

MERCURY READER



a custom publication
new selections for 2009*

John and Abigail Adams, Letters Between John and Abigail Adams (1776)

These letters were written while John was serving in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia to organize the new nation. Note that Abigail reminds him to “remember the ladies” as he and his colleagues write the new laws—a warning not necessarily heeded. (5 pp.) A800

Reza Aslan, Slouching Toward Medina: The Islamic Reformation (2005)

An Iranian-American scholar argues that Islam not only can be but must be the foundation on which democracy spreads throughout the Middle East. (17 pp.) A801

Margaret Atwood, A Letter to America (2003)

A noted Canadian writer expresses deep concerns regarding the Iraq war, American civil liberties, and the United States economy, worrying about the impact of U.S. domestic and foreign policy on the entire world. (14 pp.) A802

Patricia A. Baird and Chris MacDonald, Should Human Cloning be Permitted? and Yes, Human Cloning Should be Permitted

A professor of medical genetics, Patricia Baird, presents a strong and unequivocal argument against human cloning, and, in a second article, a philosopher of ethics, Chris MacDonald, responds to Baird’s opposition to human cloning, arguing for caution rather than an outright ban. (12 pp.) A803

James Baldwin, A Talk to Teachers (1963)

In this talk to teachers, presented in 1963, Baldwin tells teachers of minority students the truth about their students’ experiences. He talks tough in order to make clear that things needed to change or trouble would follow. (9 pp.) A804

Dave Barry, Genes Cleaned and Starched, While You Wait

Dave Barry’s wit and satire have delighted readers at all levels and of all ages for over twenty years. This essay has fun with the recent deciphering of the human genome and the implications of this achievement for humanity. (3 pp.) A805

Sven Birkerts, Into the Electronic Millennium

Birkerts provides several critiques of the electronic age, noting especially a decline in a particular type of literacy. His perspectives will provide the postmodern reader with challenges and questions. (10 pp.) A806

Neil Bissoondath, Religious Faith Versus Spirituality

A journalist explains why he considers that religious faith and spirituality can be mutually exclusive, arguing that it is possible to be spiritual without believing in God. (3 pp.) A807

Jane Black, The Perils and Promise of Online Schmoozing (2004)

Social networks online provide the opportunity to meet with and communicate with those who have interests similar to one's own. The problem though is that these sites can share information with other sites so that soon personal information can and does spread worldwide. (3 pp.) A808

Johannes Borgstein, The Poetry of Genetics (1998)

In this essay he questions the possibility that the human genome will ever be completely understood. He uses an analogy to the way that language works to show how complex the genome research and application will actually be. (5 pp.) A809

Rosa Brooks, Obama and the World (2008)

A columnist for the Los Angeles Times explores the implications of Barack Obama's election to relations between the United States and the rest of the world. (3 pp.) A901

James Carroll, In the Valley of Bones (1996)

A former priest recounts the story of how his first sermon, condemning the Vietnam War, alienates him from his pro-war father. (9 pp.) A810

Damien Cave, Generation O Gets Its Hopes Up (2008)

In this selection from the *New York Times*, Cave describes the significance of Barack Obama to the post-baby-boomer generation. The author explains how the new president fashioned his campaign and defined his appeal through the use of new-media tools, launching the post-boomer era in politics. (6 pp.) A902

CBS News Interactive, Olympic Drug Testing

This chart gives readers an overview of the enhanced use of performance drugs by Olympic athletes, showing that more athletes use drugs but that the percentage using drugs has decreased as the competitive numbers have increased. (2 pp.) A812

Laura Collins, Friend Game (2008)

Reporting on the suicide of thirteen-year-old Megan Meier, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* explores the ways in which social networking can exacerbate adolescent anxieties, sometimes with tragic results. (15 pp.) A814

Douglas Coupland, The Sun is Your Enemy (2003)

In the following selection taken from Coupland's novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, the author offers a brief exchange of three friends in the California desert discussing their answers to the question, "What do you think of when you see the sun?" (3 pp.) A815

