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Politics: Love at First Sight

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Politics: Love at First Sight

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Essay

Ever since the 2008 presidential election, I have been captivated by politics. While most people are repelled by the endless barrage of political ads every election cycle, I am enthralled by them. Electoral processes fascinate me this deep interest in politics has guided my educational path ever since. This book collection has been created as a both a result and a cause of my passion for politics; it is comprised of analyses of contemporary political issues, movies, political satire/literature, and most recently, political theory. These books have supplemented my classroom education and have continued to enflame my desire to work hard, learn as much as I can, and someday have a career in politics.

While my interest in politics and government developed at a rather young age, I did not start reading political books until high school. Throughout middle school and the first half of high school, my books of choice were *The Hunger Games*, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, and the other books in each of their respective series. My junior year I read two books that signaled my transition to reading political books: *Breaking the News* by James Fallows and *1984* by George Orwell. After having read two amazing political books in a rather close time of one another, I decided to branch out and read similar works. This journey has allowed me to discover ideas and opinions that I never would have encountered otherwise.

My favorite section of my collection is the in depth issue analysis of contemporary issues in politics. Finding an author who is an expert in their subfield of politics—political parties, the media, elections, etc.—and reading their conclusions after an extensive career of research adds to my appreciation of political work. I hope to someday join authors such as Fallows, Hopkins, Grossman, and Buchler and publish my own book own my own research in politics. While I am still trying to

hone in on the sector of the political world I want to study, I read these books to gain new insight on the inner complexities that comprise politics in the modern era.

The movies I have incorporated into this collection can be categorized in two parts: electoral politics and President Lincoln. While I do admit, these two groups may seem rather separate from the other, but they have kindled my fascination of American politics. *Recount* and *...So Goes the Nation* take two different routes in their inquiry in electoral politics. However, they both add to the dimensions of our understanding of the electoral process by depicting the more minute components that enables the system to work the way it does. Whereas *Lincoln* and *The Conspirator* focus on President Lincoln: one before his assassination and the other immediately after. Many have studied this time in American history, but both movies allow the viewer to learn something new by the time the movie is finished. These four movies are essential in my collection because of the ways in which they inspired me to continue my study of US politics and how they taught me something new.

While some may argue fiction has no place in a study of politics and that it would be prudent to remain from such superfluous material and rely primarily upon logic, reason, and statistics. I certainly do not want to discredit the necessity of logic, reason, and statistics (especially in post-factual America), but I believe that satire and literature are much needed additions to political discourse. These works raise questions that would not have been asked if only empiricisms were considered. Whether it be George Orwell, Anthony Burgess, Aldous Huxley, or even Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, social commentary forces people to question political norms. I have incorporated *1984*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Brave New World*, and other books into this collection because satire has shaped the modern political world, as seen in the ability for Americans to freely criticize the actions of the government and elected officials. Satirical novels have power that should not be underestimated.

Political theory has been a relatively new subject for me. Starting to read theory has made me regret one thing: not starting to read it earlier. In the current political climate in the US, theory may seem unnecessary. It is tempting to focus entirely on the events unfolding in Washington DC and around the world without applying theoretical concepts to these events. But theory is what starts movements, ignites revolutions, and topples despotic regimes. This collection contains theorists ranging from John Locke, whose influence in American government is inescapable, to Hannah Arendt, whose profound ideas spark controversy to this day. I hope to continue to add to this part of my collection.

My collection has been built through many trips to Book Haven (my favorite bookstore back home in Colorado) and spending many hours Amazon finding my next book to read. These distinct, yet interconnected, subfields of political study work together by diversifying my own interests and expanding my knowledge on foreign ideas and topics. Reading's impact on my life is indescribable and these books have facilitated the process of discerning which paths in life I want to take. Selecting a career and an academic field of study is a daunting task, but my love of reading political books has brought focus and has driven me, even during times of uncertainty.

