

Obama summer reading list leans towards fiction
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VINEYARD HAVEN, Massachusetts, Aug 21 — President Barack Obama, perhaps seeking a break from harsh reality after a tough summer battling the economy and Republicans in Congress, has picked a summer reading list that is long on fiction.

The White House says four of the five books that Democrat Obama has to choose from during a nine-day family vacation here are novels.

Obama's reading list — like the criticism from Republicans for vacationing while the economy is stumbling — is a rite of the summer.

But his choices ignored the weighty biographies of great Americans typically on a president's reading list.

Obama picked up two of the books on an outing with daughters Sasha and Malia on Friday: "The Bayou Trilogy", a mystery collection by Daniel Woodrell set in Louisiana, and "Rodin's Debutante", a novel by Ward Just with a character who becomes politically conscious after moving to a rough neighbourhood on Chicago's south side, echoing Obama's time there as a community organiser before he entered politics.

Other books the president brought along: "Cutting for Stone", a novel by Abraham Verghese that traces the lives of two boys who are born joined at the skull in Ethiopia, and "To the End of the Land", a novel by David Grossman of a mother who tries to keep her son alive while he is at war by hiking the length of Israel, hoping that if she cannot be reached to be told of his death, he won't die.

He also brought "The Warmth of Other Suns", by Isabel Wilkerson, the only non-fiction work on the list, which describes America's migration of blacks from the South.

Republican critics have slammed Obama for vacationing for the third consecutive summer on Martha's Vineyard, an upscale island off the Massachusetts coast that was also favoured by Democratic presidents John Kennedy and Bill Clinton.

They say vacationing at the scenic island, a stomping ground for movie stars and other wealthy Democratic Party backers in August, shows Obama is out of touch while 14 million Americans are out of work and unemployment is pinned above 9 per cent.

The White House says the country does not begrudge Obama some time with his family, but it has been careful to allow no pictures so far of him at play on the golf course. — Reuters

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