

## COMMON READINGS, 2017-2018

**Institutions**

*Beach Books 2017-2018* collects data on 498 college common reading selections in 2017-2018 at 481 institutions. These 481 institutions are located in 47 states and the District of Columbia—every part of the Union save Hawaii, Nevada, and Wyoming.

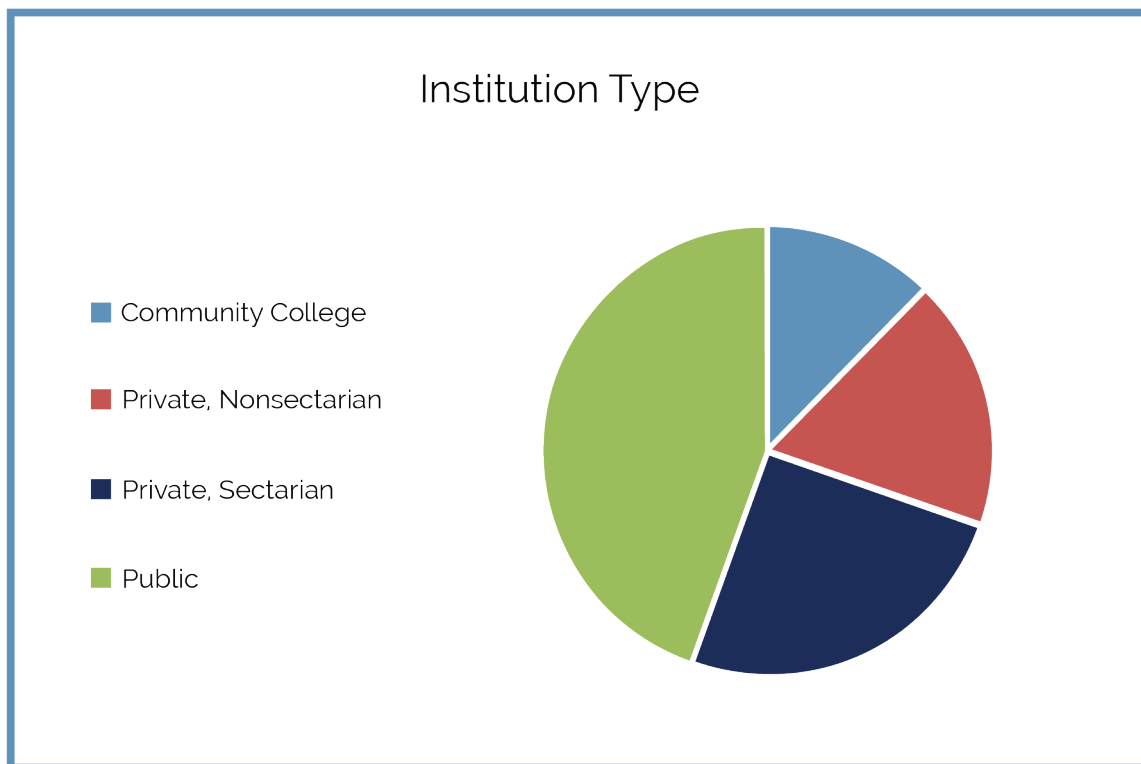
State	Number of Institutions	State	Number of Institutions
Alabama	7	Missouri	7
Alaska	3	Montana	4
Arizona	3	Nebraska	2
Arkansas	3	New Hampshire	1
California	50	New Jersey	15
Colorado	6	New Mexico	1
Connecticut	8	New York	37
Delaware	1	North Carolina	27
District of Columbia	3	North Dakota	1
Florida	13	Ohio	18
Georgia	7	Oklahoma	2
Idaho	3	Oregon	5
Illinois	14	Pennsylvania	37
Indiana	11	Rhode Island	5
Iowa	9	South Carolina	10
Kansas	8	South Dakota	2
Kentucky	8	Tennessee	9
Louisiana	6	Texas	22
Maine	4	Utah	3
Maryland	11	Vermont	3
Massachusetts	30	Virginia	14
Michigan	16	Washington	10
Minnesota	9	West Virginia	3
Mississippi	4	Wisconsin	6

These 481 institutions include 214 public four-year institutions, 121 private sectarian institutions, 87 private non-sectarian institutions, and 59 community colleges.

