

BOOK CLUB PACKET



AVAILABLE SEPT. 12TH
FROM HUMORIST
BOOKS

Thanks for buying, or bullying your loved ones into buying, *From the Campaign Trail or Thereabouts*. If you read the entire book, or flipped through it and have great inductive reasoning skills, you'll know that the novel is part satire, part romp, and wholly the ravings of self-indulgent lunatics. Hopefully, you also thought it was a lot of fun.

The way book clubs usually work, we hear, is that you read the book, and then you ask some questions about it, and talk about the questions, and somebody (usually Beth) always ducks their turn to bring the wine and cheese.

We love the idea of several people sitting around and actually discussing what we tried to talk about in this novel, so we wrote some questions to help get you started. And we promise that none of them use words like “problematize” or “deconstruct,” which we consider quite the personal feat, given we both went to grad school. We've also included a few wacky games, which will only make sense if you've read the book, so you should definitely do that (looking at you, Beth).

We hope these questions and activities give you a springboard to have some fun discussion about the Carlyles and American politics and culture, or at least allow you to pass the time until Beth leaves and you can finally just be *honest*. We're also available to Skype into your discussion, as well as for weddings, birthday parties, and bar mitzvahs. Please feel free to reach out to us at bleicherandnewton@gmail.com, if you so wish.

— Michael Bleicher & Andy Newton

Discussion Questions

Pattie and Harold's marriage is troubled when we meet them in the novel, and Pattie seems to be ambivalent about its future—and her husband—throughout. Why do you think she stays with him?

Do you think their problems stem from who Pattie and Harold are as individuals, or do you think there are ways that the society in which they live contributes to or creates the conditions for their problems?

Harold and Pattie encounter a fair amount of racism and prejudice during their trip around America. Considering the people they meet and how they view them, does it seem like Harold and Pattie have views on race that are any more informed by actual relationships with other races?

Do you see Harold and Pattie's stated views on race as serving a function? Where in the novel do you see racial attitudes that aren't reflexive, or which aren't a means to make the white speaker feel better about him or herself?

In what ways does Harold strike you as being *sui generis*, and in what ways do you think he reflects broader currents in American society? Does there seem to be a relationship between the former and the latter? If so, what could we infer from it?

Where do you see examples of "con men" in the novel? What do you think about the ways the novel portrays them? Does the novel make a moral judgment about them?

Harold has an unusual take on what's required of him as a reporter, and we see several other depictions of journalists in the novel. How would you compare and contrast Harold with his colleagues? Are their presentations of the campaign and the candidates more nuanced or accurate? If not, do you think they share similar blind spots as Harold?

Where do you see privilege operating in the novel? How do you see it operating? Do you see instances in which hard work and dedication eclipse background and pedigree? How flexible are socioeconomic divides in the novel?

Think about Harold and Pattie's argument at the presidential debate in St. Louis. Do you think Harold has a point about class and background? How much of success, in your opinion, is rooted in appearance and pedigree?

How is whiteness defined by a sense of victimhood within Trumpism? Where do you see examples of that in the text? In your opinion, is this sense of victimhood a feature of white privilege?

Hillary Clinton never appears in the novel. In what ways does the novel's portrayal of Hillary Clinton offer insight into the real-life public narrative that developed around her campaign? Do you think there's a connection between that distance and the way women were contemplated and discussed in the campaign? If so, how do you see that play out in the novel's version of reality? If not, why?

Which echo chambers do you see in the novel? Do you see them on both sides of the political spectrum? Is each echo chamber equally problematic to you?

Think about Pattie's emotional diatribe on election night. What do you think the lessons are from 2016, if anything?

Does the novel present Donald Trump as a reflection or the cause of the misogyny, racism, and anger depicted throughout?

Of the Americans Harold and Pattie encounter during their travels, which strike you as being the most "human?" Which ones strike you as being props or foils?

Similarly, the novel depicts a number of public figures. Which representations do you see as broader than others? For the broad representations, how do the absurd elements of their characters speak to a critique of the real-life public figures? Do any presentations seem more nuanced to you? If so, how do they affect your impression of the novel's world?

