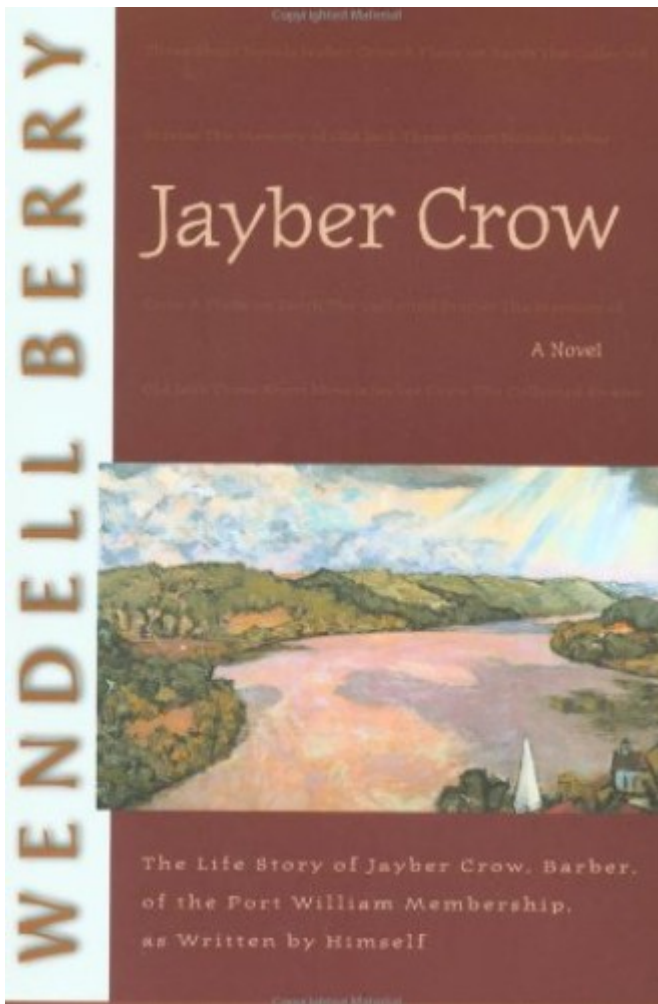


The political power of a local carrot

by [Bill McKibben](#) in the [October 12, 2016](#) issue

In Review



Jayber Crow

by Wendell Berry
Counterpoint

I'd love to have our leaders sit down with Wendell Berry's novel *Jayber Crow*. The great problem we deal with—one that crosses political lines, though it's stronger on the right—is what we might call hyperindividualism. Schooled as we've been by the

high-consumer society in which we've come of age, we've taken the quite lovely American idea of individualism and ripped it entirely out of balance. By some estimates, three-quarters of Americans don't really know their next-door neighbor. It's possible, if you have a credit card and an Internet connection, to have UPS deliver everything you need for daily life to your doorstep. The average American has half as many close friends as the average American of 50 years ago. Might this explain something about our unhingedness as a nation?

Berry has long been the great novelist, poet, and essayist of community. His short stories and novels of the men and women of Port William are a remarkable canvas. But I love *Jayber Crow* best of all; it does more to define a working community than any book I can think of, and in ways that help us, obliquely, with the decisions we need to make as a polity. It conveys the delicacy of community, and the great pleasures of a kind of membership.

Berry has lived long enough to see some of his ideas take root. When he started advocating for farmers' markets, there really weren't any; now, for a decade, they've been the fastest growing part of our food economy. If you eat a local carrot this week, thank this Kentucky author and farmer. Just as there's nothing nostalgic about a farmers' market (it's actually a vision of the future), so is there nothing nostalgic or sentimental about Berry's novel.

Read all of the responses to "A book I'd like my elected officials to read" [here](#).