According to the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, these 481 institutions include two-thirds of the top 100 universities in the nation and one-third of the top 100 liberal arts colleges.<sup>11</sup>

Rankings Type	Number of Institutions
Top 100 Universities Selections	68
Top 100 Liberal Arts Colleges Selections	32

Common readings selected at the highest-ranked colleges and universities (by *U.S. News & World Report* ranking) are somewhat better than the typical common reading selection—especially at the top universities. Below are the assignments at the ten highest-ranked universities and liberal arts colleges with common reading programs.



<sup>11</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*: National Universities Rankings, <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>; National Liberal Arts Colleges Rankings, <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-liberal-arts-colleges>.

## TOP UNIVERSITIES

Institution	U.S. News & World Report ranking	Common Reading(s)
Princeton University	#1	Jan-Werner Müller, <i>What is Populism?</i> (2016)
Stanford University	#5 (tie)	Yaa Gyasi, <i>Homegoing</i> (2016) Elizabeth Kolbert, <i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> (2014) Jesmyn Ward, <i>Salvage the Bones</i> (2010)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	#5 (tie)	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, <i>Americanah</i> (2013)
Columbia University	#5 (tie)	Homer, <i>The Iliad</i> , Bks. I-VI (800 BC?)
University of Pennsylvania	#8 (tie)	Walter Isaacson, <i>The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution</i> (2014)

## TOP LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

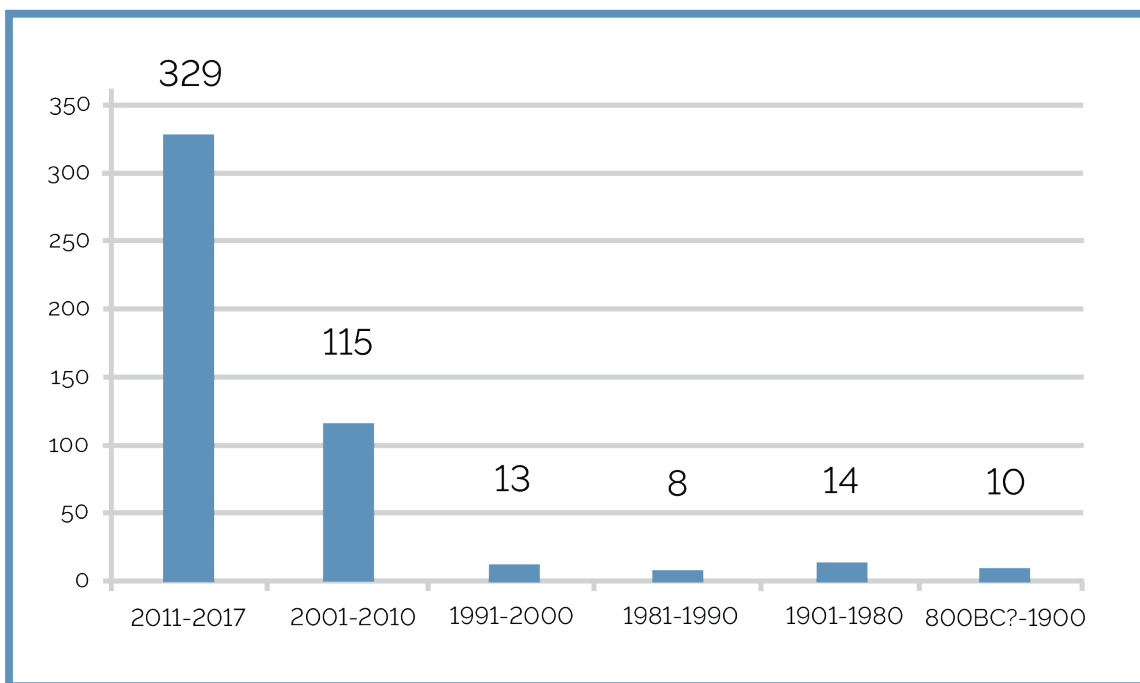
Institution	U.S. News & World Report ranking	Common Reading(s)
Williams College	#1	Bryan Stevenson, <i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> (2014)
Pomona College	#6	Arlie Russell Hochschild, <i>Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right</i> (2016)
Washington and Lee University	#10 (tie)	Danielle Allen, <i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> (2014)
Davidson College	#10 (tie)	Susan Nussbaum, <i>Good Kings Bad Kings</i> (2013)
Smith College	#12	Cristina Henríquez, <i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> (2014)

