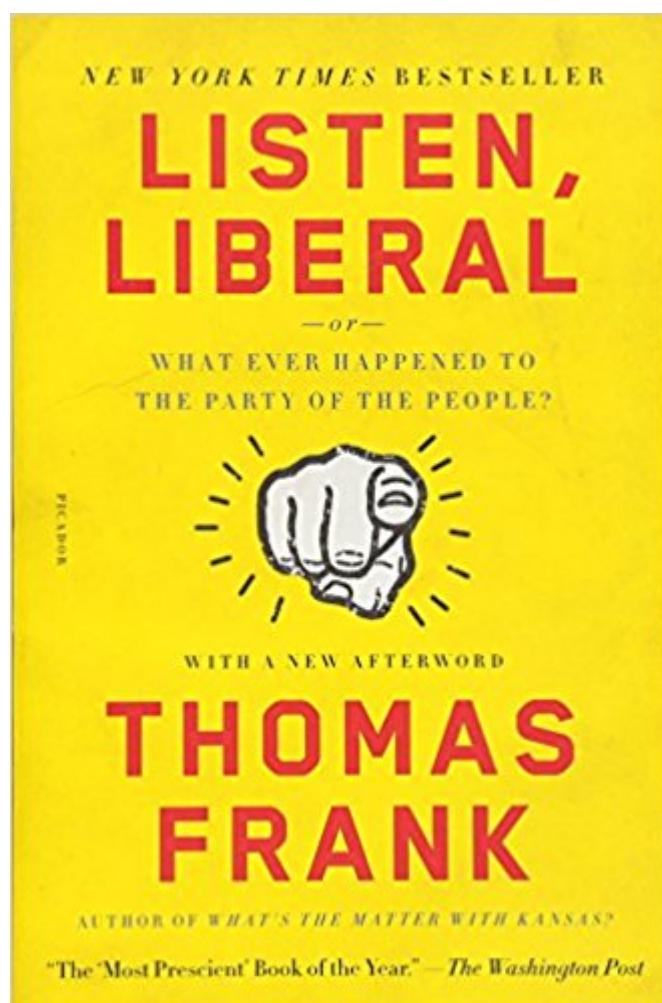




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Listen, Liberal: Or, What Ever Happened To The Party Of The People?



Synopsis

A SCATHING LOOK AT THE STANDARD-BEARERS OF LIBERAL POLITICS—A BOOK THAT ASKS: WHAT’S THE MATTER WITH DEMOCRATS? Hailed as “the most prescient book” of the year, *Listen, Liberal* accurately described what ailed the Democratic Party even before the election of 2016 made their weaknesses obvious. It is the story of how the “Party of the People” detached itself from its historic constituency among average Americans and chose instead to line up with the winners of our new economic order. Now with a new afterword, Thomas Frank’s powerful analysis offers the best diagnosis to date of the liberal malady. Drawing on years of research and firsthand reporting, Frank points out that the Democrats have over the last decades increasingly abandoned their traditional goals: expanding opportunity, fighting for social justice, and ensuring that workers get a fair deal. With sardonic wit and lacerating logic, he uncovers the corporate and cultural elitism that have largely eclipsed the party’s old working- and middle-class commitment. And he warns that the Democrats’ only chance of regaining their health and averting a future of ever-increasing inequality is a return to their historic faith.

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Customer Reviews

“Thoroughly entertaining . . . Frank delights in skewering the sacred cows of coastal liberalism. . . . He argues that the Democratic party—once ‘the Party of the

People' – now caters to the interests of a 'professional managerial class' consisting of lawyers, doctors, professors, scientists, programmers, even investment bankers. . . . A serious political critique.

– The New York Times Book Review (front page) – “What makes Frank's book new, different and important is its offer of a compelling theory as to how and why the party of Jefferson, Jackson and Roosevelt is now so unlikely to champion the economic needs of everyday people. . . . In such a looking-glass world, *Listen, Liberal* is a desperately needed corrective.

– History News Network – “In his new book, progressive commentator Thomas Frank says Democrats need to take a good long look in the mirror if they want answers to why blue-collar workers are feeling abandoned and even infuriated by what used to be their party.

– New York Post – “Over the past four decades, Frank argues, the Democrats have embraced a new favorite constituency: the professional class – the doctors, lawyers, engineers, programmers, entrepreneurs, artists, writers, financiers and other so-called creatives whose fetish for academic credentials and technological innovation has infected the party of the working class. . . . For that class, Frank argues, income and wealth inequality is not a problem but an inevitable condition.

– The Washington Post – “An astute dissection of contemporary Democratic politics that demonstrates, cogently and at times acidly, how the party lost the allegiance of blue-collar Americans.

– Publishers Weekly – “A tough and thought-provoking look at what's wrong with America . . . Frank puts forth an impressive catalog of Democratic disappointments, more than enough to make liberals uncomfortable.

– Booklist – “Important . . . Engaging . . . An edgy – even disturbing – analysis of the Democratic Party's jilting of its traditional base.