James Crawford, Making Sense of Census 2000 (2000)

This online chart shows the increase in people who speak a language other than English at home in the United States and the even larger increase in speakers who do not feel confident in their use of English. The report suggests that the increase both in immigration and birth rates among new immigrants contributes to these numbers. (10 pp.) A816

Bonnie Devet, The Day I Met Bruce Lee (2007)

A college professor, a punk-rocker couple, and a Chinese-American grandfather with his young teenage grandchildren share a moment of multicultural reflection at the gravesite of a martial-arts movie star. (5 pp.) A818

Frederick Douglass, What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? (1852)

In a fiery 1852 address to New York abolitionists on the Fourth of July, a prominent former slave condemns the United States for continuing to tolerate the enslavement of human beings.

(5 pp.) A819

James Downey, 2000 Thoughts: A Liberal Education Is Key to a Civil Society (2000)

Downey muses on the loss of the liberal education in universities in North America, especially in Canada. He suggests that the humanities especially have lost their missions and purposes. (3 pp.) A820

Bob Drogin and Maeve Reston, How the Election Was Won—And Lost (2008)

Two reporters for the Los Angeles Times analyze the failure of John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

(5 pp.) A903

Amitai Etzioni, The New Community (1993)

This essay compares and contrasts two sociological concepts, one having to do with close-knit communities based on relationship and the other having to do with diverse societies based on social contracts. Etzioni concludes that America today is a mix of both. (8 pp.) A822

Leila Fadel, Chilling Stories from the Mahdi Army (2007)

This news story contends that the problems in Iraq and Iran are about the rivalries between two ethnic groups, the Shiites and the Sunnis. As long as these two groups continue to take revenge, the author feels, nothing will change in Iraq. (5 pp.) A823

Paul Feine, McBastards: McDonald's & Globalization (2008)

In this light and easy-going essay, Feine discusses the power and fearsome aspects of the McDonald's empire but concludes that Americans both at home and abroad just cannot live without the Golden Arches.

(4 pp.) A824

Thomas L. Friedman, Finishing Our Work (2008)

A columnist for the *New York Times* attempts to explain how Barack Obama won the presidential election in the most immediate sense, but also defines the election as part of a long continuum of racial and social developments and, in doing so, projects a more enlightened future for the U.S. (4 pp.) A904

Thomas L. Friedman, While I Was Sleeping (2006)

An American journalist comes to the realization that the technology explosion of the twenty-first century has empowered not only governments and businesses, but terrorist networks and individuals as well. (10 pp.) A825

Lianne George, Why Are We Dressing Our Daughters Like This? (2007)

A Canadian journalist cites a number of experts with different explanations for what many consider an alarming trend toward sexualizing girls' clothing. (10 pp.) A826

Malcolm Gladwell, Dangerous Minds: Criminal Profiling Made Easy (2007)

A writer for *The New Yorker* unmask the glorified image of the F.B.I. criminal profiler, comparing profiling to the practice of astrologers and psychics. (15 pp.) A827

Malcolm Gladwell, None of the Above: What I.Q. Doesn't Tell You about Race (2007)

In a review of James Flynn's *What Is Intelligence?* a journalist and author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink* discusses the significance of Flynn's research as a challenge to what he refers to as the "I.Q. fundamentalists." (9 pp.) A828

Maria Glod, High-School Students Fight Anti-Cheating Firm (2006)

The following news article from *The Seattle Times* tells about students at a Virginia high school who are protesting the school's use of Turnitin, a database designed to discourage plagiarism. (3 pp.) A829

Doris Kearns Goodwin, How I Caused That Story (2002)

A respected historian responds to accusations of plagiarism, explaining the complicated process of incorporating sources into lengthy works of history. (3 pp.) A830

Timothy Gower, Fatal Flaw (2008)

A journalist consults doctors and medical ethicists who differ on questions not only of how to define death, but also on whether or not to abandon the "dead donor rule" in harvesting organs for transplant. (6 pp.) A831

