

Fine doorstops

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [April 30, 2014](#) issue



I couldn't put down Donna Tartt's book *The Goldfinch*. I found myself reading it late into the night and even structuring my day so that I could get back to reading. Stephen King wrote about its 700-page length: "Prospective buyers have every right to ask: 'Do I really want to give two weeks of my reading life to this novel?'" He then called *The Goldfinch* "a rarity," one of a very few books that connect to both head and heart.

Narrator Theo is rescued from various tragedies by the love of parents, a wild friend, a mysterious girl, and a patient older man. The book includes profanity, underage drug use, and drinking, but there is a recurrent theme of the redemptive potential in human relationships and human love. The story also touches on the theological themes of evil and the suffering of innocents, as well as occasional almost Christ-like self-giving.

Another fine doorstop of a book is Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (910 pages, including notes and index). Theodore Roosevelt is known for his boundless physical vigor, intellectual curiosity, and optimism about the future of the United States. I was grateful for the book's reminder of just how progressive Roosevelt was. He was responsible for the federal government taking seriously, for the first time, stewardship of the nation's natural beauty and resources. He also recognized the threat of the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few individuals and the corporations. As a trustbuster he took on John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil

monopoly and Cornelius Vanderbilt's unregulated railroad empire.

While reading about Roosevelt's battle with the financial elite of the nation I came across "America's Taxation Tradition" in the *New York Times*. Paul Krugman asked readers to name the leader who said the following: "The absence of effective State, and, especially, national, restraint upon unfair money-getting has tended to create a small class of enormously wealthy and economically powerful men, whose chief object is to hold and increase their power." The speaker was Theodore Roosevelt in his famous 1910 "New Nationalism" speech.

Economic inequality is still a critical national issue. It poses the same threat to the nation today as it did a century ago, and the threat is exacerbated by the recent Supreme Court decision that allows individuals to donate enormous amounts of money to political parties and individual candidates.