anyone on the left.

Though *Up from Liberalism* concerns itself largely with issues that date back to the 1960s, the combination of humor and erudition Buckley uses to skewer the leftist establishment gives the book a timeless appeal.

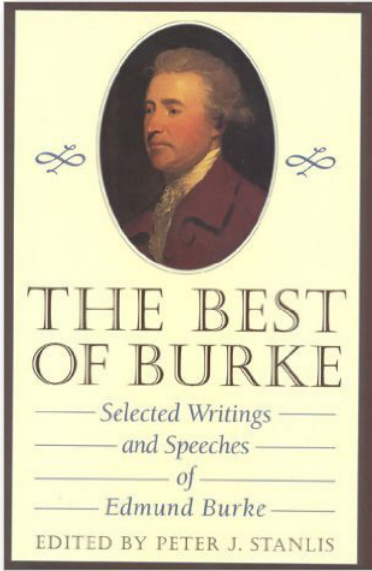
4. *The Best of Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* edited by Peter J. Stanlis

If Ronald Reagan is the great communicator, Burke must be the extraordinary communicator. Someone once said that pages of Burke are like sheets of fire. During the time he lived, in the 18th century, most political leaders were hereditary aristocrats, but Burke, like Cicero, did not descend from generations of prominent leaders. He earned his leadership in British politics through the power of his mind. He studied history and political principles. He applied what he learned to real circumstances.

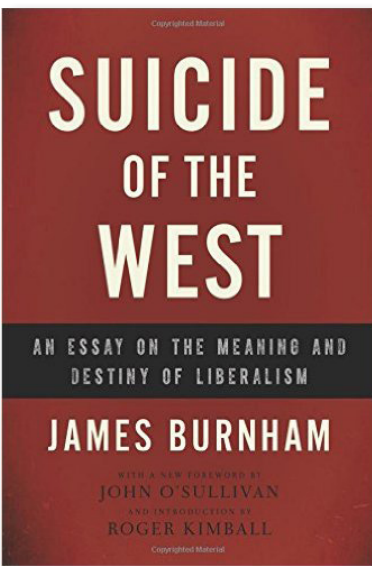
This book tells the true story of the revitalization of the U.S. economy during the 1980s.



The Law, Bastiat's most famous work, is concerned primarily with economics, in the context of traditional values.



If Ronald Reagan is the great communicator, Burke must be the extraordinary communicator.



Suicide of the West is a withering indictment of leftist ideology. Burnham shows collectivism as the ideology of Western suicide.

A superficial look at Burke's career might tempt one to dismiss him as a failure. Most of the causes to which he devoted himself were not successful in his lifetime. Prior to the American Revolution, Burke wrote brilliantly on behalf of conciliation between Britain and the American colonies. He argued for fair treatment of India by Britain. He argued for fair treatment of the Irish by the British and for Catholic emancipation in England. Burke's arguments eventually prevailed, but after his death.

Fortunately, he did live long enough to see the triumph of the greatest work of his life: his effort to awaken his country to the fundamentally destructive but superficially attractive nature of the French Revolution. His thorough and, I believe, inspired condemnation of the French Revolution swept British majority opinion and powerfully affected thinking on the Continent. To Burke, more than any other thinker or politician of his time, goes the credit for creating the intellectual force which saved Europe first from revolutionary chaos and then from dictatorship.

Modern-day conservatives are also profoundly in his debt. His writings against the French Revolution provided the philosophical foundation for anti-communism in particular and ordered liberty in general. Read Burke. All his writings on government and politics are a rich ore, studded with gems of wisdom.