Joshua Hammer, A Prayer for the Ganges (2007)

A journalist chronicles the largely failed efforts to clean up the River, the most sacred—and most dangerously polluted—waterway in India. (10 pp.) A833

Jessi Hempel with Paula Lehman, The MySpace Generation (2005)

This essay, written with Hempel's editorial assistant Paula Lehman, demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the music scene for today's youngest members of the web world. The writing style of the essay reflects the quick reading style of those interested in the music scene, easy and full of detail. (10 pp.) A835

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Excerpt from *Infidel* (2007)

In this chapter from her memoir, Hirsi Ali recounts the uproar over her public comments about the Prophet Muhammad, her agenda as a new member of the Dutch parliament, and a short movie she made with a well-known filmmaker. (15 pp.) A836

Edward Hoagland, Endgame: Meditations on a Diminishing World (2007)

In the following essay from *Harper's* magazine, a well-known nature writer offers a passionate, yet pessimistic view of the current state of the natural world and takes the opportunity to note the passing. (16 pp.) A837

Jed Horne, Real Ugly, Real Fast (2006)

A New Orleans journalist recounts the horrifying situation in the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina and its immediate aftermath. (18 pp.) A838

Ann Hulbert, Boy Problems (2005)

This essay addresses the issues of students of both genders dropping behind in studies, girls in math and boys in general. The author concludes that perhaps recognizing the drop in male achievement may lead to progress for all. (4 pp.) A839

Carolyn Ives, Brains, Brawn, and Beauty: A Place for Feminist Academics in Aesthetic Body Sports, or Working towards a Physical Feminism

In the following essay, a college teacher and physique athlete explores the challenges of women in a male-dominated sport. Also, she confronts the paradox of being an academic feminist involved in a sport some view as objectifying women. (7 pp.) A840

Jeff Jacoby, A Vote for Voting on Election Day (2008)

A newspaper columnist argues that the increasing trend toward early voting is detrimental to the democratic process. (3 pp.) A905

Scott Jaschik, Winning Hearts and Minds in War on Plagiarism (2008)

In this selection from *Inside Higher Ed*, the author visits a conference of writing teachers. In one session the topic is the problem of student plagiarism and ways of addressing the matter. (8 pp.) A841

Robert D. Kaplan, Lost at Sea (2007)

In the following selection, a military scholar discusses how U.S. involvement in Iraq and its interests in the Middle East have diverted this nation's attention from the military and economic build-up in the Asian countries. (5 pp.) A843

Barbara Kingsolver, "Called Home" from Animal, Vegetable, Miracle (2007)

A noted American writer sets out with her family to see if they can live simply, making as little impact on the environment as possible. (21 pp.) A844

Naomi Klein, Disaster Capitalism: The New Economy of Catastrophe (2007)

In the following essay from *Harper's*, the Canadian journalist and activist takes a hard look at how climatic and political disasters fuel free-market forces that convert these disasters into market opportunities. (19 pp.) A846

Elizabeth Kolbert, Excerpt from *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2006)

In this chapter from Kolbert's *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, the author informs us that the greenhouse effect—so much in the news in the last few years—is nothing new. In fact, science has understood the effect of gases on the planet's climate for quite some time indeed. (7 pp.) A847

Edward Koren, Game/Test Scores (2002)

This cartoon suggests that we should reward athletes for their academic achievements as well as for their athletic prowess. The reward should be as public as the scoreboard at a basketball game. (2 pp.) A848

Anne E. Kornblut, Madame President: Will She Ever Get There? (2008)

This article from the *Washington Post* investigates the challenges of sexism faced by politicians Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin as they worked to achieve the highest offices in the U.S., represented in attacks on their personal and professional behavior. (5 pp.) A906

Jon Krakauer, Excerpts from *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (2003)

A noted journalist examines the teachings of the sect known as Mormon Fundamentalists, particularly its adamant defense of polygamy. (23 pp.) A849

John Krakauer, *The Stampede Trail from Into the Wild* (1996)

In a chapter from his book about the young adventurer, Krakauer comes upon the bus in the Alaskan wilderness where McCandless had lived and died a year before and reflects on the significance of his rite of passage. (15 pp.)

