



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on May 26, 2015

Graduation Gifts

This is the season of college graduations, and many people may be wondering what kinds of gifts would be most appropriate for young people leaving the world of academia and heading out to face the challenges and opportunities of adulthood in the real world.

Given the narrow range of left to far left views of the world on most college campuses, and the vast ignorance of other views, even among graduates of elite academic institutions, one valuable gift might be a book giving a different perspective on the world.



The recent publication of *American Contempt for Liberty*, a hefty, 417-page collection of columns by economist Walter E. Williams, would be an excellent choice. For many college graduates, this book would be virtually an education in itself, covering many issues and presenting many perspectives they have never encountered before, in this era of academic lockstep thinking on social issues.

How often will most college students have seen Social Security exposed as “The National Ponzi scheme,” as one of Professor Williams’ columns does in plain, hard-hitting English? Or see minimum wage laws examined in terms of their actual results, rather than their pious rhetoric?

Another book that would open the eyes of most of today’s graduates to a world they have never encountered or conceived is *Life at the Bottom* by Theodore Dalrymple. It shows the actual effects of the welfare state on the way people live their lives. It is not a pretty picture, but inexperienced young people need to become acquainted with realities, after years of hearing high-sounding theories.

The fact that *Life at the Bottom* is about low-income whites in England, living lives remarkably similar to the lives of blacks in American ghettos, means that it cannot be dismissed as racism, the way American promoters of the welfare state evade responsibility for the social disasters they have created.

Any of a number of blockbuster best sellers by Ann Coulter can provide eye-opening revelations about the economic madness and moral dry rot originating on the political left. Her recently published book, *Adios, America!* is about the heedless rush to solve our immigration problems by simply declaring millions of illegal immigrants to be legal.

Like other Ann Coulter books, its cutting wit and take-no-prisoners style is backed up by thoroughly researched facts, including facts that most of the media refuse to report.

Books are not the only graduation gifts that could let young people, who are leaving the world of campus groupthink, know that there is another world called reality. Subscriptions to high quality publications with a different viewpoint are another possibility. The quarterly publications *City Journal* and *Hoover Digest* are gems of this genre.

My own favorite approach to controversial issues, going back to my teaching days, is to confront students with the strongest arguments available on opposite sides of these issues. The point of this



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approach is not to feed the students prepackaged conclusions, but to force them to seek facts and apply logic, in their own attempts to resolve complex and important controversies.

Nor should they be allowed to cop out with some vague pieties about how “the truth lies somewhere in between.” The truth is wherever you find it — and the process of trying to find it is what education should be about, regardless of what conclusions they reach.

For those who share this conception of education, one of the best gifts to graduates — or to undergraduates still going through lockstep academia — would be a subscription to publications with opposite viewpoints, to make up for the narrow range of views in our educational institutions today.

My suggestion would be to give young people a subscription to both the *New York Times* and *Investor’s Business Daily*. Seeing how the editorial pages of these newspapers clash, day after day on issue after issue, should build up some mental muscles that students seldom get from being mental couch potatoes on politically correct campuses, where one viewpoint fits all.

Since both newspapers have electronic versions available for iPads and other devices, that should fit the current lifestyle of the young, while they move beyond the current groupthink.

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