Annotated Bibliography

Contemporary Issues in Politics:

1) Buchler, Justin. *Hiring and Firing Public Officials*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Many Americans often assume our current electoral system allows for the selection of the best governing officials. Buchler raises intriguing points that competitive elections are not healthy for democracy and in fact signal its decline; it therefore becomes necessary to Buchler that Americans differently conceptualize the purpose of democratic elections in order to preserve their legitimacy and increase public satisfaction with their results. While I don't fully agree with his claims, I find the ways in which he frames his ideas to be rather intriguing.

2) Grossman, Matt, and David A. Hopkins. *Asymmetric Politics*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

This book has shaped how I view the relationship between the democratic and republican parties. These two parties attract different members utilizing different rhetoric: the democrats are group oriented; the republicans are ideological. By using these two terms in a non-pejorative way, the authors highlight how our two main parties may be more different than originally understood. This book has transformed how I compare and contrast the two central political parties in the United States.

3) Fallows, James. *Breaking the News*. Vintage Books, 1997.

Fallows presents a critique of his own profession—journalism—in order to improve both public trust in the media and increase journalistic accuracy. He claims that while the media is not perfect, it is still essential in order to sustain liberal democracy. Rather than endlessly critiquing the media, Fallows sets forth suggestions in order to improve journalism and consequently, American democracy. Although current political attacks on the media were unforeseen at the time of publication, this book provides insight that proves to be increasingly valuable in the modern political

environment. I find Fallow's commitment to "public journalism" and his desire to improve the work he does to better inform people to be extremely admirable

4) Obama, Barack. *The Audacity of Hope*. Three Rivers Press, 2006.

After his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention titled "The Audacity of Hope," then Senator Obama published this book in continuation of his inspiring message. Obama discusses both his past and his policy prescriptions in order to spark hope throughout the American public. Obama's combination of optimism and pragmatism shine light even in an era hallmarked by seemingly insurmountable partisan gridlock. I continue to draw inspiration from President Obama even after his tenure in office.

5) Peterson, Peter G. *Running on Empty*. Picador, 2004.

In spite of President Washington's warning as he left office, Americans quickly formed political parties to organize political life. Peterson delves into the current effects that the two-party system has in US politics today and argues that they are causing more harm than good. He argues that Americans from all areas of the ideological spectrum ought to distance themselves from violent partisanship and ought to place the needs of the collective body over those set forth by political affiliation. I find Peterson's critique of American political parties to be well-balanced and thought provoking.

Movies:

6) *Lincoln*. Directed by Steven Spielberg, performances by Daniel-Day Lewis, Sally Field, and

Tommy Lee Jones. DreamWorks, 20th Century Fox, and Amblin Entertainment, 2012.

The passage of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution brought an end to the horrendous practice of slavery. Spielberg depicts the struggles President Lincoln faced in lobbying Congress to pass this crucial amendment. Powerful performances, precise camera framing, and a fantastic script work in perfect harmony in this Academy Award winning movie that will become a

classic in American film. This film gains newfound depth after watching the Netflix documentary, *13th*, which highlights the modern ramifications of the 13th Amendment.

7) *Recount*. Directed by Jay Roach, performances by Kevin Spacey and Tom Wilkinson. HBO Films, 2008.

In the midst of contested results in Florida during the 2000 US Presidential Election, lawyers from both the Gore and Bush campaigns worked ceaselessly in order to secure a victory for their respective campaigns. This dramatization of the months following the election provides viewers with a newfound perspective on the events that preceded the Supreme Court decision, *Bush v. Gore* (2000).

8) *...So Goes the Nation*. Directed by Adam Del Deo and James D. Stern. Endgame Entertainment, 2006.

This documentary delves into the importance of Ohio in the 2004 US Presidential Election. Deo and Stern provide new meaning to the old adage in electoral politics, “so goes Ohio, so goes the nation.” Every four years Americans are reminded of the functions of the electoral college; *...So Goes the Nation* digs deeper by highlighting the intense campaigning that takes place in Ohio.

9) *The Conspirator*. Directed by Robert Redford, performances by Robin Wright. The American Film Company, 2010.