The novel is somewhere between a satire and a farce—but are there any moments you find affecting or moving? If so, how does that affect your reading of the novel as a whole?

How would you feel if you were Pattie?

Expense Report Activity

Instructions: Whoopsy daisies! Harold forgot to keep track of his expenses during his time on the campaign trail, and now he has to submit everything before the end of the fiscal year. Help Harold complete his expense report by matching each expense to the ideal code found in the bank at the end of the activity, and then compare your responses. Hint: some codes may not be used.

Hertz Car Rental (Boston, MA)	Prestige Collection - Porsche Boxster	[Code]
Mamma Maria Ristorante (Boston, MA)	2 CSR SALAD, 1 VITELLO MILANESE, 1 PENNE ENOTECA, 2 CHIANTI, 1 TIRAMISU SHARE SURCHARGE \$1	
Big Dale's Towing Services (Manchester, NH)	Porsche Boxster BLK AUTOMATIC 2014	
Hertz Car Rental (Manchester, NH)	Vehicle Repairs (Motorist Uninsured) - Porsche Boxster	
Hertz Car Rental (Nashua, NH)	Sweet Dreams Collection - Ford Mustang	
Hertz Car Rental (Nashua, NH)	Sirius XM Radio	
Hertz Car Rental (Nashua, NH)	Vehicle Repairs (Motorist Uninsured) - Ford Mustang	
Homewood Suites by Hilton (Nashua, NH)	Dry Cleaning	

Hertz Car Rental (Nashua, NH)	Sirius XM Radio [ACCOUNT CREDITED]	
Amtrak Corp. (Chicago, IL)	California Zephyr - 2 Premium Class @ \$838.00 / Ticket	
Amtrak Corp. (IA)	California Zephyr - 2 BDWSR LIME-A-RITA	
Cash (IA)	Payment to A. Deevers for Real Hot Lead - \$20.00	
CVS Pharmacy (Denver, CO)	Icy Hot Cream	
Hertz Car Rental (Montgomery, AL)	Americana Collection - Chevy Silverado	
Barnes & Noble (Auburn, AL)	The Autobiography of Malcolm X, X, Malcolm; The Closed Ballot, Gates, Theod.; Consumer Reports New Car Buying Guide 2016	
CVS Pharmacy (Tallahassee, FL)	Plan B: One Step Emergency Contraceptive	
Hot Jim's Cajun Shack (Tallahassee, FL)	2 Fish Taco Pltrs; 2 Pacífico 16 oz.; 2 Gulf Greens	

Greyhound (Philadelphia, PA)	PHIL-SAN DIE - 2 Coach Class @ 58.00	
CVS Pharmacy (Philadelphia, PA)	1 Coppertone 32 oz Sensitive Skin Collection 50 SPF; 1 Orbit Spearmint pk	
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery (Lincoln, NE)	2 Adult Passes @ 12.99	
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery Gift Shop (Lincoln, NE)	A LIFE WELL LIVED: SHELDON AT PLAY COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBIT PRGRM \$25.00	
Dan Thomson Cyber Investigative Services and Housepainting (Lincoln, NE)	1 hr @ \$122.59	
UBER (Cleveland, OH)	Convention Ctr. Marriott / Best Western Airporter \$22.85	
UBER (Cleveland, OH)	Best Western Airporter / Days Inn Akron \$88.45	
Skyline Restaurant (Akron, OH)	2 Bowl Bustr Chili Spaghetti Plate	
Days Inn Akron (Akron, OH)	In-room Entertainment - Sound of Music	