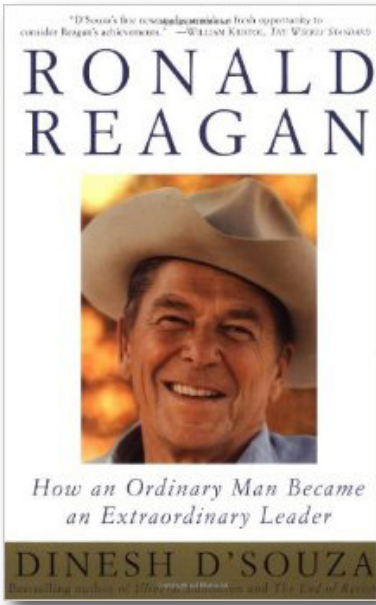
5. *Suicide of the West* by James Burnham

Burnham began his career in political activism as a Trotskyite communist and became a very committed anti-communist. Like Buckley, Burnham, in the '60s and '70s particularly, provided intellectual fortification for the conservative movement.

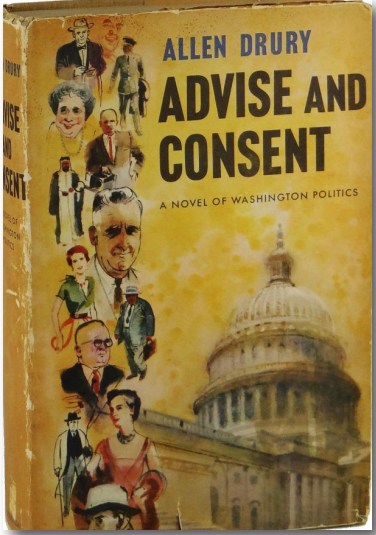
First published in the early sixties, *Suicide of the West* is a withering indictment of leftist ideology. Burnham shows collectivism is the ideology of Western suicide. Though Soviet communism has collapsed, their ideology remains, and as long as it does, *Suicide of the West* should be read by conservatives.

6. *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers

A master of English prose, Chambers was a senior editor of *Time* magazine until he resigned, in 1948, to testify against a man he once considered his friend, Alger Hiss. Chambers testified that several years earlier, before World War II, he had been a member of the Communist Party of the United States, and that through the Party he had met Hiss, a fellow Party member and a State Department



D'Souza explains the Reagan the leftists (and many conservatives) never understood.



Advise and Consent is essential reading for conservatives seeking to know how Washington really works.

employee. What's more, Chambers charged that Hiss routinely delivered to him secret U.S. government papers to be given to the Soviets.

At the time of Chambers' testimony, Hiss was president of the prestigious Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Chambers' charges shocked the leftist establishment, who viciously attacked Chambers for decades afterwards.

Hiss denied ever being a Communist and denied even knowing Whittaker Chambers. Hiss made these denials in the wrong place, before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Thanks in part to the efforts of a congressman from California named Richard Nixon, Hiss was eventually convicted of perjuring himself in his testimony before the House committee and went to jail.

Until the fall of the Soviet Union, leftists in general fiercely maintained Hiss was innocent. Then newly opened files in Russia and de-classified U.S. intelligence reports vindicated Chambers and proved Alger Hiss was as guilty as sin.

Witness, Chambers' account of his ordeal, is a powerful, wrenching book. Any conservative who reads the first section, Letter to My Children, should become a Chambers admirer for life.

7. *Ronald Reagan* by Dinesh D' Souza

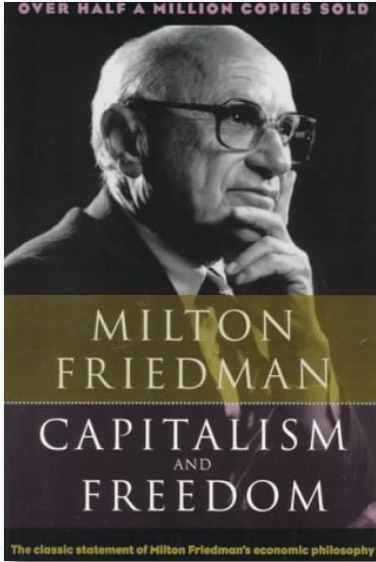
This political biography by an outstanding young author will be for future generations an essential study of Reagan written in his lifetime. D'Souza explains the Reagan the leftists (and many conservatives) never understood.

