

Favorite Books

Compiled from suggestions by Wisconsin legislators & legislative employees, May 2002

<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/pubs/tapthepower.htm>

The following titles and comments were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2002. Comments were edited only for length.

Nonfiction

***All Over But the Shoutin'*. Rick Bragg, New York, Pantheon Books, 1997.** This is a very moving tribute to this Pulitzer Prize winner's mother. It is the story of growing up poor in the south. It's funny and touching.

***An Anthropologist on Mars*. Oliver Sachs, New York, Knopf, 1995.** The first of a number of incredibly interesting books by Oliver Sachs that I've read, this book (which chronicles the lives and coping mechanisms of a number of people with unique and fascinating neurobiological disorders or differences) also helped me to informally "diagnose" the disorder that the son of a great friend of mine suffers from . . . called "Asperger's Syndrome" . . .

***Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. James M. McPherson, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.** A great read on the civil war.

***Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative*. David Brock, New York, Crown Publishers, c2002.** Finally, someone had the guts to come forward and reveal that the "right-wing conspiracy" isn't (wasn't) a figment of Hillary's imagination. He confirmed what I already knew, and I hope people who in general are conservatives read it – esp. with an open mind. I, too, am an ex-conservative.

***God, Guns & Rock 'n' Roll*. Ted Nugent, Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2000.** The Motor City Madman tells-it-like-it-is on a number of issues: God and traditional family values, constitutional rights, responsible gun ownership, and hunting. The Nuge is a captivating speaker in person, and he brings that same non-sense approach to this book.

***The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*. Michael Ignatieff, New York, Henry Holt, 1998.** In this provocative collection of essays, Ignatieff explores the complex origins of ethnic conflict.

Biography

***The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*. H.W. Brands, New York, Doubleday, 2000.** A biography of Ben Franklin made interesting primarily by the multi-faceted life of its subject. Of particular interest to a legislative audience might be the section on Franklin's work as a lobbyist at the British parliament during the 1750s and 1760s.

***Flags of Our Fathers*. James Bradley (with Ron Powers), New York, Bantam Books, c2000.** War veterans generally don't talk about combat experiences; neither did Wisconsin native John Bradley – one of the six men who raised the flag on Iwo Jima. The real heroes didn't come home was all Bradley told his family about the flagraising. When Bradley died in 1994, his son wrote this book using a cache of letters, papers, and photographs the family never knew existed. My father recommended this book to me. He piloted a PBY Catalina flying air/sea rescue in the South Pacific (and off the Iwo Jima coast.) *Flags of Our Fathers* opened the door to a discussion of the book – and his WWII experiences.

***Greenspan: The Man Behind Money*. Justin Martin, Cambridge, Mass., Perseus Pub., 2001, c2000.** An entertaining book that takes you on a journey through the extraordinary life of one of our nation's most revered (or feared) men [Alan Greenspan]. From start to finish it is impossible to put down. Find out how a college drop out and jazz musician goes on to be one of the most powerful men in the nation. A definite read for anyone and everyone!

***Lindbergh*. A. Scott Berg, New York, Putnam's, 1998.** Charles A. Lindbergh is famous for his solo flight across the Atlantic, but that is just one event in the life of a fascinating man and his family. Berg was the first author granted unlimited access to Charles and Anne Lindbergh's papers/documents and has written a book that holds your interest the entire time. Charles contributed to the fields of medicine, environment and politics, as well as early aviation. Wonderful, detailed, interesting book. (And did you know Lindbergh flunked out of UW Madison?)

***Mary Todd Lincoln*. Jean Baker, New York, Norton, 1987.** This is probably one of the best books written about Mary Todd Lincoln. It gives the reader a wonderful insight into her complex character and how her marriage to Abraham Lincoln both helped and hindered his presidency.

***My American Journey*. Colin Powell (with Joseph E. Persico), New York, Random House, 1995.** This is the best book I have ever read! Makes you want to go out in the world and kick some butt. Really makes you want to see Colin Powell run for president some day.