## Assignments

### PUBLICATION DATES

Common reading committees continue to select almost nothing but books written in the lifetimes of incoming students—and very largely books written since 2010. Out of 489 datable texts selected for 2017-2018 common readings, 329 (67%) were published between 2011 and 2017, and 444 (91%) have been published between 2001 and the present. The median publication year was 2012. The most common years of publication were 2016 (89 books, 18% of the total), 2014 (85 books, 17% of the total), and 2015 (72 books, 15% of the total).

Thirteen selections were published in 2017—more than the 10 (2%) that were published before 1900.



The entire list of 22 common reading selections published from antiquity through 1980 appears below:

### ASSIGNMENTS THROUGH 1980

<i>The Iliad</i> (Books 1-6)	Homer	800 BC	Columbia University
<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	Aristotle	Ca. 350 BC	Hillsdale College
<i>Doctor Faustus</i>	Marlowe, Christopher	1592	Utah Valley University
<i>The Condensed Wealth of Nations</i>	Smith, Adam / Butler, Eamonn	1776/2011	Florida College
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Shelley, Mary	1818	Doane University
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Shelley, Mary	1818	Emory University

<i>Frankenstein</i>	Shelley, Mary	1818	Gustavus Adolphus College
<i>Frankenstein</i>	Shelley, Mary	1818	Washington University in St. Louis
<i>Hard Times</i>	Dickens, Charles	1854	The King's College
<i>Dracula</i>	Stoker, Bram	1897	Auburn University at Montgomery
<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i>	Remarque, Erich Maria	1929	Lynchburg College
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	Steinbeck, John	1939	University of California, Santa Cruz, Rachel Carson College
<i>Under the Sea Wind: A Naturalist's Picture of Ocean Life</i>	Carson, Rachel	1941	University of California, Santa Cruz, Rachel Carson College
<i>Existentialism Is a Humanism</i>	Sartre, Jean Paul	1946	University of California, Santa Cruz, Stevenson College
1984	Orwell, George	1949	Delaware Valley University
<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Bradbury, Ray	1953	Belmont Abbey College
<i>The Idea of a Multiversity</i>	Kerr, Clark	1963	University of California, Santa Cruz, Porter College
<i>The Quest for Peace and Justice</i>	King, Martin Luther, Jr.	1964	Catawba College
<i>The Lame Shall Enter First</i>	O'Connor, Flannery	1965	The King's College
<i>Silence</i>	Endo, Shusaku	1966	Loyola Marymount University
<i>A Man of the People</i>	Achebe, Chinua	1967	Dartmouth College
<i>The Hiding Place</i>	Ten Boom, Corrie	1971	Harding University
<i>Sula</i>	Morrison, Toni	1973	Salisbury University
<i>The Girl Who Was Plugged In</i>	Tiptree, James, Jr. [Alice Bradley Sheldon]	1974	University of California, Santa Cruz, Crown College

## GENRES

We classify common readings by genre: biography, memoir, newspaper, nonfiction, novel, play, poetry, and so on. The large majority of the 498 assignments were in the three allied genres of Nonfiction (174, 35% of the total), Memoir (142, 29% of the total), and Biography (20, 4% of the total). Together there were 336 selections from these three genres, 67% of the total number of assignments.