8. *Advise and Consent* by Allen Drury

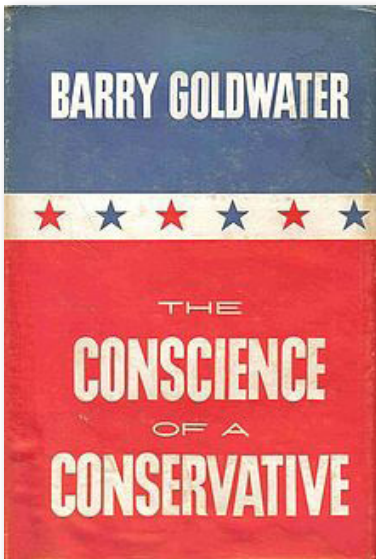
This is the great American political novel. Drury was for many years a political reporter in Washington, D.C. He did not have to imagine the tensions that develop between the President and Congress, nor did he have to imagine the bitter political fighting and intrigues that take place behind the scenes; he had reported on them. I consider *Advise and Consent* essential reading for conservatives seeking to know how Washington really works.

9. *The Theme Is Freedom* by M. Stanton Evans

The late Stan Evans, a good friend, wrote many successful books, but this is a stunning, path-breaking work. It is a frontal assault on Karl



This is a jargon-free explanation of the principles of economic freedom, which Friedman demonstrates is a necessary condition for political freedom.



The Conscience of a Conservative is pure Barry Goldwater, circa 1960.

Marx and the economic determinism that underpins Marxism. In place of economic determinism, Evans offers what might be called theological determinism. He demonstrates that free countries are free largely because of religion, rather than despite religion, as leftists claim.

10. ***Capitalism and Freedom*** by Milton Friedman

As befitting a Nobel laureate in economics and a former president of the American Economic Association, Dr. Friedman wrote many fine scholarly works. But you don't need a doctorate in economics to read *Capitalism and Freedom*. This is a jargon-free explanation of the principles of economic freedom, which Friedman demonstrates is a necessary condition for political freedom. Get and read this razor-sharp book.

11. ***The Conscience of a Conservative*** by Barry Goldwater

Published in 1960 and reproduced in the millions in 1964, when Goldwater ran for President, it is still read widely today. Some people suggest that, since the draft of the book was written by the late Brent Bozell (whose son, Brent Bozell III, is the head of the media-watchdog organization, the Media Research Center), that credit for the book belongs more to Bozell than Goldwater.

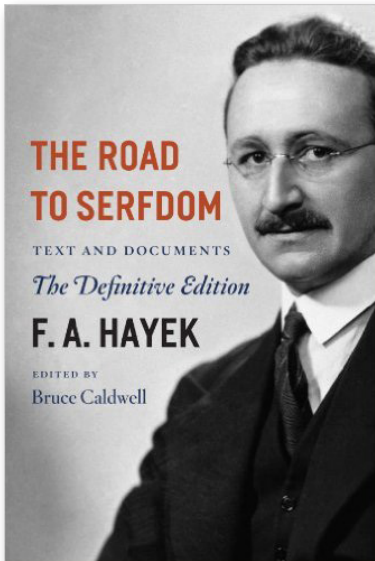
Bozell studied Goldwater's writings and listened carefully to his speeches. He wrote this book in close coordination with Goldwater.

The Conscience of a Conservative is pure Barry Goldwater, circa 1960. Those who haven't read it should do so, not only for its masterly distillation of the principles of limited government, but also to gain an insight into Goldwater's great impact on politics in America. This book didn't win the 1964 election for Senator Goldwater, but it launched the political education of many grassroots activists who eventually nominated and elected Ronald Reagan.