Stevenson, James A. (Nantucket Town, MA)	PERSONAL - \$2000.99	
CVS Pharmacy (Nantucket Town, MA)	Trojan ExtraThin 12 pk	
CVS Pharmacy (Philadelphia, PA)	Trojan ExtraThin 12 pk [STORE CREDIT]	
Disco Pete's LPs (Charleston, WV)	Breakaway, Garfunkel, Art [USED] - \$1.00	
Magellan's (New York, NY)	1 Ship / Bottle - \$238.74	
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY)	1 Adult Admission - \$25.00	
Charley's Famous Wall Street Diner (New York, NY)	1 TUNA WHEAT \$12.99 1 SNAPPLE \$4.99	
Duane Reed W. 85th Columbus (New York, NY)	Head & Shoulders Family Size	
Ruth J. Spellman Family Foundation (New York, NY)	\$438.50 **CASH**	
Rally's Deli & Groc (New York, NY)	Pine Tree Air Freshener 30 pk	
Hudson News (St. Louis, MO / STL)	Twilight of the Elites: America After	

	Meritoc..., Hayes, Chris \$12.99	
Hudson News (St. Louis, MO / STL)	Every Reason to Leave: And Why We Chose to Stay, Rose, Vicki \$7.99	
Filomena Ristorante (Georgetown, D.C.)	1 Gnocchi Della Mamma, 1 Misto Di Mare Alla Filomena, 2 Insalate Alla Cesare, 2 Prosecco, 1 Tiramisu	
Bloomingdale's (New York, NY)	Executive Collection - 2 Calvin Klein Classic Cut Men's Suit @ \$799.99 [REJECTED CODE 888 NOT EMPLOYED]	
H. Silverstein Brothers Tailors (New York, NY)	Men's Fitting [REJECTED CODE 888 NOT EMPLOYED]	
Jolson's Wine and Spirits (New York, NY)	Dom Perignon 2 bott. [REJECTED CODE 888 NOT EMPLOYED]	
CVS Pharmacy (New York, NY)	Prozac prescrip. 30 CT. [REJECTED CODE 888 NOT EMPLOYED]	
John Wayne Liquors (San Diego, CA)	Dom Perignon 2 bottles	

CODES

250 GROUND TRANSPORTATION

410 LODGING

412 DINING

415 DESK LIQUOR

510 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

514 ESCAPING ANTI-SEMITIC MOB

617 DISGUISES

675 BEING A WHITE ALLY

710 MIDDLE AMERICA / ENNUI

712 INTERVIEW (CELEBRITY)

713 INTERVIEW (ELECTED OFFICIAL)

714 INTERVIEW (REPUBLICAN VOTER IN DINER) [**CORPORATE POLICY
REQUIRES ONE RACIALLY CHARGED REMARK BE OBTAINED ON THE RECORD.**]

715 INTERVIEW (WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD) [**\$20.00 MAXIMUM PER
DIEM.**]

744 HOLIDAY CARDS FOR KUSHNER FAMILY [**REQUIRES APPROVAL FROM
MAGGIE HABERMAN.**]

800 CORPORATE HAPPY HEALTHY REPORTERS INITIATIVE

802 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

810 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Dr. Rothstein's Seven Exercises for a Happier, Healthier, and More Centered Partnership

1. Ask your companion to draw a stapler by describing childhood memories relating to staplers.
2. Select the three freshwater fish that best express your deepest insecurity.
3. If your mother's voice triggers self-doubt in your head, sing it. If it does not, sing that. Repeat, asking your partner to sing the high harmony.
4. Which amendment to our constitution owes part of its wording, in some way, to the historic abuses of England's Star Chamber? Once you have the answer, write it on a slip of paper, and give it to your companion on your next anniversary.
5. The jitterbug is a kind of dance popularized in the United States in the early 20th century, and is associated with various types of swing dances such as the Lindy Hop, jive, and East Coast Swing. Try to divine the steps to the jitterbug with your partner, but do not allow any parts of your body to touch. Inventory your feelings.
6. What attachment style does the singer of the Cardigans' "Lovefool" evince? Discuss with your partner, then make a list of the ways the lyrics distill a basic emotional need or phobia. While the list does not necessarily have to rhyme, some form of meter is encouraged.
7. Switch partners. Describe your wedding night to your new partner. Inventory your feelings.

Campaign Dispatch Fill-in-the-Blank

Instructions: Uh-oh! Harold has a deadline to meet, but he spent the entire afternoon having his feet exfoliated instead of attending any of the campaign events. Luckily, he's got a template for these sorts of journalistic crises,¹ which he can use with some minor changes (we're not looking to reinvent the wheel here). Help him finish his article before the clock strikes midnight!