Novels were the most popular genre of imaginative literature: 119 selections, 24% of the total.

Genre	Number of Assignments
Biography	20
Epic Poem	1
Essay	5
Lecture	1
Memoir	142
Memoir Poems	1
Miscellaneous	8
Musical	2
Newspaper	3
Nonfiction	174
Novel	119
Play	3
Poetry	7
Short Stories	10
Skills Assessment	1
TV Program	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>

## SUBJECT CATEGORIES

We divided the common readings into 30 subject categories. Since each book could be assigned up to two categories, the total number of subject categories is greater than the number of assignments. In 2017-2018, there were 804 assigned subject categories. A book such as Matt Richtel's *A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention* (2014) was categorized under *Humanitarianism/Social Activism* and *Media/Science/Technology*; Jennine Capó Crucet's *Make Your Home Among Strangers* (2015) was categorized under *Coming of Age* and *Immigration*.

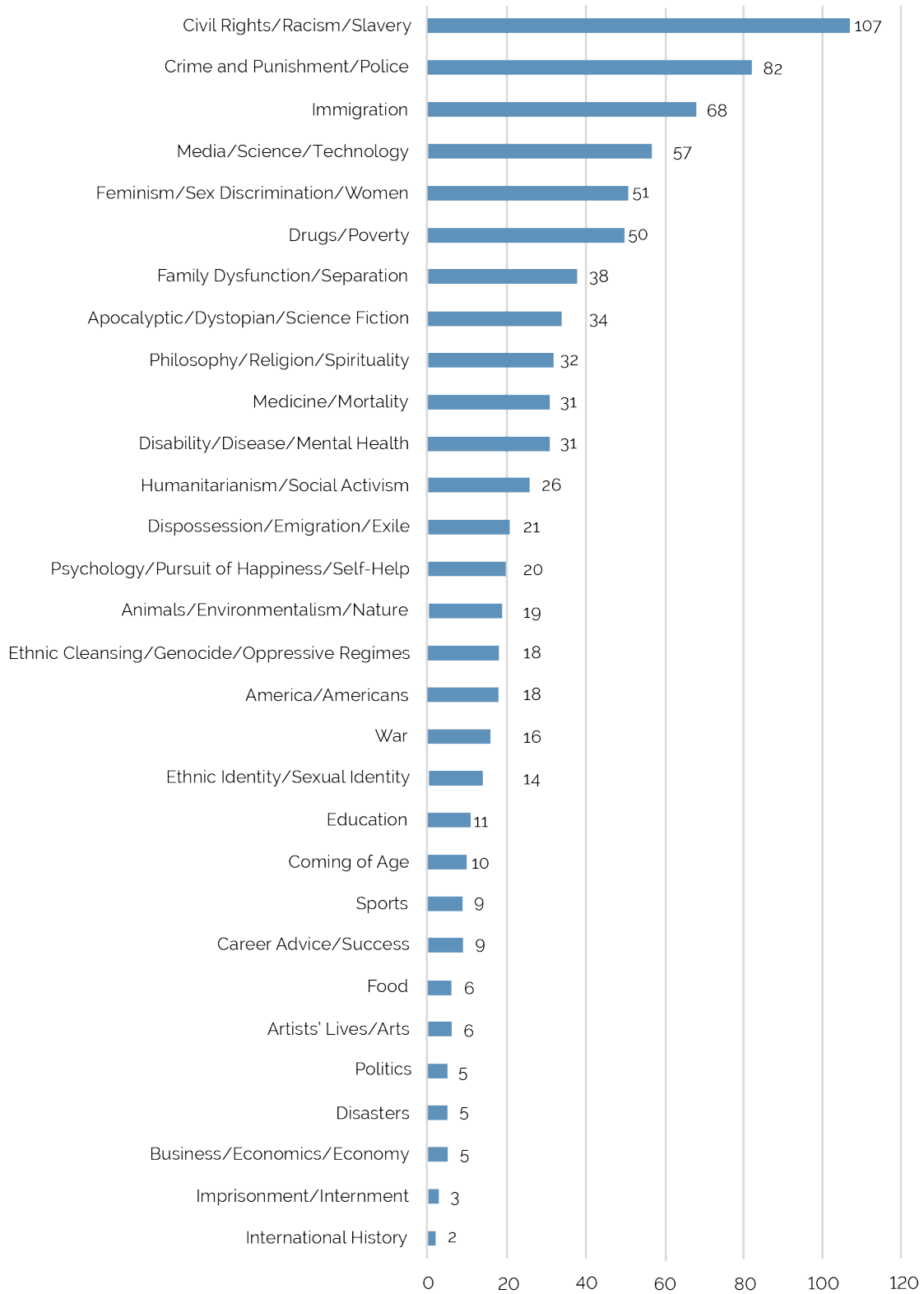
The most popular subject categories in 2017-2018 were *Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery* (107 readings), *Crime and Punishment/Police* (82 readings), *Immigration* (68 readings), *Media/Science/Technology* (57 readings), and *Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women* (51 readings).