12. ***The Road to Serfdom*** and 13. ***The Fatal Conceit***, both by F. A. Hayek

Hayek lived into his nineties and died in 1992. Like Friedman, Hayek was a Nobel Laureate in economics. While most of his writings are fairly technical, *The Road to Serfdom* is highly readable.

Written in England in 1944 while Hayek was an Austrian refugee from Nazi-occupied Europe, *Road to Serfdom* is pure gold for conservatives



and well worth frequent reading. But it utterly frustrates leftist readers because it explains so clearly and powerfully why socialism can't work.

Frank Meyer, whom I shall discuss later, read *Road to Serfdom* while he was associated with the Communist Party. "The Party will have to answer this," Meyer told his wife. The Party couldn't and didn't. Meyer set off on his journey up the road from serfdom.

The other Hayek book I specially recommend is *The Fatal Conceit*. Hayek packed this extraordinary book, published posthumously, with the wisdom he developed in a lifetime of brilliant thought. Here, for example, he warns against the intellectuals' impulse to redesign what they never could have designed in the first place: our civilization.

14. *Economics in One Lesson* by Henry Hazlitt

If everybody learned economics from Hazlitt, it would not be called the dismal science. In this masterpiece of concision, economic journalist Hazlitt elegantly and clearly presents the case for economic liberty. Hayek said of this book: "I know of no other modern book from which the intelligent layman can learn so much about the basic truths of economics in so short a time."

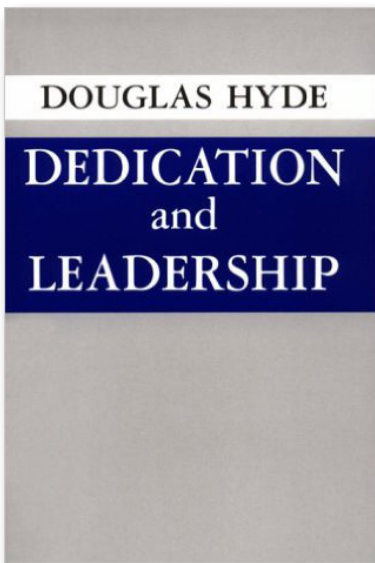
15. *Dedication and Leadership* by Douglas Hyde

For many years Hyde was a leader of the Communist Party in Great Britain. In 1948, the Communist stalwart shocked all Britain by resigning as editor of the daily paper of the British Communist Party and leaving the Party.

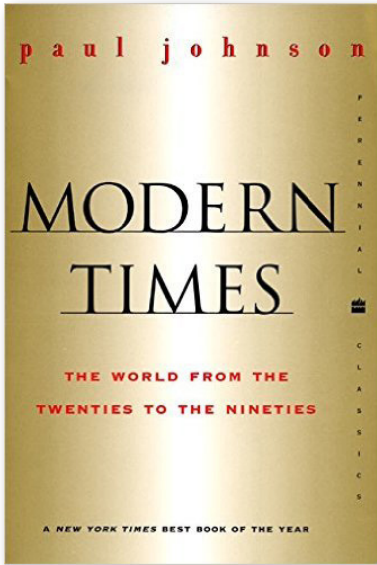
He became a Christian and wrote *Dedication and Leadership* as a guide to political skills for anti-communists, particularly Christians. After reading it, you will understand why communism endured for so long. Much of its success, Hyde shows, was due to its use of philosophically neutral techniques of communication, recruitment, training, and organization.

I learned of *Dedication and Leadership* around 1968 from Eugene Methvin, who was for decades a senior editor at the *Reader's Digest*. He gave me his old, marked-up paperback copy, which was nearly falling apart. I read and studied it until it did fall apart. Now I give away hundreds of copies to students at my schools each year.

Road to Serfdom is pure gold for conservatives and well worth frequent reading. But it utterly frustrates leftist readers because it explains so clearly and powerfully why socialism can't work.



After reading this book, you will understand why communism endured for so long.



If you enjoy reading history, a taste you can and should acquire, Modern Times will be a great pleasure for you.

