

will always be counted as among the greatest of our presidents because of his implicit understanding of the power of ideas (gleaned, perhaps, from his career as an actor—a field not too distant, in many ways, from that of rhetoricians and scholars).

More specifically, the new president must thoroughly understand why Marxism failed, both as a political system and as a system of economic, psychological, and cultural insights. Reading Thomas Sowell's *Marxism: Philosophy and Economics* would be an excellent start.

For a little light reading, I'd advise my president to read the plays of Shakespeare—particularly *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Julius Caesar*—for their insights into human action and the nature of leadership. Both George Bush and Bill Clinton escaped the American education system before its demise and thus have no doubt read these works. But Shakespeare is best savored, not simply skimmed. And if all the world is indeed a stage, then the next president of the world's only superpower will play the lead. He had best memorize the right lines.

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## ★ F. Kenneth Iverson

The president should read:

*Trashing the Planet*, by Dixy Lee Ray with Lou Guzzo. A well-known scientist gives an even-handed, common-sense perspective on environmental issues. It avoids the distortions and hysterical rhetoric that seem to be the order of the day.

*The Fair Trade Fraud*, by James Bovard. The author provides an in-depth look at our chaotic trade laws, which give incompetent industries an entitlement to milk the American consumer. *The Fair Trade Fraud* is the frightening story of the 8,000 tariffs and 3,000 quotas that restrict foreigners' rights to sell and American citizens' right to buy, and the description of an area where clearly the government has invaded the rights of the individual.

*The Next Century*, by David Halberstam. A short book by a thoughtful observer of society on our problems and the changes we need to make a better tomorrow.

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## ★ Elizabeth Larson

Set in South Africa half a century ago, Alan Paton's deeply moving tale, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), is both a tragedy, in the classical meaning of the word, and a paean to the human virtues and dignity sadly lacking in much of American society today. Many nonfiction works have been written in recent years decrying the effects of the welfare society and the cult of victimization on personal morals and responsibility. For all their careful

analysis, documentation, and statistics, however, none of those books brings home to the reader as Paton does the evil of abdicating individual responsibility and the human dignity of those who willingly live, and die, as a result of their actions.

A sidelight to Paton's central tale of a simple Zulu pastor and his wayward son is the story of the pastor's village—the land overworked and infertile and the people despondent. A wealthy white man arrives one day with plans to reverse this “tragedy of the commons” by dividing the land among the villagers. The right to private property is the subject of the other two books I suggest for our incoming president: *Free Market Environmentalism*, by Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal (1991), and *Takings: Private Property and the Power of Eminent Domain*, by Richard Epstein (1985).

Anderson's and Leal's environmental reader is the most important book for any political leader surrounded by aides, policy makers, and green advocates claiming that only the government can remedy environmental “crises.” While other free-market environmental books are essential resources for information on specific environmental problems and why government “solutions” have made them worse, *Free Market Environmentalism* provides the fundamental principles used by every free-market environmental writer. Anderson and Leal explain, with many historical examples, that environmental problems can be solved by providing the right incentives to the people involved and by letting human initiative, not government mandates, take charge.

Particularly in light of recent battles between property owners and environmental activists over the “taking” of private property by restricting an owner's use of his land, Epstein's authoritative analysis of the concept of eminent domain restricted in the Constitution is the most important work on the subject available. The deceptively simple questions Epstein considers (What is a taking of property? Do current regulations—say, zoning or rent control—fall into that category?) ought to be posed to every policy maker from the president to your local zoning board—and, unfortunately for the security of property rights in America today, almost never are. A new president couldn't have a better foundation upon which to build his presidency than a profound respect for what the Founders considered one of the inalienable rights of women and men.

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## ★ Laura Main

Our nation's problems stem from an internal sort of cancer—call it lack of “family values” or, to be blunt, simply a lack of values. It touches every segment of our country, from crime on our streets to the well-being of our businesses, and it has very little to do with having children out of wedlock.

Even with large segments of the population receiving some sort of government aid, we still find a nation in the grips of so-called



poverty. The book that blows the lid off the ineffectual hand-out system is Charles Murray's *In Pursuit: Of Happiness and Good Government*. Murray quite graciously touches on every foundation that every individual needs to find true happiness—self-respect, education, a functional community, and family—and how our present system is providing everything but that. Everyone should read this book, not just the next president.