Nicholas D. Kristof, *Obama and the War on Brains* (2008)

Based on his experiences in the Barack Obama campaign, Kristof contrasts the intellectual political approach of Obama to the hostility toward intellectuals that seems to have dominated U. S. politics in the past. (3 pp.) A907

Anne Lamott, *Shitty First Drafts* (1995)

Most writers write terrible stuff in their first drafts, and sometimes the fear of those drafts keeps writers from writing at all. In this humorous book chapter, Lamott tells how to go right ahead and write no matter how bad the first try. (5 pp.) A851

David Leonhardt, *Maybe Money Does Buy Happiness After All* (2008)

In this selection, a journalist discusses two groundbreaking studies on the relationship between economic status and happiness. While many people assume that money does not buy happiness, some recent trends suggest quite the opposite. (4 pp.) A852

Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, *What Do Schoolteachers and Sumo Wrestlers Have in Common?* (2006)

An economist and a journalist focus on cheating among schoolteachers and sumo wrestlers in order to examine the relationship between incentives and human behavior. (27 pp.) A853

Stefan Lovgren, *Al Gore's "Inconvenient Truth" Movie: Fact or Hype?* (2006)

A journalist consults scientific experts to evaluate claims made in an award-winning documentary on global warming. (4 pp.) A854

Ray Magliozzi, *Help us Overthrow the Short/Tall Mafia at Starbucks Coffee*

Magliozzi calls for a revolution against Starbucks. He suggests that we all go in and ask for two bucks worth of coffee, thus refusing to use the confusing size designations Starbucks dictates. (3 pp.) A855

Charles C. Mann, *Who Will Own Your Next Great Idea?* (1998)

Mann negotiates the complexities of copyright issues, showing that the copying of digital materials is inevitable and that the real issue is how the world will deal with the ownership of intellectual property. (7 pp.) A856

Gregory Mantsios, *Class in America—2006* (2007)

In this selection, a professor of Worker Education at Queens College in New York discusses the myths surrounding class in the U.S.—the first being that we live in a “classless” society—and the realities of class domination. (17 pp.) A857

Jason Mark, *Atomic Dreams: How the Nuclear Lobby Is Spinning Liberals, Lawmakers, and Grassroots Environmentalists* (2007)

With the consequences of climate change making it the major environmental issue today, nuclear energy has once again become a viable option. In this selection from the *Utne*, an editor from *Earth Island Journal*, argues that the nuclear lobby has waged a powerful campaign about the need for nuclear energy, convincing even those who once opposed it. (11 pp.) A858

Courtney E. Martin, Love Your Fat Self: Rejecting Fear, Loathing, and Sacrifice (2007)

In this article from *Utne*, the author profiles her friend Gareth, her struggles with obesity, and the public perception that is “sizeism.” (8 pp.) A859

Scott Matthews, Copying Isn't Cool (2003)

Music companies have been accused of bullying those who copy music online, but this essay argues that legal alternatives that might appear to resolve this issue also would interfere with civil liberties and free trade. (4 pp.) A860

John McMurtry, Kill 'Em! Crush 'Em! Eat 'Em Raw! (1971)

This essay shows how aggression in sports can correlate with and lead to aggression on a national and international scale. McMurtry's own experience led him to view organized sports, especially football, as soul and body destroying. (7 pp.) A862

Duncan Murrell, In the Year of the Storm (2007)

In the following selection from the July 2007 issue of *Harper's*, the author offers a gritty personal account of his observations and experiences while living in New Orleans for nearly a year after Katrina. (31 pp.) A863

National Eating Disorders Association, Enhancing Male Body Image

This list suggests ways that men can develop a positive view of themselves no matter what the body shapes that they have. The list suggests an appreciation of the whole person and lifestyle rather than an emphasis on the one-size-fits-all athlete's form. (2 pp.) A864