16. **Modern Times** by Paul Johnson

This is a brilliant and highly-readable discussion of the history of the 20th century, unburdened by the leftist world view. If you enjoy reading history, a taste you can and should acquire, *Modern Times* will be a great pleasure for you, as will other works by Paul Johnson. I find *The Quotable Paul Johnson* particularly valuable.

17. **The Conservative Mind** by Russell Kirk

Professor Kirk was an intellectual disciple of Edmund Burke and an indefatigable identifier and defender of the permanent things in our culture. He left a great body of published works.

Starting with Burke, *The Conservative Mind* surveys the major conservative thinkers of Western civilization. Published in 1953 and updated in subsequent editions, it re-established in America the intellectual respectability of conservative principles, setting the stage for the growth of the modern conservative movement.

18. **Liberty and Tyranny** by Mark Levin

A powerful and highly useful book, *Liberty and Tyranny — A Conservative Manifesto* by Mark Levin was the number one best seller for months in 2009.

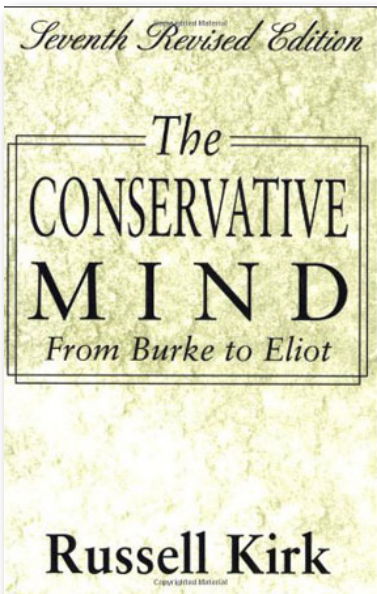
At a time when conservative principles are endangered like never before, Mark Levin brilliantly wrote them down to educate us and remind us of their timeless value.

With so many leftist Democrats now in power and so many content-free Republicans aspiring to power for the wrong reasons, Mark Levin did America a big favor by writing this book. Now there's no excuse for any of us not to know who are the enemies of ordered liberty and why they are wrong, wrong, wrong.

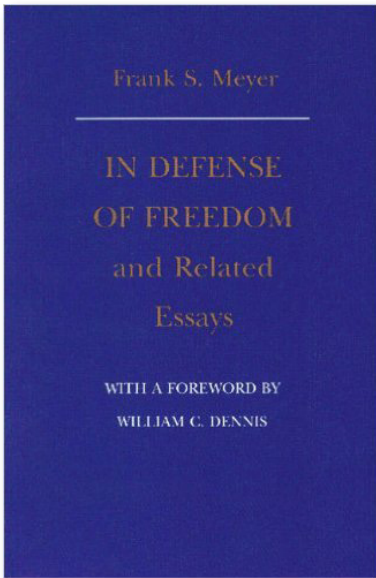
I expect *Liberty and Tyranny* to remain in print for decades. Responsible parents will buy it for their bright children in their student years. Conservative activists will re-read it to re-charge their political batteries.

19. **The Rise of Radicalism** by Eugene Methvin

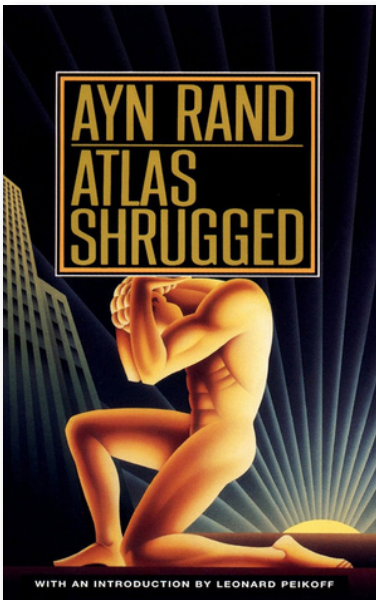
Methvin examines what might be called the fundamentals of leftism: propaganda, confrontation, organization, and violence. The book may be hard to find, but if you find it, buy it. This book will help you view the political process from an historical perspective.



