

Not Your School's Reading List 5: What Happened to America?

At *Intellectual Takeout*, we strive to offer not only commentary on current events but also tangible advice for engaging with our increasingly chaotic world. That's why we're proud to present this ongoing series of literature recommendations.

This week's entries discuss the crisis in the American political climate and reveal how we've arrived at our current state.

See the previous reading list [here](#).

1. Smedley D. Butler. [*War Is a Racket*](#). 1935.

"*War Is a Racket* is General Smedley Butler's frank speech describing his role as a soldier as nothing more than serving as a puppet for big-business interests. The introduction discusses why General Butler went against the corporate war machine. ... Widely appreciated and referenced by left- and right-wingers alike, this is an extraordinary argument against war – more relevant now than ever."

2. James Burnham. [*The Managerial Revolution*](#). 1941.

"Burnham's claim was that capitalism was dead, but that it was being replaced not by socialism, but a new economic system he called 'managerialism.' ... This is the book that theorised how the world was moving into the hands of the 'managers'. Burnham

explains how Capitalism had virtually lost its control, and would be displaced not by labour, nor by socialism, but by the rule of administrators in business and in government.”

3. Christopher Lasch. [The Culture of Narcissism](#). 1979.

“Lasch’s identification of narcissism as not only an individual ailment but also a burgeoning social epidemic was groundbreaking. His diagnosis of American culture is even more relevant today, predicting the limitless expansion of the anxious and grasping narcissistic self into every part of American life. *The Culture of Narcissism* offers an astute and urgent analysis of what we need to know in these troubled times.”

4. Patrick J. Buchanan. [The Death of the West](#). 2002.

“*The Death of the West* details how a civilization, culture, and moral order are passing away and foresees a new world order that has terrifying implications for our freedom, our faith, and the preeminence of American democracy. *The Death of the West* is a timely, provocative study that asks the question that quietly troubles millions: Is the America we grew up in gone forever?”

5. Charles Murray. [Coming Apart](#). 2012.

“Drawing on five decades of statistics and research, *Coming Apart* demonstrates that a new upper class and a new lower class have diverged so far in core behaviors and values that they barely recognize their underlying American kinship—divergence that has nothing to do with income

inequality and that has grown during good economic times and bad. ... That divergence puts the success of the American project at risk.”

6. Bryan Burrough. [Days of Rage](#). 2015.

“An account of the battle between the FBI & revolutionary movements of the '70s ... Burrough's *Days of Rage* recreates an atmosphere almost unbelievable decades later, conjuring a time of native-born radicals, often nice middle-class kids, smuggling bombs into skyscrapers & detonating them inside the Pentagon & the Capitol, at a Boston courthouse & a Wall Street restaurant.”

7. Tucker Carlson. [Ship of Fools](#). 2018.

“A blistering critique of the new American ruling class, the elites of both parties, who have taken over the ship of state, leaving the rest of us, the citizen-passengers, to wonder: How do we put the country back on course? ... The people in charge are free to pursue policies that are disconnected from the public good but that have, not coincidentally, made them richer, more powerful, and more self-satisfied.”

8. James Kirkpatrick. [Conservatism Inc](#). 2019.

“A compilation of first-rate journalistic pieces written in the heat of the moment by James Kirkpatrick, during one of the most intense periods of contemporary American politics – the events surrounding the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. ... A concerted critique of an entire political class from the ground up, with special regard for

the failings and cowardice of contemporary American conservatism.”

9. Christopher Caldwell. [*The Age of Entitlement*](#). 2020.

“Caldwell has spent years studying the liberal uprising of the 1960s and its unforeseen consequences. Even the reforms that Americans love best have come with costs that are staggeringly high—in wealth, freedom, and social stability. ... He shows that attempts to redress the injustices of the past have left Americans living under two different ideas of what it means to play by the rules.”

10. Paul Gottfried. [*The Vanishing Tradition*](#). 2020.

“This anthology provides a timely critical overview of the American conservative movement. The contributors take on subjects that other commentators have either not noticed or have been fearful to discuss. ... As *The Vanishing Tradition* shows, the conservative movement has not often retrieved its wounded, instead dispatching them in order to please its friendly opposition and to prove its ‘moderateness.’”

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