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Favorite Books Continued

***Pope John XXIII.* Thomas Cahill, New York, Viking, c2002.** This recently published brief biography is an amazingly concise history of all the Catholic popes, and 2000 years of Western culture. But most of all it is a warm, engaging portrait of an Italian peasant and farmer who became a champion for peace, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli – better known to the world as Pope John XXIII. . . . Thomas Cahill has written a book to enlighten and inspire – and entertain – readers of any faith or background. He doesn't pull his punches in describing the intrigues (and the even the debaucheries and scandals) that have attended papal history. This is history and biography at its most riveting. A "biographical essay" (at a compact 240 pages), *Pope John XXXIII* by Thomas Cahill richly pays tribute to one of the most heroic figures of our times.

Fiction

***The Death of Artemio Cruz.* Carlos Fuentes (translated by Sam Hileman), New York, Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1964.** The Mexican Revolution and its subsequent betrayal and corruption is a frequent subject for Fuentes' richly-textured novels. In this book, the story is told through the deathbed remembrances of one who lost his idealism to opportunism following the revolution.

***The Divine Comedy – Part 1 The Inferno.* Dante Alighieri (translated by Jefferson Butler Fletcher), New York, Columbia University Press, 1951.** I've read the book three times. The imagery is powerful. It's also an interesting look at the times Dante lived in.

***The Floating Opera.* John Barth, Toronto/New York, Bantam Books, 1981, 1967.** This is the story of the day when Todd Andrews, convinced nihilist, practicing attorney and confirmed cynic decides not to commit suicide. In addition to being a very enjoyable book, the initial chapter provides an apt metaphor for the legislative process.

***Foucault's Pendulum.* Umberto Eco (translated by William Weaver), San Diego, Harcourte Brace Jovanovich, c1989.** While translated from the Italian, the English version still holds the interest of the reader. Complex narrative style. Melds history and theology against the backdrop of revolutionary movement in Milan in the 1970s and 1980s. The conspiracy theorist's bible.

***The Golden Notebook.* Doris Lessing, New York, Simon & Shuster, 1962.** A fictionalized account of Lessing's experience working in the anti-apartheid movement and Communist party in post World War II Rhodesia prior to the country's independence.

***The Handmaid's Tale.* Margaret Atwood, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1986.** This book encouraged me to look at world trends and ideas more critically and with a future perspective.

***Les Miserables.* Victor Hugo (translated by Charles E. Wilbour), New York, Knopf, 1997.** The book is a classic because even though it was written in 1862, the commentary on human behavior and social order mirrors the modern world.

***The Long Secret.* Louise Fitzhugh, New York, Dell, 1965.** Children's intermediate reader chapter book. A FANTASTIC book – the sequel to *Harriet the Spy* and even better. I used to begin every summer vacation from junior high through high school with re-reading this book. The prose is wonderful and captures the childhood sensation of wonderment at having a whole summer stretched out before one.

***One for the Money.* Janet Evanovich, New York, Scribner's, 1994.** The first in a series of mysteries by Janet Evanovich. They are laugh out loud funny. The main character is Stephanie Plum who is an unemployed lingerie saleswoman turned bounty hunter. So far Evanovich is up to book 8. All are highly recommended.

***Outlander.* Diana Gabaldon, New York, Delacorte Press, 1991.** Fabulous character development – wonderful combination of fiction and history. There are more books in the series, but it's all one story about a central group of characters. I felt that these people really existed and also felt immersed in 17th century Scotland. Learned a lot about daily life as well as major historical events. I suggest this book to everyone I meet!

***The Poisonwood Bible.* Barbara Kingsolver, New York, HarperFlamingo, 1998.** An intricate and compelling story of a missionary family from Georgia as they experience life in the Congo during the turbulent years of decolonization in the 1960s.

***Roughing It.* Mark Twain, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995.** An account of Mark Twain's first trip to the West and how an aversion to work led him inevitably to become a writer and lecturer. I am classifying it as fiction, although the author claimed it was all told exactly as it happened.

***The Stranger.* Albert Camus (translated by Matthew Ward), New York, Knopf, 1993.** *The Stranger* really let me see the world from someone else's eyes. The protagonist is detached, emotionally void, and perhaps incapable of real love. He often acts without sensing the consequences and therefore winds up in a situation where he is the accused. I would recommend this provoking classic to anyone, but beware: the amoral thoughts and deeds in this book may be a little disturbing at times.
