

A short list of really good books on a variety of topics:

Long run prosperity

- "The Rise and Decline of Nations", by Mancur Olson (1982)
 - *An intriguing and insightful view on why nations experience decline.*
- "Plagues and Peoples", by William McNeill (1977)
 - *Characterizes history as a biological process, where aggregate outcomes are heavily influenced by 'macro-' and 'micro-' pathogens. Fascinating.*
- "Guns, Germs, and Steel", by Jared Diamond (1999)
 - *Some intriguing hypotheses on geography's role in economic development.*
- "The Elusive Quest for Growth" by William Easterly (2002)
 - *What we've learned from the last 50 years of studying and trying to help developing nations achieve faster economic growth. The record is unambiguous -there are very few success stories. Major theme: people respond to incentives.*
- "The White Man's Burden: why the West's efforts to aid the Rest have done so much ill and so little good" by William Easterly (2006)
 - *Why most aid programs have failed, are failing, and will continue to fail. Easterly isn't against helping the needy; he simply notes that most efforts have done more harm than good. The reasons will probably surprise you. This book is a must read.*

History, Politics, Current Events

- "The Day the Universe Changed", by James Burke (1995)
 - *Enlivens world history by isolating particularly pivotal events that changed the course of history.*
- "American Caesar", by William Manchester (1978)
 - *Biography of Douglas MacArthur. Especially riveting account of MacArthur's role in the Pacific theater of WWII.*
- "From Beirut to Jerusalem", by Thomas Friedman (1989)
 - *A good introduction to the history of Israeli-Palestinian 'issues'.*
- "Longitudes and Attitudes", by Thomas Friedman (2002)
 - *A collection of Friedman's New York Times columns about the U.S. and Middle East developments in the two years immediately following 9/11/01.*

Finance & Economics

- "After the Music Stopped", by Alan Blinder (2013)
 - *Blinder recounts the details of the Global Financial Crisis and recovery in a compelling time-sequence of events. He recounts the what, and the why as well as some observations on how attempts to prevent future crises are already being undermined by market participants. He offers an explanation for the dissent from both sides of the political spectrum, and lays much of the blame at policymaker's (both parties) inability to effectively communicate.*

- "The Return of Depression Economics", by Paul Krugman (1999)
 - *Krugman does a good job of showing how a few powerful ideas can go a long way in understanding the economics behind events; an excellent telling.*
- "Naked Economics: Undressing the Dismal Science", by Charles Wheelan (2002)
 - *This is a terrific book. It's economics in plain English by an excellent writer (Wheelan is an erstwhile correspondent for The Economist). He divides the book into chapters reflecting really the important ideas in economics (the power of markets; the importance of incentives; good (& bad) government; productivity and economic growth; information; politics; finance; monetary policy; and trade and globalization). Some great one-liners: the S&L executives being members of the 3-6-3 club (borrow at 3%, lend at 6%, and arrive at the golf course at 3pm); macro forces are like the tides, micro forces determine the quality of the boat you're in; Glenn Loury explains why affirmative action generates feelings of reverse discrimination way out of proportion to reality.*
- "Freakonomics", by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner (2005)
 - *Good book; dumb title.*
- "Stocks for the Long Run" by Jeremy Siegel (1994)
 - *A good description of the equity premium puzzle in the 1st chapter.*

Aging in America

- "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End", by Atul Gawande
 - *This book takes on a difficult and delicate subject we are inclined not to think too much about. Correspondingly, this raises questions about why we have/tolerate sterile, dismal, repugnant 'homes' for our elderly, and why the cost of care in the U.S. is so large. The conversation will only become more important.*

Travel

- The Life of Birds, by David Attenborough (1998)
 - *David Attenborough communicates well the amazing adaptations of birds around the world; really makes you want to experience some of these for yourself.*
- Richard Halliburton's Complete Book of Marvels (1941)
 - *Richard Halliburton led an amazing life and he wrote with verve and simplicity of style that is truly enchanting.*
- Riding the Hulahula to the Arctic Ocean: A Guide to 50 Extraordinary Adventures for the Seasoned Traveler, by Don Mankin and Shannon Stowell (2008)
 - *These 50 trips really take you there.*