Subject Category	Number of Selections
America/Americans	18
Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	19
Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	34
Artists' Lives/Arts	6
Business/Economics/Economy	5
Career Advice/Success	9
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	107
Coming of Age	10
Crime and Punishment/Police	82
Disability/Disease/Mental Health	31
Disasters	5
Dispossession/Emigration/Exile	21
Drugs/Poverty	50
Education	11
Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	18
Ethnic Identity/Sexual Identity	14
Family Dysfunction/Separation	38
Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women	51
Food	6
Humanitarianism/Social Activism	26
Immigration	68
Imprisonment/Internment	3
International History	2

<b>Subject Category</b>	<b>Number of Selections</b>
Media/Science/Technology	57
Medicine/Mortality	31
Philosophy/Religion/Spirituality	32
Politics	5
Psychology/Pursuit of Happiness/Self-Help	20
Sports	9
War	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>804</b>



### Subject Categories



## THEMES

We have also recorded 23 further themes prominent among these assignments. Each book could be assigned up to two themes. We assigned Joshua Davis' *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream* (2014) the themes *Latin American* and *Protagonist Under 18*, while we could have substituted *Film/TV version exists* as one of those themes.

In 2017-2018, there were 406 assigned themes. Most of these register the persisting interest in diversity, defined by non-white ethnicity at home and abroad, but the remainder register other aspects of common readings worth noting. Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* (2010) has an *African American theme* and a *Hurricane Katrina* theme; Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* (2012) has a *Latin American* theme and a *Protagonist Under 18*. Many common readings discuss books of which a film or television version exists, a significant number are graphic novels or memoirs, and many have a protagonist under 18 or are simply young-adult novels. The themes register most strongly the common reading genre's continuing obsession with race, as well as its infantilization of its students, its middlebrow taste, and its progressive politics.

In 2017-2018, the most popular themes were African American (160), Latin American (54), Protagonist Under 18 (29), Film/Television version exists (24), and African (22).

Theme	Number of Selections
Afghanistan War	1
African	22
African American	160
Asian	3
Asian American	11
European	18
Film/TV version exists	24
Graphic work	14
Hurricane Katrina	3
Iraq War	1
Islamic World	14
Jewish World	1
Latin American	54
Muslim American	9
Native American	7
NPR	4

Theme	Number of Selections
Pacific Islander	1
Protagonist Under 18	29
South Asian	6
Southeast Asian	5
Vietnam War	1
White Appalachian	9
Young Adult	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>406</b>

### MOST WIDELY ASSIGNED BOOKS

These were the ten most widely assigned books in 2017-2018:

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	<b>Nonfiction</b> Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	29
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	<b>Memoir</b> Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment/Police <i>African American theme</i>	19
<i>Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race</i> Shetterly, Margot Lee 2016	<b>Nonfiction</b> Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Media/Science/Technology <i>African American theme</i> <i>Film/TV version exists</i>	14
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	<b>Biography</b> Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	12
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	<b>Memoir</b> Crime and Punishment/Police Drugs/Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	12
<i>Make Your Home Among Strangers</i> Cruet, Jennine Capó 2015	<b>Novel</b> Coming of Age Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>	10