This lesser known movie tells the story of Mary Surratt (played by Robin Wright), the first woman to be executed by the United States government. In a time where the country was in panic after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, law enforcement officials were engaged in hasty investigations to find those responsible. Redford spectacularly highlights the controversy that surrounds the conviction and execution of Surratt to this day.

Political Satire:

10) Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. Norton, (1962) 1986.

Before this edition, *A Clockwork Orange* was cut a chapter short in the United States. Readers in the United Kingdom experienced a different ending than those in the US who were deprived of the final chapter until years after the novel's original publication. Controversy surrounds this novel; it compels readers to determine the balance between public good and individual freedom in a forceful manner. No matter how many times I re-read this book, I come away from it having picked up on something that I haven't noticed before.

11) - - - . *The Wanting Seed*. Norton, (1962) 1996.

In a society where the government regulates a family's ability to have children, many have to deny themselves of their own humanity in order to survive. This dystopian future highlights the importance of freedom in a society and the role of human sexuality. The suppression of sexuality leads the suppression of humanity, according to Burgess.

12) Smith, Chris and Jon Stewart. *The Daily Show (The Book)*. Busboy Productions, 2016.

The Daily Show has become an integral part of modern political satire, captivating young audiences. This transcription of conversations with the founding crew members provides a humorous glimpse into how this popular show was founded. I enjoy how this book is solely conversations between Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and John Oliver because it provides a raw and comical look into everything that goes on off camera.

13) Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, (1932) 2006.

It is often rather easy to live in a bubble of entertainment and *soma* to forget reality. However, Huxley warns that by slipping into this trap, people are thus becoming removed from their own humanity. This novel applies to politics in the ways in which it prompts individuals

to be vigilant of the easily accessible ways that distract from reality. By succumbing to mindlessness, apathy enables a government to rule without resistance. I find Huxley's work to be a potent reminder that while entertainment and consumerism are alluring on the surface, it is crucial for us to break out of that cycle and be conscious of the world around us.

14) Lewis, Sinclair. *It Can't Happen Here*. Signet Classics, (1935) 2014.

Lewis shares his vision of what can happen if democracy is taken for granted. This book warns its audience about the fragility of democracy if it is forgotten and those who live within a democratic society fail to preserve its integrity. With the rise of populism around the world, Lewis' novel has been on top seller lists on Amazon. I find his message of the necessity to actively maintain democracy to be rather prevalent today.

15) Orwell, George. *1984*. Signet Classics, (1949) 1961.

This dystopian work compels its reader to ask themselves: What is the appropriate role of government? By creating an authoritarian state in *1984*, Orwell seeks to warn societies of tyrannical governments that overstep their power. This novel urges many to remain vigilant of abuses of power and necessitates resistance to totalitarian governance. This is my favorite book and it was the first book of this collection.

Political Theory:

16) Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. Penguin Classics, (1963) 2006.

Arendt poses her ideas in a very intricate, tactful way that elicits critical analysis on what constitutes a successful political revolution. She concludes her discourse on revolution by pondering what form of government ought to rule after a revolution. Her highly controversial, yet fascinating ideas continue to raise questions on what is the best form of governance. Her work continues to intrigue scholars in lieu of the recent events of the Arab Spring. I want to continue reading Arendt's fascinating work.

17) Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage International, (1963) 1993.

Baldwin urges the “relatively conscious” members of society to respond to racism and bigotry in the United States with love. His profound and at times, perplexing conclusion compels people not to combat prejudice with hatred; rather, he asserts that prejudice can be defeated through love and education. To Baldwin, living a life of compassion will conquer discrimination. I find his message to be relevant to modern activists who wish to bring change in the world.

18) Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Edited by C. B. Macpherson. Hackett Publishing Company, (1689) 1980

Locke’s writings heavily influence Thomas Jefferson in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. Reading Locke has allowed me to gain increased insight on the school of thought that is responsible for many of the protections engrained in the Bill of Rights. The original text has provided new depth to democratic ideals that I study in my academic career.

19) Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. Crossing Press, 2007.

It may seem odd that the work of such a profound poet is placed under the category of political theory. But Lorde’s work extends beyond the field of poetry. She highlights the injustices of discrimination and offers suggestions on how to achieve a more equitable society. She encourages people to think outside of mainstream forms of political dissent and urges her audience to fight for justice for all people, not just a select few. I find her intersectional approach to be extremely important now because of the ways the identities people hold cannot be separated from each other.

20) Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Hackett Publishing Company, (1859) 1978.

Mill’s influence in the United States is vast. He warns against a tyrannical majority and claims that political dissent in a society is not optional. It is through the diversity of ideas that political discourse is strengthened, according to Mill. His work still remains relevant in today’s

society and shares an important message of speaking out and not allowing the opinions of a group in power from silencing one's own opinions.

21) Orwell, George. *A Collection of Essays*. Harcourt, 1981.

Not only is Orwell a brilliant novelist, his essays, such as "Politics and the English Language," provoke readers to examine rhetoric in differing ways. Influenced by the events of World War II, the Spanish Civil War, and the imperialism of Great Britain, he utilizes his authorial prowess to engender critical analysis of the political events of his era.

22) Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Translated by Donald Cress. Hackett Publishing Company, (1755) 1992.

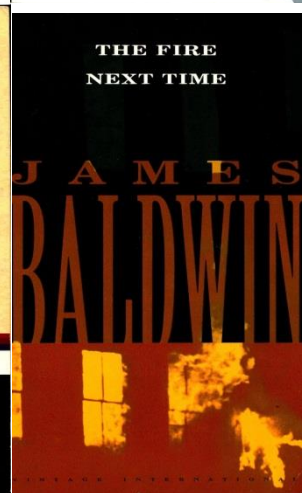
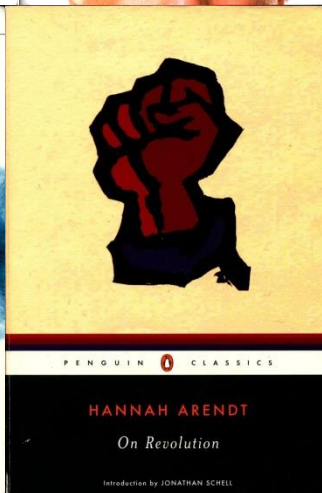
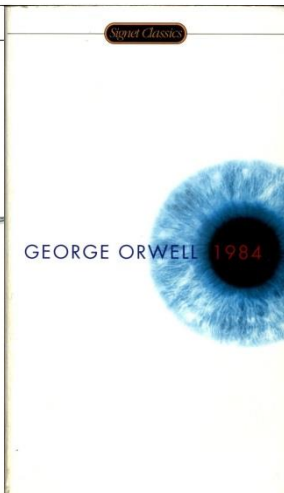
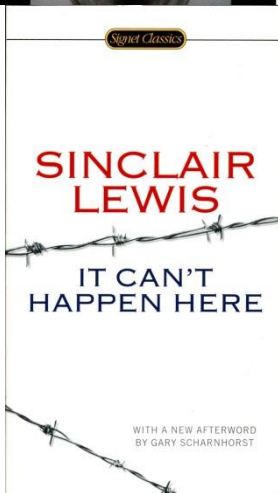
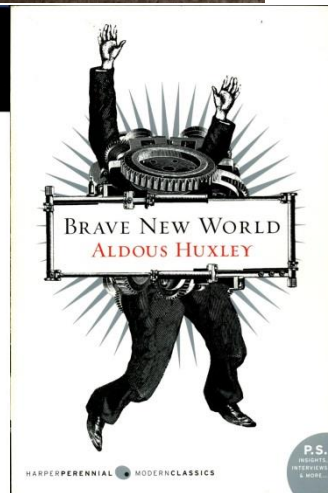
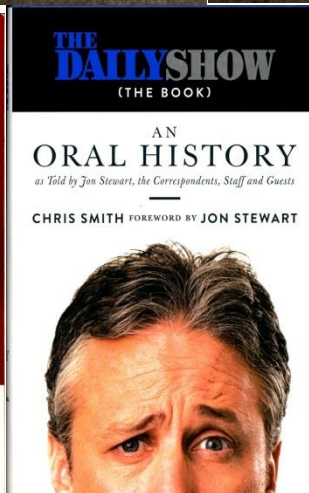
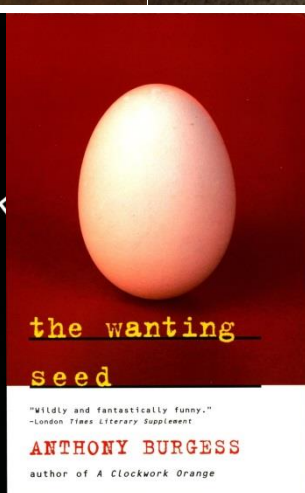
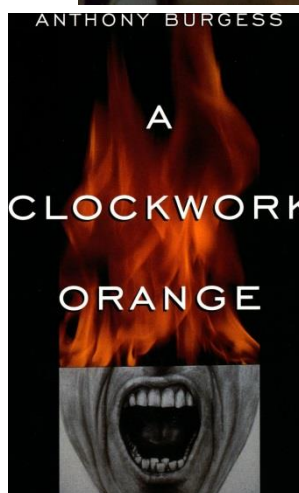
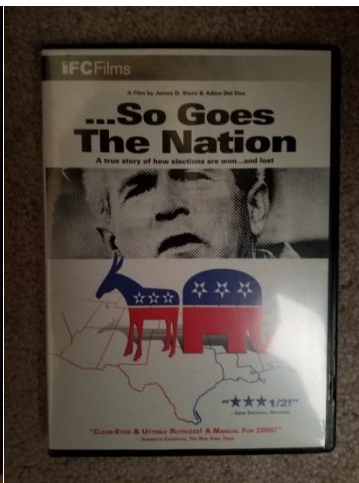
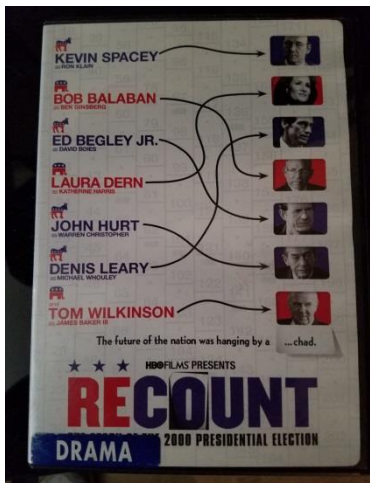
In modern political discourse, economic inequality is frequently discussed. Rousseau delves into the emergence, reasons for existence, and perpetuating factors of inequality in society. His work raises questions such as: What is the appropriate level of inequality in a society? How does inequality impact societies?