Starting with Burke, The Conservative Mind surveys the major conservative thinkers of Western civilization.



Meyer was a former Communist, but he atoned for this by the many contributions he made to the anti-communist cause.



Atlas Shrugged is one of the most devastating critiques ever written of big government and the leftist media.

20. *In Defense of Freedom* and 21. *What Is Conservatism?*, both by Frank Meyer

As mentioned earlier, Meyer was a former Communist, but he atoned for this by the many contributions he made to the anti-communist cause and to the conservative movement. The latter, I believe, owes an incalculable debt to him.

Before 1960, Meyer, who was at the time a senior editor of *National Review*, began arguing that there is no inherent contradiction between the two major streams of the right in America: free-market principles and traditional values.

He further argued that for the conservative movement to succeed, adherents of both lines of thought, natural allies on most issues, must be fused together. Supporters of a conservative economic policy, he taught, couldn't expect their policies to be enacted without the backing of social-issue conservatives. And it was equally true, he continued, that social-issue conservatives couldn't expect their policies to be enacted unless they allied with economic conservatives.

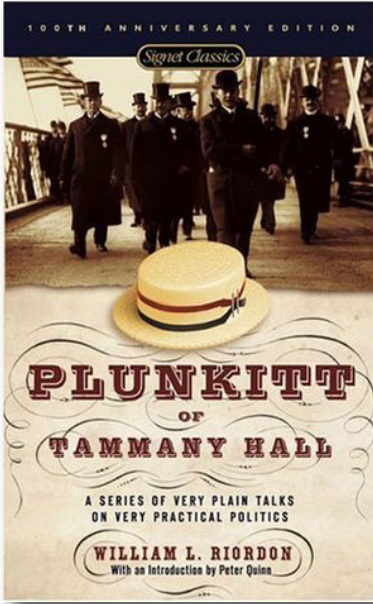
The presidential elections of 1980, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2004, and 2016 as well as several cycles of congressional elections beginning in 1994 were manifestations of the wisdom of Frank Meyer.

22. *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand

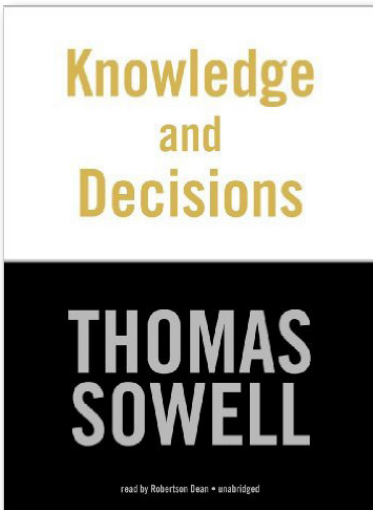
This book has been described as a very long essay in the guise of a very long novel. It is one of the most devastating critiques ever written of big government and the leftist media. Rand's moral indignation is contagious. After reading her, most readers are forever immune to the enticements of socialism.

It must also be said, however, that the militantly atheistic Rand had an unrealistic view of human nature and little appreciation for cultural values. Most people, however mesmerized by her they may be in their youth, outgrow Rand's philosophy, which Burke might have described as a theoretical construct rather than an application of the accumulated wisdom of mankind.

After reading *Atlas Shrugged*, read also *The Fatal Conceit*, by F.A. Hayek. Hayek once told me, "I am not religious, but I have a great respect for religion." Hayek, along with Burke, who was a Christian, possessed an understanding of human nature much deeper and more realistic than Ayn Rand's.



Riordon provides a classic examination of the reality of big-city politics as it was practiced a century ago.



Sowell ranks as the most consistently excellent writer on the public policy process today.

