

If someone asks me if I liked a particular book, I don't always have a definitive answer. Some books present ideas that are important for us to know but hard to read about, ideas that make us so uncomfortable with what we ourselves have done, thought, or believed. Others are badly written, though they discuss important ideas. Other books are totally uninteresting to me. And there are always some about which my only thought is: "How did that even get published?"

Responses to fiction are, of course, personal in nature. A good, exciting thriller to one person might be wholly repugnant to someone else. And certain genres leave some readers cold and others enthused about topics that interest them. For example, I am not generally excited about historical fiction. I'd rather read the actual history that inspires most of these novels.

Sometimes, of course, there are books that we should read but don't, because they make us uncomfortable. There are a lot of present-day accounts of political issues, people in the news, or ideas that we don't like, and most of us avoid reading about them. I am no exception, but I think we should be more concerned about reading some of these books that are repugnant to us.

But, there are enough excellent, well-written, important books to keep us occupied for whatever amount of reading time we have in our lives. And, some of them are books all of us really must read. One of them is a book I am just about half through now. It is *Necessary Trouble*, "Growing Up at Midcentury," by Drew Gilpin Faust.

The author has written a memoir of sorts, but one that is more revealing of the time, place, and circumstances in which she grew up. Well to do white people of that era, people of her parents' age, living in the South, but not the Deep South, have influenced the ways in which Americans came to regard race, economics, privilege, and transparency that have profoundly affected American life to this day. And, as she so clearly shows, only breaking out of this mindset can bind up the wounds of this still fractured nation. This is a remarkable book, and the revelations that came to Drew when she was still a young girl have profoundly affected her life and view of our unmet responsibilities in this country. She became focused on what was "fair and just" at an early age, and she soon realized that racial policies in the United States have been neither fair nor just, not only during slavery, not only in the decades of the Jim

Crow laws and practices that endured well into the twentieth century, and not now in the supposedly enlightened twenty-first century.

As I finish this book, I will be interested in how the author applied her youthful belief in justice to her life that followed, on to the Civil Rights movement, her time as a professor of history, and later as the President of Harvard.

Books are the vehicles that can lead us to better understand the world in which we live. If only they could give us motivation, too, to change that world for the better. All of us need to think like Drew Gilpin Faust did as a young girl. We need to search out ways to support policies of justice in a still very unfair world.