

Malcolm Harris, Kids These Days

One of my favorite books of 2018! Harris argues that the expansive role of 'human capital' in today's economy forces his/our generation, the millennials born between 1980 and 2000, into a unique economic predicament. In particular, the economy has shifted the burdens of training, education, and professional overhead, onto the worker, such that workers are more productive than ever, and students higher achieving than ever, but still unable to get ahead economically. His chapters on student debt and the higher education racket are especially pertinent here. I cannot recommend this book strongly enough, especially for the over-forty set who could stand to have their economic baselines updated.

Bryan Caplan, The Case Against Education

Colleges are a waste of time and money. Detailed quantitative arguments show that most students don't learn very much, the price tag is too high, and that 'signalling' and 'credentialling' can account for most of the economic payoff associated with a college education. (Primary and secondary education don't fare much better.)

Morson and Shapiro

A fun book co-written by an economist and a slavist, arguing for the importance of interdisciplinary conversation. No discipline, they believe, can fully account for complex phenomena, or answer life's big questions, or prepare a student for life and work. But working together, they can. The metaphor of the hedgehog and the fox, who know one big thing and many little things, respectively, structures short readable chapters, with examples from literature and economic case studies. We should all be foxes, they say.

Treadgold

A conservative argument that 'liberal' hegemony on campus has interfered with learning outcomes, pushed ideology in place of objective scholarship, promoted bad scholars and teachers, while silencing dissenting voices. He makes some strong points about buzzwords, trends, coddling, and the like.