_____ [CANDIDATE]

_____ [SIZE]

_____ [STATE]

_____ [TOILETRY ITEM]

_____ [PLURAL NOUN]

_____ [NOUN DESCRIBING A PERSON]

_____ [ADVERB]

_____ [ADJECTIVE]

_____ [HONORIFIC TITLE]

_____ [VERB (INFINITIVE)]

_____ [HISTORICAL FIGURE]

_____ [FORM OF GOVERNMENT OR CONCEPT]

_____ [SUPERLATIVE]

¹ *With quotes and paraphrases used for parodic purposes from "Iowa Caucus Results: Ted Cruz Wins, Hillary Clinton Declares Victory" - CNN Politics, Stephen Collinson - <https://www.cnn.com/2016/02/01/politics/iowa-caucuses-2016-highlights/index.html>*

_____ [HONORIFIC TITLE]

_____ [PIECE OF FURNITURE]

_____ [DAY OF THE WEEK]

_____ [WORD DESCRIBING THE SEA]

_____ [ADJECTIVE]

_____ [VERB (INFINITIVE)]

_____ [USE ANY WORD OTHER THAN "NOMINEE"].

_____ [VERB (PAST TENSE)]

_____ [CANDIDATE OTHER THAN CHRIS CHRISTIE]

_____ [NOUN]

_____ [DIFFERENT NOUN]

_____ [NOUN]

_____ [NEW STATE]

_____ [ADJECTIVE]

_____ [NOUN]

_____ [GEOGRAPHIC AREA]

_____ [ADJECTIVE OR NOUN]

_____ [CANDIDATE] WINS _____ [SIZE] in
_____ [STATE] PRIMARY

By Harold Carlyle

Hillary Clinton won the _____ [STATE (SAME AS FIRST)] Primary early Tuesday morning in a(n) _____ [TOILETRY ITEM] thin contest against Sanders in Iowa. But Democratic party _____ [PLURAL NOUN] have not declared a(n) _____ [NOUN DESCRIBING A PERSON].

"Hillary Clinton _____ [ADVERB] won the _____ [STATE (SAME AS FIRST)] Primary," the Hillary campaign said. "Many of the _____ [ADJECTIVE] votes have come in, and _____ [HONORIFIC TITLE] Clinton is the first candidate to _____ [VERB (INFINITIVE)] with such a margin since _____ [HISTORICAL FIGURE]." The campaign added, "Hillary believes in _____ [FORM OF GOVERNMENT OR CONCEPT]."

"The results tonight are the _____ [SUPERLATIVE] in _____ [STATE (SAME AS FIRST)] Democratic primary history," Iowa party _____ [HONORIFIC TITLE] Andy McGuire said. "We will report that final precinct when we have confirmed those results with the _____ [PIECE OF FURNITURE]."

One thing is clear after _____ [DAY OF THE WEEK] night's _____ [STATE (SAME AS FIRST)] primaries: there's a long, _____ [WORD DESCRIBING THE SEA] election season ahead before two deeply _____ [ADJECTIVE] parties can _____ [VERB (INFINITIVE)] behind a _____ [USE ANY WORD OTHER THAN "NOMINEE"]].

Donald Trump _____ [VERB (PAST TENSE)] Republican _____ [CANDIDATE OTHER THAN CHRIS CHRISTIE], raising questions about the importance of _____ [NOUN] in this very historic _____ [DIFFERENT NOUN]. And Mitt Romney's stronger-than-expected

showing could mark him as the establishment's best hope against a _____
[NOUN] revolt in next week's _____ [NEW STATE] primary and beyond.

Trump's victory sets him up as a(n) _____ [ADJECTIVE] force in
_____ [NOUN]-rich, _____ [GEOGRAPHIC AREA] states
to come and offers _____ [ADJECTIVE OR NOUN] conservatives hope that
one of their own can become the Republican nominee for the first time since Ronald Reagan.