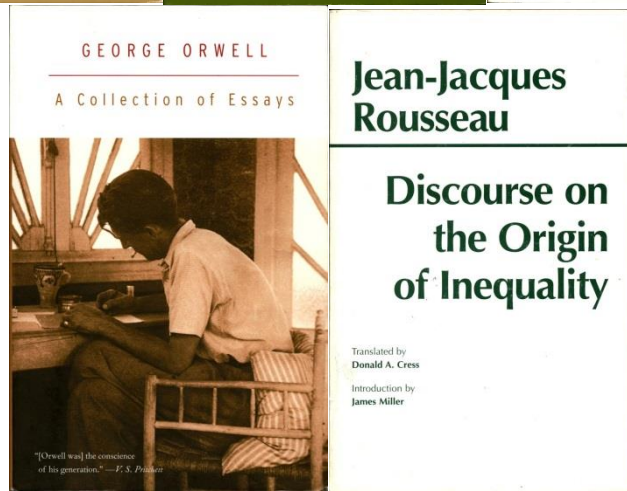
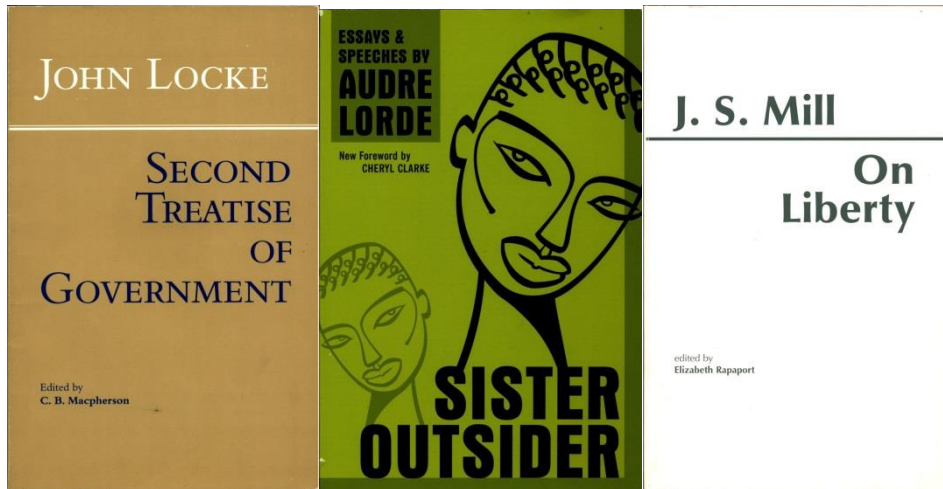
Images

Most images were captured using a scanner which has distorted the proportions of the covers.

Items are depicted in the same order as they appeared in the annotated bibliography.







Wish List

1) Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Harcourt, (1951) 1973.

While I do not necessarily agree with all of Arendt's claims, I find her use of rhetoric to be very fascinating. Her in depth analyzations of politics in a world immediately after World War II continue to provide insight in the contemporary political realm. This book will help me increase my understanding of totalitarian governments, what enables their formation, and how to prevent such a government from taking hold.

2) Berman, Ari. *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle of Voting Rights in America*. Picador, 2016.

I first heard about this book while listening to an interview with the author on NPR and I was immediately intrigued by the argument Berman makes. Democracy can only function when elections are free, fair, and open for all members of a society to participate in. I would like to further inform myself on the current situation regarding voting rights in contemporary American society and compare and contrast Berman's claims to those made by Buchler in *Hiring and Firing Public Officials*.

3) Dobbs, Michael. *House of Cards*. Sourcebooks Landmark, (1989) 2014.

The Netflix original show, *House of Cards*, is by far my favorite TV series. After binging a new season immediately after its release, I have always wanted to read the book that inspired it. The novel is set in the United Kingdom, resulting in different governmental structures than those in the American TV show. After taking PG 102: Intro to Comparative Politics, my desire to read this book has continued to grow after having studied the system of government of the UK. Needless to say, I am glad both the TV show and books are works of fiction or else my study of politics would look nothing like it currently does.

4) Kennedy, John Fitzgerald. *Profiles in Courage*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, (1955) 2006.

While I have previously read short excerpts from President Kennedy's book, I want to finish this work. Finding a politician who is willing to do what is right even though it may not be the most popular thing to do politically has become an increasingly rare phenomenon in the modern political climate. President Kennedy's words continue to inspire me, even after his tragic assassination over fifty years ago.

5) Mayhew, David. *Partisan Balance: Why Political Parties Don't Kill the US Constitutional System*.

Princeton University Press, 2013.

It is very easy to rebuke the current two-party system in the United States as inefficient, corrupt, undemocratic, and at times, toxic. After having read Peterson's criticisms of both the Democratic and Republican parties, I want to read Mayhew's explanation regarding the place of political parties in US political processes. Finding a defense of the two-party system is a rather rare find, especially in the current state of intense party polarization. I believe that it is through challenging popular beliefs that we can either strengthen or alter our opinions; Mayhew's investigation into American political parties will provide me with that opportunity.