So that our president will further his understanding of the need for true self-esteem (not the pop version), I would recommend *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, by Nathaniel Branden. And last, but not least, *A Bend in the River*, by V. S. Naipaul, to illustrate the negative effects of populating cities and towns with innumerable government employees ignorant of what a town truly is and what it means to be a citizen in one. A mere facade of freedom and prosperity, orchestrated by an irresponsible government, can only result in one thing: barely surviving in a jungle.

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## ★ Donald N. McCloskey

If a president reads anything longer than 50 pages containing an argument, it's good news. Presidents—of universities and of companies as much as of the United States of America—have to be quick reads. But too much quick reading makes Jack a superficial boy. It makes him an arrogant boy, too, a Ross Perot, unaccustomed to the modesty of quiet listening. To read a good book with an argument you have to shut up and listen for a few hours, or you're not going to get it. The executive summary won't do. The last long-reading president was Harry Truman. Asked in his old age whether he liked to read himself to sleep he shot back, "No, young man: I like to read myself awake."

One book for the awakening would be Eric Hoffer's *The Temper of Our Time* (reprinted in 1992 by Buccaneer Books). Hoffer, who died in 1983, leaving 10 of these short but luminous books, was a San Francisco longshoreman and sage. He received no formal education, seizing it instead from libraries and bookstores on his way to pick fruit or offload cargo. He wrote in aphorisms, which make his books readable in rest periods from working out the schedule for the White House tennis court. Though a worker, Hoffer supported capitalism; though a thinker, he distrusted intellectuals. "In politics, the intellectual who as a 'man of words' should be a master in the art of persuasion refuses to practice the art once he is in power. He wants not to persuade but to command." A president should know that; Hoffer knew it at the height of American social engineering.

After Hoffer's aphorisms, try a sustained historical argument, from J. R. T. Hughes, a great economic historian at Northwestern who died this year prematurely: *The Governmental Habit: Economic Controls from Colonial Times to the*

*Present* (new edition, Princeton University Press, 1991). From Hughes the president can learn the unhappy fact that we have always liked to interfere, we American individualists. Should "deregulation" be turned back by the new administration? Don't make me laugh. What Hughes called "the regulatory junk pile" is three centuries deep. We can crush modern economic growth with the junk pile if we try hard enough. The reborn state socialists in the environmental movement would like us to do just that. A president should know it.

And light relief: P. J. O'Rourke's *A Parliament of Whores: A Lone Humorist Tries to Explain the Entire United States Government* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991). The book is gut-wrenchingly funny. Mark Twain called Congress "America's only native criminal class"; O'Rourke extends the characterization to the entire U.S. government. You can imagine the new president not joining the laughter. He should, and would gather thereby O'Rourke's serious point. It came to him in the middle of a New England town meeting: "The whole idea of our government is this: If enough people get together and act in concert, they can take something and not pay for it." There's something every president should know.

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## ★ Michael McMennamin

Mr. President, economics has never been your strong suit. You showed no more appreciation of how to generate real growth in the economy than your opponent did. Yet if the economy in the next four years doesn't begin to demonstrate the kind of growth it enjoyed during the '80s, your party may well be shut out of the White House for the next generation.

So what books can you read during the next two and a half months that might really make a difference in your new administration? Given the constraints on your time, the books should be 1) relatively short, 2) entertaining, 3) a source of ideas for improving the economy (if not the government), and 4) written by someone who has no interest in being appointed by you to a high government office.

The three books I recommend are (in the order in which they should be read): *A Parliament of Whores*, by P. J. O'Rourke (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991); *The Fair Trade Fraud*, by James Bovard (St. Martin's Press, 1991); and *For Free Trade*, by Winston S. Churchill (Arthur L. Humphreys, 1906).

O'Rourke's *A Parliament of Whores* is the most accurate, insightful book on American government since Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Read it. Suggest to your staff that P. J. would make a fine White House director of communications. (Don't worry, he won't accept). Fire those who