



My favorite books of 2018

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I love books. I spend a crazy amount of time reading books and listening to audiobooks. It is how I escape the problems of everyday life, and enter a genius-filled world.

When I read Theodore White's *The Making of the President 1960* in the fifth grade, it opened my eyes to politics and history in a way that stayed with me for the next six decades. Every year, certain books leave their mark on me.

Here are my favorite books of 2018:

The book that had the most impact on me this year was Elisabeth Rosenthal's *American Sickness: How Healthcare Became Big Business and How You Can Take it Back*. A doctor and former New York Times reporter, Rosenthal shows how the economics of doctors, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies manipulate patients into unnecessary expensive procedures. She then provides resources for dealing with the unhealthy health care system.

In 2018, I spent more time than I would have liked thinking about President Donald Trump. *Fear: Trump in the White House*, by Bob Woodward, and *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, by Michael Wolff, both illustrated how crazy things are in Trump's White House. We should be afraid, very afraid.

Another book about politics was recommended to me by a reader last year. It was the 1959 novel, *Advise and Consent*, by Allen Drury, which tells a fictionalized story about a controversial nominee for Secretary of State and the political machinations that ensued. The audiobook was a wondrous time warp to a time when Washington politics was so different.

I read a lot about climate change, but my favorite science books were on genetics. *The Evolution of Beauty*, by Richard Prum, and *She Has Her Mother's Laugh*, by Carl Zimmer, both brought to life the complexities of

evolution and told the stories of those who are figuring this stuff out.

As the Jerry Brown era comes to a close, it is a great time to read Miriam Pawel's *The Browns of California: The Family Dynasty that Transformed a State and Shaped a Nation*. What a tale. The compare and contrast of Edmund "Pat" Brown's administration, his son Jerry Brown's first governorship and then Brown's final governorship is fascinating.

For those of you who live in Sacramento, I recommend former Bee reporter and my friend Andy Furillo's novel *The First Year*. It is a story of reporting, the Russian mob, Trump and forest fires. It is a sort of love story, and most delightfully, there is a Sacramento business or landmark on nearly every page. I certainly enjoyed it.

Other books I liked a lot include *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, by Richard White, which is a great companion piece to our California State Railroad Museum. Also, the novel *4 3 2 1*, by Paul Auster, which tells four different versions of the same life, and Seymour Hersh's memoir *Reporter*, which tells the stories behind some of the best journalism of the last 50 years. And finally the book I read before traveling to New York with the Sacramento Metro Chamber study mission, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith.

I owe a special thank you to all of the wonderful people at the Sacramento Public Library, particularly the Central Branch, who made my reading this year possible. They provide so much for so many, every day.

I am making my 2019 reading list now. Please send me your suggestions. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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