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis</i> Vance, J. D. 2016	<b>Memoir</b> Drugs/Poverty Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>White Appalachian theme</i>	9
<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	<b>Nonfiction</b> Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>	8
<i>Callings: The Purpose &amp; Passion of Work</i> Isay, Dave 2016	<b>Memoir</b> America/Americans	7
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	<b>Poetry</b> Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>	7

This list overlaps strongly with last year’s list of most widely assigned texts. *Just Mercy* and *Between the World and Me* were also #1 and #2 last year; and *The Other Wes Moore*, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, and *Citizen* also appeared in both lists of most widely assigned texts.

### HOMOGENEITY

College common readings continue to display a lack of intellectual diversity. This is most evident in the clustering of readings on modern African-American experience, which focus especially upon African-Americans’ relationship to the criminal justice system. This clustering is driven significantly by the most widely assigned texts. All five texts that appeared in the top-ten list in both 2016/2017 and 2017/2018 were about African American experience—*Just Mercy*, *Between the World and Me*, *The Other Wes Moore*, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, and *Citizen*—and the 2017/2018 list also included *Hidden Figures*, another text on African American experience.

This focus had intensified in the last several years, but the rate of increase seems to have abated this year:<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The figures for 2014/2015, 2015/2016, and 2016/2017 were drawn from last year’s report. We have revised our raw data for this year’s study, and now include a far larger data sample for those years—but we have not yet integrated our new data for this particular analysis. The year-by-year comparison should be roughly accurate, but taken with a pinch of salt.

Subject Categories	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Civil Rights/ Racism/Slavery	41 (11%)	64 (18%)	74 (21%)	107 (21%)
Crime and Punishment/ Police	39 (10%)	53 (15%)	67 (19%)	82 (16%)

Theme	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
African American	61 (16%)	99 (27%)	103 (29%)	160 (32%)

The percentage numbers above are “percentage of total assignments,” not “percentage of total subject categories” or “percentage of total themes.”

While there is an even greater focus on African American themes, there is less focus on the two subject categories of Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery and Crime and Punishment/Police. Assignments of *Hidden Figures*, which discusses the contribution of African American women to the space program, emblemize and forward this shift.

#### PREDICTABILITY

The ideologically-constrained common reading genre has become so homogenous that common reading selections have become predictable.

Last year we predicted that “*Between the World and Me* will be one of the five most-frequently selected common readings for 2017-2018.” It was the second most popular choice.

Last year we predicted that a significant number of common reading programs would assign books significantly about rape or sexual assault, but that none would assign K. C. Johnson and Stuart Taylor’s *The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America’s Universities* (2017). Assignments this year did not include *The Campus Rape Frenzy*, but did include Jennifer Thompson-Cannino, Ronald Cotton, and Erin Torneo, *Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption* (2009) at Hilbert College, NY; Annie E. Clark and Andrea L. Pino, *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* (2016) at Moraine Valley Community College, IL; and Jon Krakauer, *Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town* (2015) at Adams State University, Colorado.

On the other hand, we predicted “that at least five colleges and universities will choose pro-transgender-activism works in 2017-2018.” Only two did: Janet [Charles] Mock’s *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*, at University of California, Davis, and Amy Ellis Nutt’s *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania. We are not, alas, perfect prophets.

**NEW PREDICTIONS FOR 2018/2019 COMMON READINGS**

We predict that at least five of the ten most widely assigned texts will have African American themes.

We predict that *Just Mercy*, *Between the World and Me*, and *Hidden Figures* will all remain in the top ten most widely assigned texts.

We predict that at least ten assignments will express transparent anti-Trump passion.

We predict that at least five colleges will select #MeToo-themed texts.

We predict that no college will assign Jordan Peterson’s *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (2018) in the next three years, although it is a common reading ‘natural’—a bestseller that provides psychological advice.

