

can who wants to understand what our forces are fighting in Afghanistan and how they are trying to defeat perhaps the most terrible insurgent enemy in the most ideal place for an insurgency to operate should read this slim, intense book.

The Writer's Art (Andrews McMeel), by James Jackson Kilpatrick. All of us who communicate political thought for a living—actually, everyone who wants to write and speak well—can benefit from reading Kilpo's classic, probably the best book on writing ever written. Just reading it is a joy because Kilpatrick is our greatest living wordsmith. You can revel in chapters titled "Faith, Hope and Clarity" and "My Crotchets and Your Crotchets" and learn every step of the way. His only failure is in not declaring a policy of unconditional surrender in our war against words ending in "ize," which is a great struggle of our time. Perfectly innocent nouns are converted into unmanageable verbs, debasing both. But this is a small complaint about a book that I read for the first time more than two decades ago, and reread every year. Any writer—amateur or professional—can benefit from reading this book. And anyone who speaks publicly can benefit as well. If you write well, you will speak well. That's the Gospel According to St. Kilpo, and we must embrace it as tightly as our abilities permit. **

Jed Babbin is editor of Human Events.

BOB BARR

THE *FEDERALIST PAPERS* (1787–1788), by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. Want to know how government should work? Read *The Federalist Papers*. Want to be reminded how our government was supposed to work? Read *The Federalist Papers*. Want to learn where we've gone wrong as a nation? Read *The Federalist Papers*. Even Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and one of America's true Founding Fathers, recommended *The Federalist Papers* as "the best commentary on the principles of government, which ever was written." Nearly two centuries later, Clinton Rossiter, one of the 20th century's most accomplished political scientists, described this collection of 85 essays as "the one product of the American mind that is rightly counted among the classics of political theory." They were right then, and they would be right today in their analysis of

these magnificently written treatises on government, individual liberty, and constitutional policy.

Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief (Penguin), by James M. McPherson. The controversy over the memos penned by Department of Justice lawyers in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, used to justify the extraordinary measures taken by the administration of George W. Bush in the months and years thereafter, continues to rage today, some eight years later. For citizens concerned about the erosion of civil liberties as a result of the prior administration's exercise of such powers—or for those who supported such moves and are worried they might be curtailed by the current administration or by future Supreme Court decisions—James McPherson's fascinating account of how President Abraham Lincoln employed his powers as commander in chief during the War Between the States is a must-read. In it one finds the seeds of the steps taken 140 years later by the Bush administration. From suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* to the issuance of far-reaching executive orders to accomplish legislative ends—Lincoln did it long before George W. Bush or Dick Cheney did. These lessons, so vividly and entertainingly presented by McPherson, remind us that to understand the present, study the past.

George Washington on Leadership (Basic), by Richard Brookhiser. As a general, he won far fewer battles than many of his contemporaries. As a public speaker, he was far less eloquent than others of his time. In terms of sheer IQ, he was bested by many of those with whom he surrounded himself. Yet George Washington is considered one of the greatest generals of all time, and one of the best, if not the best, American president of all who have served in that office. For those searching for the answers to the question of how a man so human and thus so imperfect could reach such heights of justified praise, one must read Richard Brookhiser's book, in which he explains in lucid and relevant terms Washington's true leadership characteristics. From his famous tenacity to his willingness to recognize and use the skills exhibited by those around him, George Washington accomplished more than others who bested him in eloquence, military skill, or base intelligence. Yes, he made mistakes—many—but unlike so many other political or military leaders of his time or ours, Washington did not forget them, and he learned from them. In this age, when our leaders employ grand eloquence and repeated sound bites to hide mistakes

and agendas, learning how a truly great leader comported himself, and in so doing saved our nation, is worth far more than the price of this book.

Three Felonies a Day: How the Feds Target the Innocent (Encounter), by Harvey A. Silverglate. With a federal criminal code that exceeds 4,000 offenses, and state and local statute books adding many thousands more, it truly can be said we are living in an over-criminalized society. Indeed, when the federal government concocts regulatory schemes reaching into such minutiae as how much water is permitted to flow through the commodes in our homes, or what kind of lightbulbs we may be permitted to use to illuminate the books we read at night, clearly something is wrong. When zealous federal prosecutors play “gotcha” with a doctor trying to relieve the pain of an elderly patient suffering from advanced cancer, because the physician prescribed doses of pain medicine a federal drug agent determined was excessive, clearly we have reached an age when criminal law has become not the servant but the master of all professions. While frightening for what it reveals about legislators, prosecutors, and judges far too willing to permit laws that never should have been passed to be used without restraint, Harvey Silverglate’s *Three Felonies a Day* should be bought and read by lawyers and laypersons alike. It is a real eye-opener.

Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals (Vintage), by Saul D. Alinsky. The title of this book, at a time when we are ruled by a radical community organizer, says it all. ✱

Bob Barr represented the 7th District of Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995 to 2003, and was the 2008 Libertarian Party nominee for president of the United States. He practices law with the Law Offices of Edwin Marger, and runs a consulting firm, Liberty Strategies, Inc., headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.

MATTHEW CONTINETTI

I SPENT MOST OF THE PAST YEAR researching and writing my own book, *The Persecution of Sarah Palin* (Penguin Sentinel), so much of my reading in 2009 had to do with salmon fisheries and the correct way to field-dress a moose. But, whenever I wanted to procrastinate—and that happened a lot—I read for pleasure. Which means there’s a tall pile of

books on my nightstand that have nothing to do with snow machines or the incorrigible media elite.

Scanning over the titles on my personal “Good Books in 2009” list, I’m reminded just how organic the writing process is, just how much writing depends on reading. The perspective, insight, voice, and intensity of each of the authors I read this year influenced my own work in various (and perhaps intangible) ways. Here are my five favorites.

Niall Ferguson’s *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* (Penguin) is an accessible and entertaining narrative history of Western finance. Ferguson may be the only writer alive who can make bond markets seem exciting. *The Ascent of Money* won’t make you rich, but it will teach you that financial crises have been around for as long as capitalism has. The two go together like peanut butter and jelly. It’s all part of the creative destruction of the marketplace that’s brought us to where we are today. History encourages us to take the long view, and the lesson of Ferguson’s history is that we’ll survive the current economic troubles. And eventually, we’ll end up more prosperous than we were before. Assuming Obama doesn’t mess things up, of course.

The newspapers are full of scary headlines, but they have nothing on Stephen King. Years ago I decided to read every novel my favorite contemporary American author has written, in the order he wrote them. One of the King titles I read in 2009 was *Desperation* (Signet), and it’s among his best. A friend recently asked me which of King’s post-addiction novels deserves a place alongside *The Shining*, *The Stand*, *The Talisman*, and *It*. No question, the answer is *Desperation*. If you have a high tolerance for literary gore, you’ll love it.

Meanwhile, I finally got around to reading Michael Lewis’s *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game* (W.W. Norton), which I heartily recommend to NFL fans looking for something to do in between Sunday afternoons. The fantastically talented Lewis tells the story of the fantastically talented Michael Oher, an offensive tackle who goes from a life on the street to playing football at a preppy Nashville high school and then at Ole Miss. Lewis juxtaposes Oher’s story with a history of Bill Walsh’s West Coast offense (and Lewis’s retelling of a key San Francisco 49ers game from the 1980s is the best part). *The Blind Side* came out years ago, but one of the satisfactions of reading it now is that you can finish the book and then watch Oher play for the Baltimore Ravens.