National Endowment for the Arts, Reading At Risk (2004)

These ten graphs illustrate the essence of the NEA report on *Reading at Risk*. The graphs show a decline in every type of reading but especially in reading by males and by the youngest members of the national population. (10 pp.) A865

Barack Obama, A More Perfect Union (2008)

In response to criticism of his former pastor's controversial positions, a 2008 presidential candidate examines the role played by race in the history of the United States, arguing that the issue cannot be dismissed or trivialized. (13 pp.) A867

Tim O'Brien, How to Tell a True War Story (1990)

A Vietnam veteran recounts horrors that may or may not have happened during the war, all in an attempt to explain what a true war story is. (14 pp.) A866

Jeff Parker, The Great GAPSby Society (2004)

This cartoon comments on the widening gap between high-income and low-income workers in society, especially U.S. society today. *The Great Gatsby* is a book about the lives of the super rich, so the pun on the title stresses the differences in income and status. (2 pp.) A869

Orlando Patterson, An Eternal Revolution (2008)

In an Op-Ed essay that appeared in the *New York Times*, a professor of sociology at Harvard regards Barack Obama's presidential victory as “part of an ever-evolving process” rather than “as a radical transition” to a new era. The author focuses on the significance of this “eternal revolution” as it pertains to “blacks, women and the young.” (4 pp.) A908

Carlo Petrini, Excerpt from *Slow Food: A Case for Taste* (2001)

In this excerpt from the author who started the “slow food” movement, Petrini describes people’s changing relationship to food. The fast food trend, he asserts, has cut humans off from the senses, social life, and nature itself. In response to this development, the author suggests a program “to restore atrophied dimensions of sensory experience.” (7 pp.) A870

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (1937)

The images in *Guernica* portray the horrors of war and dictatorship. The painting has been said to portray not only the massacre in Spain that inspired it but to foreshadow the worse horrors of war that were to follow its creation. (2 pp.) A871

Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate* (2002)

Pinker takes on the difficult question of nature and nurture. Do our parents and our culture make us what we are, or are we destined by our genes to act in certain prescribed ways? He traces a variety of kinds of evidence, all of which show that we are both at the same time. (12 pp.) A872

Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* (2006)

In this excerpt from Michael Pollan’s book, the journalist discusses the advantages and disadvantages—the paradox—of “dietary flexibility,” flexibility enjoyed for better or for worse by humans alone. (15 pp.) A873

Francine Prose, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Cannot Read: How American High School Students Learn to Loathe Literature* (1999)

This essay asks why present-day students are not asked to read more challenging texts. Prose argues that morally simplistic texts either bore or indulge readers without asking them to think critically. (14 pp.) A875

Andrew Purvis, *Marseille’s Ethnic Bouillabaisse* (2007)

A journalist seeks to understand why in Marseille, unlike so many other European cities, people of different ethnic origins and religious traditions live together in harmony. (8 pp.) A876

David Quammen, *Contagious Cancer: The Evolution of a Killer* (2008)

In the following selection, a well-known writer of scientific topics recounts the discovery of an infectious cancer among Tasmanian devils, the marsupials that inhabit the island off the coast of Australia. (20 pp.) A877

B. Allan Quigley, *Knowledge Is Not Enough: Advancing Health Literacy through Lessons from History*

In this documented essay, Quigley shows that school literacy education can fail many students and leave need for adult literacy programs, some of which could be improved through lessons from history. (7 pp.) A878

Janet Raloff, *Inflammatory Fat* (2004)

Raloff analyzes the research that shows how dangerous fat is to health and discusses the specific biological connections that make fat so dangerous. (10 pp.) A879

Richard Rodriguez, *The God of the Desert: Jerusalem and the Ecology of Monotheism* (2008)

In the following essay from *Harper’s* magazine, the author takes us on a journey to Jerusalem to understand the desert, a place of emptiness, from which three world religions emerged. (20 pp.) A880

Theodore Roosevelt, The Proper Place for Sports (1903)