23. *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* by William Riordon

Rarely is a political book as entertaining as it is informative. This is one of those rarities. Riordon provides a classic examination of the reality of big-city politics as it was practiced a century ago. Any principled person considering a career in politics should read this book to understand what makes many self-interested, career politicians tick.

24. *Knowledge and Decisions* by Thomas Sowell

In my view, Sowell ranks as the most consistently excellent writer on the public policy process today. Any column or book by Sowell is valuable. For this list I have chosen one of his most powerful and transforming works.

Hayek and his colleague, Ludwig von Mises, wrote long ago that government bureaucrats could never know enough to make wise decisions. Sowell elaborates on this theme in a marvelous book that changed my thinking about the way economic and political decisions are made.

Knowledge and Decisions was published in the early 1980s, when I worked in the Reagan White House; I bought ten hardback copies and lent them to Reaganites inside the Administration. (Not everyone was a Reaganite in the Reagan Administration.) Sometimes the book came back, and I lent it out again. By the time I left the White House staff in 1984, I had only two copies left, proving that even good Reaganites suffer from the “I forgot to return your book” syndrome. But I can understand why people “forgot” to return this book.

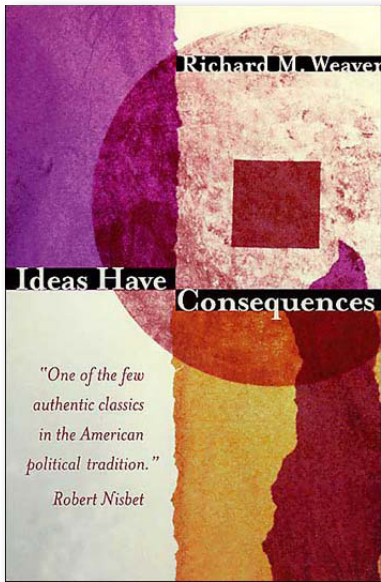
25. *The New Right: We're Ready To Lead* by Richard Viguerie

This book explains the rise of the New Right in the 1970s and how this important new element in the conservative movement deliberately, systematically, and successfully set out to increase the number and effectiveness of conservative activists in America.

26. *Ideas Have Consequences* by Richard Weaver

Weaver was a professor of rhetoric at the University of Chicago. *Ideas Have Consequences*, like Weaver's other books, is small but deep. It brilliantly diagnoses what ails modern man, tracing the illness to its root, the flight from faith.

According to Weaver's friend Russell Kirk, the publisher imposed the title, which Weaver hated, on this book.



My one problem with the book is that its title is used as an incantation by some conservative intellectuals who insist that being right, in the sense of being correct, is sufficient to win. To support their position, they utter the words: "Ideas have consequences," thinking that by so doing they have enlisted Richard Weaver on their side and thereby absolved themselves of any obligation to take effective actions.

Once you have read the book, you will know that Weaver didn't believe that ideas in and of themselves have consequences. He believed that skillful actions, when based on good ideas, have good consequences.

That is the list. I hope these books will inspire you as they have inspired me.

Too many conservative activists stop reading after they leave college. Soon, they drift away from their principles and lose their effectiveness. Don't let this happen to you. A good book will often lead you to another one, if you decide to keep learning.

The world is an interesting place. Read all about it. If you don't read, you can't lead. Continue your education all your life.

Read to learn the lessons of history.

Read to keep up with the issues.

Read to understand why others succeed.

Read to avoid mistakes others have made.

Read for your personal enjoyment.

Read to familiarize yourself with what interests others.

Read to increase your value to an employer.

Read to improve your vocabulary.

Read good writing to learn to write well yourself.

Read to share wisdom with others.

Read to lead.

Ideas Have Consequences brilliantly diagnoses what ails modern man, tracing the illness to its root, the flight from faith.

How To Get Morton's Recommended Books

Advise and Consent, Allen Drury, Avon Books, 1981 (out of print)
ISBN-13: 978-0380010073

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