We predict that no college outside Nebraska will assign Ben Sasse’s *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance* (2017) in the next three years, although it is a thoughtful discussion by an eminent politician about how American youth should become mature.

**HONORABLE MENTIONS**

Every college that assigned a work written before 2000 is to be commended for assigning books that will introduce students to the broader expanses of human history. We wish to single out for honorable mention a number of institutions that made especially good common reading selections.

Institution	Author	Work
Columbia University	Homer	<i>The Iliad</i> , Books I-VI (ca. 800 BC)
Delaware Valley University	George Orwell	<i>1984</i> (1949)
Florida College	Adam Smith/Eamonn Butler	<i>The Condensed Wealth of Nations</i> (1776/2011)
Harding University	Corrie Ten Boom	<i>The Hiding Place</i> (1971)
Hillsdale College	Aristotle	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> (ca. 350 BC)
Loyola Marymount University	Shusaku Endo	<i>Silence</i> (1966)
Northwestern University	Danielle Allen	<i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> (2014)
University of California, Santa Cruz, Rachel Carson College	John Steinbeck	<i>Grapes of Wrath</i> (1939)
University of California, Santa Cruz, Stevenson College	Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i> (1946)

Institution	Author	Work
Utah Valley University	Christopher Marlowe	<i>Doctor Faustus</i> (1592)
Wartburg College	Scott H. Hendrix	<i>Martin Luther: A Very Short Introduction</i> (2010)
Washington and Lee University	Danielle Allen	<i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> (2014)

## Recent Developments

### #METOO

Common reading selections remain almost uniformly progressive, mediocre, recently published nonfiction, with a minority of progressive, mediocre, recently published fiction. Institutional underpinnings continue to reinforce this skew: mission statements that require such books; “co-curricular” dominance in the selection committees; and association with service-learning and civic engagement; among others. The programmatic structures and the sorts of books selected display great continuity, year by year.

The most dramatic change in the last year is the impact on common reading programs of the #MeToo movement, which demands that Americans live up to rigorous standards of sexual virtue, and provide real social and legal sanction against those Americans who do not. This movement has begun to affect authors whose works appear frequently among common readings—to date, the most notable appear to be Sherman Alexie and Junot Díaz, both of whom have been accused of sexually harassing or misogynistic behavior.<sup>13</sup>

The logic of the #MeToo movement suggests that authors such as Alexie and Díaz will likely be removed from the common reading lists—unless the purity of #MeToo caves before the institutional demand for “diverse” Indian and Hispanic authors, and a token penance, by way of atonement, is allowed to substitute for complete ostracism. Selection committees will face an interesting dilemma as they confront the now-conflicting imperatives of diversity ideology and #MeToo purity, and have to choose between the politics of racial identity and sexual virtue. Intersectionality provides no easy answers here.

The #MeToo movement, with its demands for higher standards of character and virtue, has also highlighted the dangers of the common reading programs’ commitment to choosing living authors for common readings. A living author may have undiscovered sins. Greg Mortenson’s fabulism,

<sup>13</sup> Lynn Nearie, “‘It Just Felt Very Wrong’: Sherman Alexie’s Accusers Go On The Record,” *NPR Books*, March 5, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/05/589909379/it-just-felt-very-wrong-sherman-alexies-accusers-go-on-the-record>; Amanda Arnold, “Author Alisa Valdes on Junot Díaz: ‘He Mistreated Me, and I Was Severely Punished for It,’” *The Cut*, May 6, 2018, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/05/alisa-valdes-describes-junot-dazs-misogynistic-abuse.html>.

whose exposure abruptly ended selection committees' desire to assign *Three Cups of Tea*, could be taken as an unrepresentative oddity.<sup>14</sup> The cases of Alexie and Díaz raise the possibility that such exposures may become the new normal.

This particularly matters for college common readings because the books are not usually chosen for literary quality. Selection committees characteristically choose books by (progressive) moral exemplars, whose virtues are transparently ascribed to their books. This criterion means that any common reading author with feet of clay will be presumptively removed from the common reading canon—perhaps after an embarrassing orientation, when discussion leaders tiptoe around the moral failings of the author.