This letter to Roosevelt's son shows his balanced view of what a healthy life entails. Roosevelt stresses that character is far more important than winning at a sport. (3 pp.) A881

Chris Rose, Hell and Back (2007)

A newspaper columnist recounts his battle with severe depression in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. (10 pp.) A882

Elizabeth Royte, Transsexual Frogs (2003)

In this essay, Royte follows the research of minority scientist Tyrone Hayes as he discovers the dangers of using herbicides in the environment. She shows how Hayes was persecuted when he did not find the results that a large chemical company expected. (10 pp.) A883

Carl Sagan, The Cosmic Calendar (1977)

A calendar of the life of the universe shows how very young humans are in the scope of the history of the universe. If the history of earth were the month of December, humans would have appeared on the 31st. (4 pp.) A884

Darshak Sanghavi, When Science Meets the Soul (2008)

A pediatrician analyzes the dilemma faced by a Jehovah's Witness couple when told that their unborn child will need surgery and a blood transfusion in order to survive. (11 pp.) A885

Barry Schwartz, Why Decisions Disappoint: The Problem of Adaptation (2004)

A sociologist argues that because it is human nature to adapt to change, Americans must constantly seek out new acquisitions in order to make themselves happy. (11 pp.) A887

Michael D. Shear, Right Turn in July Put McCain on Unfamiliar Path (2008)

Shear reports on his experiences on the campaign trail with McCain, showing how both questionable judgment and devastating circumstances can cause the loss of an election. (6 pp.) A909

Upton Sinclair, Chapter 14 from *The Jungle*

In the following excerpt from Sinclair's famous work, the author offers a grim indictment of Chicago's meatpacking industry as it existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Sinclair's book prompted President Theodore Roosevelt to order an investigation of the industry, which led to the creation of the nation's first food and drug act. (8 pp.) A888

Andrea Smith, Sexual Violence as a Tool of Genocide

In the following selection a Native American scholar discusses the "relationship between sexual violence and colonialism." This connection is critical in Smith's estimation in matters of race. In her terms racism is a "biologized" phenomenon that is spread through the social fabric. (13 pp.) A889

David G. Spielman, Six Flags New Orleans After Katrina (2007)

A freelance photographer from New Orleans captures a popular American amusement park submerged in the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina. (2 pp.) A890

Margaret Talbot, Best in Class

This essay asks whether choosing a valedictorian has become too contentious for schools today. Many schools have stopped the practice to avoid hurt feelings and law suits. (13 pp.) A891

Deborah Tannen, There Is No Unmarked Woman (1993)

Tannen lays out the issues inherent in the social differences between men and women by showing that women's clothing and names are always marked, showing who they are, whereas men's clothes and names tend to be neutral. (6 pp.) A893

Sojourner Truth, Ain't I a Woman? (1851)

A legendary former slave addresses the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, stirring her audience to demand equal rights for women. (2 pp.) A895

Eric Weiner, "Happiness is Home" from *The Geography of Bliss* (2008)

In this chapter from *The Geography of Bliss*, Eric Weiner explores "America's place on the happiness spectrum." According to the author, America is not as happy as its material wealth might suggest. (12 pp.) A897

Bryan Welch, Putting a Stop to Slave Labor (2007)

A farmer-journalist shines a light on the plight of undocumented immigrant laborers in the United States, arguing that our government's failure to deal effectively with the issue perpetuates a situation in which workers endure slave-labor conditions. (6 pp.) A898

Duff Wilson and Michael S. Schmidt, Steroid Report Cites 'Collective Failure' (2007)

The following selection is an account of the Mitchell report on steroid use in baseball. The investigation named 89 players, including many of the biggest stars in the game, and implies that steroid use threatens the integrity of "The American Pastime." (6 pp.) A899

Gahan Wilson, Food Fight (1999)

This cartoon traces the use of genetic modifications of food from its first stages to a stage where human genes might be used to stimulate intelligence in other species. The results are predictable and gruesome. (2 pp.) A900