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## August Recommendations: A Few More Books, ideas, thoughts, while it's still summer.

James Fallows Aug 19, 2022

One of my maxims is: when possible, don't miss a chance to give a deserved compliment. Here are a few I have in mind right now.

These follow some previous reading-guide posts, like “ Four Books to Notice” and “ August Recommendations.” These items are a mixed bag, connected by my view that each deserves mention.



*Book art from the renowned turn-of-the-20th century illustrator  
Jessie Willcox Smith.  
(1890 print, from Getty Images.)*

### 1. Claire Nader: ‘You Are Your Own Best Teacher!’

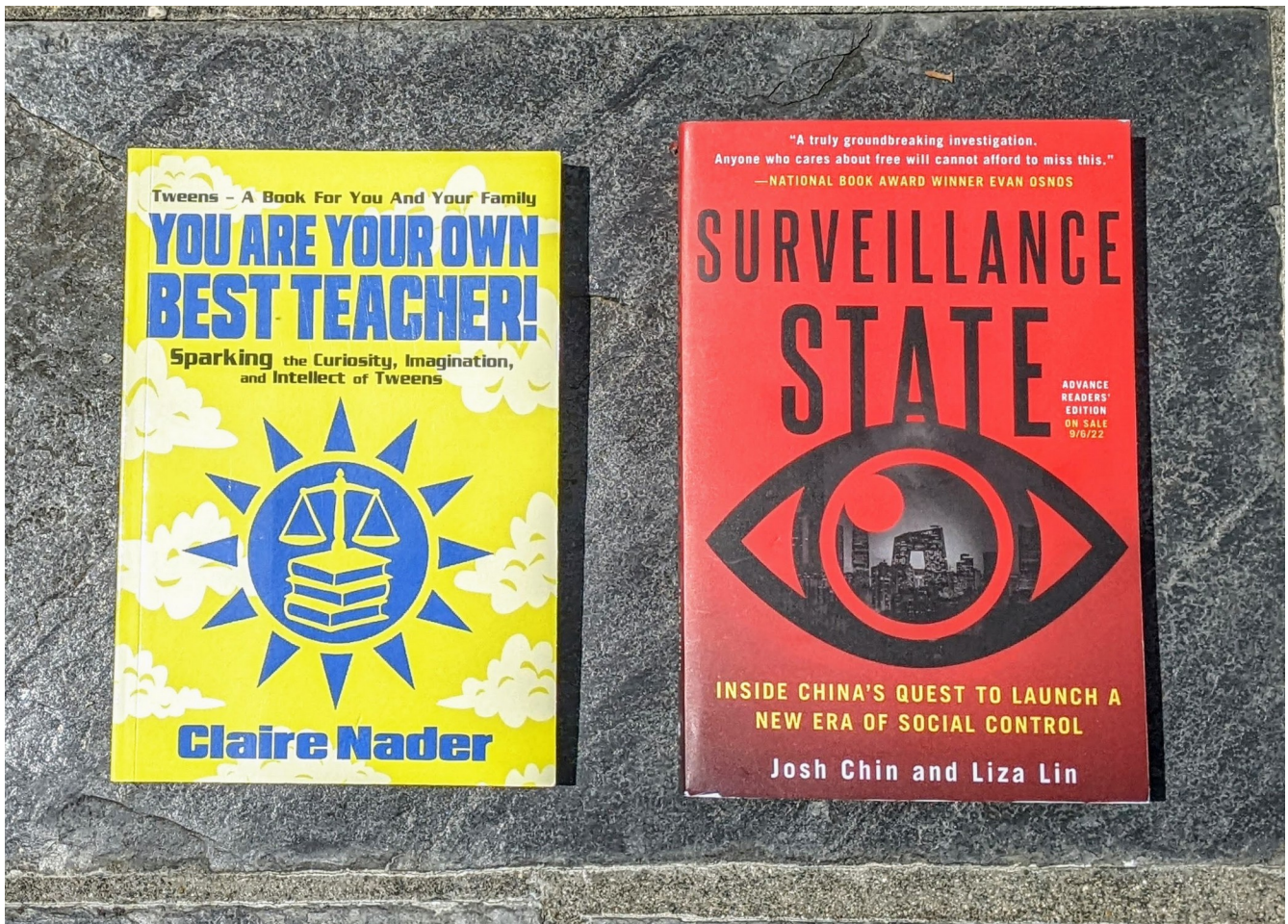
You might not have seen this one coming.

I have known Ralph Nader since I was a teenager, in the 1960s, when he was in his mid-30s and had already won worldwide fame. In those days I worked for him on a project, with the future Massachusetts judge Julian Houston, about the USDA’s role in dispossessing Black farmers from the rural South.

Before you even begin a response: As a former Nader employee, who in the 1970s wrote two successful books under his auspices, I am keenly aware of the mixed ways in which he has influenced modern American history. That has been my topic on other days, but not today. Instead I mention him because of a book by one of his sisters that he has made me aware of.

Ralph was the youngest of four children of an immigrant Lebanese family in Winsted, Connecticut. The oldest, his brother, Shafeek, is no longer alive. The two sisters, Laura and Claire, are well known. Laura has been a long-time anthropologist at UC Berkeley; Claire is a social scientist and civic activist who began her career at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Claire has now written what I consider a delightful and instructive book, called *You Are Your Own Best Teacher*. The subtitle is a good summary of its ambition: “*Sparking the Curiosity, Imagination, and Intellect of Tweens.*”



*Claire Nader's book on the left, Josh Chin's and Liza Lin's on the right.*

The Tweens she is addressing are young readers between the ages of nine and 12. A remarkable aspect of the book's tone is that Claire Nader is not burdened at all by issues of "generation gap." She was born when Herbert Hoover was in the White House, and is addressing those born during Barack Obama's time. But she breezes right along, peer to peer.

Never once does she talk down to, lecture, or condescend to her readers, and she goes very light on "when I was your age..." Nor is she ever cutesy. Instead she has a chatty, warm, "you can understand all this" tone, like the youngest-spirited grandmother or great-aunt who became a favorite of the descendants. She is wanting young people to be excited about all they can do, and talks up to them, with respect.

She comes again and again to the three gifts-of-youth she mentions in the subtitle, and how people just starting out can make the most of them. For instance:

Delight in your present age. Take advantage of your freest years for exercising your curiosity, imagination, and concentration, while adding more daily experiences that are new to you and not part of your routine.

I am obviously too far removed from Tween-hood, or even being a Tween parent, to know how this will land with its announced audience. But for parents and certain Tweens it is certainly worth checking out.

And we'll wait to hear from our oldest grandchild, Jack Fallows, who has just turned 11, to hear what he thinks.

I have never met Claire Nader. I believe I would like her, based on this book.

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