So long as selection committees look for exemplary authors rather than good books, they must engage in perpetual scrutiny of potential authors' lives—an Orwellian and time-consuming requirement. The #MeToo movement suggests that a great many authors will fail to live up to the new moral standards. And what if even stricter standards emerge? What if (say) a strict new vegetarianism condemns all potential common reading authors who eat meat? Even within the current common reading catalogues, few authors may survive a #MeatToo challenge.

The desire to prioritize morality tests over questions of literary quality is in any case antithetical to the spirit of a college. Yet the #MeToo movement suggests that the current system will undergo increasing practical strains. It also suggests a practical alternative: classic texts by dead authors. Committees who choose such works will be able to select works by authors whose moral failings are already known. It is regrettable to realize that Martin Luther King was an imperfect human being, but this is already well known, and does not seem likely to damage his standing with common reading committees.<sup>15</sup> Classic texts are better than modern texts; and dead authors are safer than living ones. The #MeToo movement gives a sharp new imperative to choosing the classics as common readings.

#### THE WEINSTEIN CONNECTION

The original #MeToo scandal illustrates a further moral peril of the common reading genre: its dependence on morally compromised Hollywood studios. Reportage on Harvey Weinstein's business practices revealed not only the corruption of Hollywood but also the corruption of the book publishing world. Authors who wished to have their books turned into movies avoided muckraking in Beverly Hills, and book publishers, dependent on a symbiotic relationship with movie producers, likewise turned a blind eye.<sup>16</sup>

14 Jon Krakauer, "3000 Cups of Deceit," *Medium*, July 20, 2014, <https://medium.com/galleys/greg-mortenson-disgraced-author-of-three-cups-of-tea-believes-he-will-have-the-last-laugh-760949b1f964>.

15 Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 144–54, 189.

16 Andy Lewis, "How Harvey Weinstein Used His Book Imprint to Cover His Tracks," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bookmark/how-harvey-weinstein-used-his-book-imprint-cover-his-tracks-1051659>.



The subject matter of the common reading genre seems to reflect this avoidance. Partly the committees subsist on a diet of books curated by publishers, and partly the committees seek out books that have been made into recent movies, since they think it will make students more likely to read the common reading. It is therefore notable how selective is the progressive activism promoted by college common readings. Jon Krakauer's story of campus rape in *Missoula* made it onto common reading lists, but no exposé of Hollywood rape similar to Rose McGowan's *Brave* (2018). David Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), a paranoid thriller about the tech industry, has been a frequent common reading selection; there are no equivalents about the film industry. Common readings include a large number of progressive economic manifestos, such as Matthew Desmond's *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* (2016), but no book calling for reform of intellectual property laws to shorten the period of movie copyright, no book about Hollywood's export of movie production overseas to weaken its unions, nor any book condemning the lack of racial diversity among Hollywood producers.

The absences in college common readings betray the influence of Hollywood's interests—and the case of Harvey Weinstein suggests just how morally compromising that influence has been. Selection committees cannot and should not entirely avoid books that have been turned into movies: we recommended Shusaku Endo's *Silence* (1966) to common reading committees before the 2016 film came out, and it would be perverse to withdraw the recommendation just because Martin Scorsese also admires Endo's novel. Nevertheless, selection committees should consider seriously their dependence on book publishers' common reading lists, since these lists themselves apparently are curated to serve corporate Hollywood.

#### **SYMPATHY FOR THE DEPLORABLES?**

Nine colleges selected J. D. Vance's memoir *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016). This selection should be taken as a gesture toward understanding the half of the country that voted for President Trump; so should the selection by two more colleges of Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (2016). The gesture, however, stays firmly within the limits of the common reading genre, by the expedient of extending the mawkish study of collective suffering by an identity group to poor whites in the heartland. We commend selection committees that widen common readings' bounds of sympathy beyond traditional progressive limits. Yet they would do even better to abandon the strictures of identity-group suffering altogether.