

Teddy Roosevelt's Reading List vs. Today's Candidates

Last week presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump was asked to give a list of books he's reading. As the *Los Angeles Times* [notes](#), the fact that he couldn't name the titles suggests that the question caught him off guard. He did give a little information about the books, however:

"I'm reading the Ed Klein book on [Hillary Clinton](#)," Trump answered, without specifying which one – Klein has written two, "The Truth About Hillary: What She Knew, When She Knew It, and How Far She'll Go to Become President" and "Unlikeable: The Problem with Hillary."

Trump then said that he's reading a book about Richard Nixon, but was unable to recall the title or author, telling Wolff, "[W]ell, I'll get you the exact information on it."

Presumptive Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton was a bit quicker on her feet when asked the same question in 2014. [Politico shares](#) that her selections were:

"'The Goldfinch' by Donna Tartt; 'Mom & Me & Mom' by Maya Angelou; and 'Missing You' by Harlan Coben."

Considering the fast-paced campaign schedule these two have, many would call the fact that they're actually reading something commendable.

But that label of "commendable" might change once we compare their lists to that of Teddy Roosevelt.

In November of 1903, Teddy Roosevelt [wrote a letter](#) to Nicholas Murray Butler in which he responded to Butler's question about the kinds of books a person should read.

Roosevelt listed the books he had read during the previous two years of his presidency. Roosevelt was careful to note that he had not always read these books in their entirety, nor was it his first time reading all of them.

In spite of this disclaimer, Roosevelt's list holds over more than *100 titles*.

And those 100-plus titles weren't light reading either. Below are a handful of the more well-known books or authors Roosevelt mentioned:

1. Herodotus
2. Thucydides
3. Polybius
4. Plutarch
5. *Orestean Trilogy*, Aeschylus
6. *Seven Against Thebes*, Sophocles
7. *Hippolytus*, Euripides
8. *Bacchae*, Euripides
9. *Frogs*, Aristophanes
10. *Politics*, Aristotle
11. *Essays*, Macaulay
12. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon (Roosevelt is careful to note that he *only* read 3 or 4 volumes.)
13. *Frederick the Great*, Carlyle
14. *Speeches and Writings*, Lincoln
15. *Essays*, Bacon
16. *Macbeth*, Shakespeare
17. *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare
18. *Henry the Fourth*, Shakespeare
19. *Henry the Fifth*, Shakespeare
20. *Richard the Second*, Shakespeare
21. *Paradise Lost*, Milton
22. *The Inferno*, Dante
23. *Beowulf*, Church
24. *Quentin Durward*, Scott

25. *Tom Sawyer*, Twain
26. *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens
27. *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens
28. *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray
29. *Call of the Wild*, London

It's not hard to see that Roosevelt easily squashes both Clinton and Trump in reading material, both in terms of length and mental depth. But before we condemn the two current candidates, perhaps we would do well to realize that they are simply in step with current culture.

As Pew Research reported in 2015, almost [one in 3 Americans](#) did not pick up a book – electronic or print – in the previous year.

If Americans aren't stretching and informing their minds by reading, should we really be surprised when we end up with the types of candidates, laws, and popular culture that we do?

“Every Man has in Politicks as well as Religion, a Right to think and speak and Act for himself. No man either King or Subject, Clergyman or Layman has any Right to dictate to me the Person I shall choose for my Legislator and Ruler. I must judge for myself, but how can I judge, how can any Man judge, unless his Mind has been opened and enlarged by Reading.” – [John Adams, 1761](#)