– The National Book Review – “Thomas Frank's new book *Listen, Liberal* documents a half-century of work by the Democratic elite to belittle working people and exile their concerns to the fringes of the party's platform. If the prevailing ideology of the Republican establishment is that of a sneering aristocracy, Democratic elites are all too often the purveyors of a smirking meritocracy that offers working people very little.

– The Huffington Post – “Democrats often use the fact that Republicans have gone off the deep end to ignore their left flank, on the grounds that those liberals have nowhere else to go politically. *Listen, Liberal* contributes to the literature that expresses deep frustration with that decision, the fuel for a revolt.

– The Fiscal Times – “As with Frank's other books, *Listen, Liberal* is a piece of contemporary history that tells us not only what the powerful are up to, but how the trick is being pulled, with an admirable deployment of irony.

. . . While his previous books are essentially about devils being devils, this one shows how the angels have fallen further than they realize. *Prospect magazine (UK)*

THOMAS FRANK is the author of *Pity the Billionaire*, *The Wrecking Crew*, and *What's the Matter with Kansas?*. A former columnist for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Harper's*, Frank is the founding editor of *The Baffler* and writes regularly for *Salon*. He lives outside Washington, D.C.

There is one (horrifying) theme in *Listen Liberal*. It is that the Democratic Party has betrayed its natural constituency of labor, and is constantly trying (and succeeding) to outrun Republicans by doing more damage to the social structure than Republicans profess, thus stealing their thunder. "It has become Democratic thinking that the common people are at last being treated as they deserve to be. They do it with "professionals". Frank has filled this entire book with evidence of this one point. The difference between Republicans and Democrats ain't what it used to be, according to Frank. The Democrats have decided to put all their eggs in one basket: professionals. They staff their offices with them, just like the Republicans use only lawyers from the Federalist Society. Their backers are Wall Streeters, because the Democrats are at least as generous to Wall Street as the Republicans when in power. For the wealthy, it's a win-win. Doesn't matter who gets in. So while Republicans consider their base the uneducated, bootstrap entrepreneurs who create jobs, the Democrats consider their base the highly educated, networked professionals who create jobs. Two sides of the same coin. And neither one can be bothered with the rest of the population except when vote-gathering. Then, for a brief period, it's all about inequality and jobs. Frank focuses on the last two Democratic presidents, Clinton and Obama, and the upcoming contender Hillary Clinton. He autopsies their administrations (and Hillary's part in them) and finds them all the same mouthing platitudes to gain votes from the electorate, then reverting to type and removing any and all support for them so they can to deliver on promises made to the rich. It was Bill Clinton who dismantled welfare and Glass-Steagale, not either Bush. I particularly appreciated Frank's discussion of glass ceilings in terms of floors. While the Hillary Clintons of the world rail about glass ceilings, it was her Democrat husband president who removed the floor for mothers on welfare, creating extreme poverty where once there was a safety net. While Hillary grandly supports microloans for women (which do not work, other than to create more debtors and richer bankers), when in power, it's all about

supporting the rich at the expense of the poor. Garden variety hypocrisy, but coming from a Democrat, and about Democrats, it's supposedly shocking. Frank is overwhelmed by the Democrats' adoption of professionals. Democrats think professionals can solve any problem, and every position is filled with one. Every event showcases them. Doesn't it matter that they have no real world experience; the fact they are professionals means they are highly educated creatives. That's all that matters in a Democratic government. So to be disappointed in the Obama Administration is to show yourself as not being a professional. It wasn't always so. Frank shows that FDR's Democratic cabinet had poorly educated secretaries who had street smarts, real life experience, and ideals. They could propose innovative programs that addressed real problems. And if they didn't work, they had another idea waiting. His VP Harry Truman never went to college. Truman couldn't even get an interview today. The Democrats' solution to every problem is go back to school, preferably Harvard, Yale or Stanford, and every door will open for you. All you laborers are fooling yourselves. Get an education and become professionals, because America doesn't need or want anyone else. Listen Liberal is a damning, upsetting polemic from a passionate, experienced insider. You might think it would make excellent fodder for a Republican. But it is actually a sad reflection of what has become of the country and its politics. Two sides of the same coin is not healthy. Someone needs to represent the 99%. David Wineberg

I read this book in one sitting late last night and thoroughly enjoyed it. There's lots of criticism of Bill and Hillary that might cause those "feeling the Bern" to spontaneously combust. For me the most interesting topic was how the Democrats have so thoroughly absolved themselves of any responsibility to the working class by convincing themselves that "Innovation" (e.g. Uber, micro loans, Airbnb, "sharing" economy) is some sort of law of the Thomas Friedman Flat World we apparently now live in that destines those unable to code up an App or get a patent to a life of poverty. One of my favorite quotes was: "Economies aren't ecosystems. They aren't naturally occurring phenomena to which we must learn to acclimate. Their rules are made by humans. They are, in a word, political. In a democracy we can set the economic table however we choose. Let's start choosing how the table gets set!"

Thomas Frank stirs up my aggravation with our political system as no other person can. He

excoriates the Democratic Party for selling out the American People (those not part of the Top Ten Percent). I read many passages of this book aloud to my wife, and both of us were like, "Damn, Thomas Frank! Tell it." I don't mean to get all political on , but Frank does a brilliant job breaking down the empty promises of Democrats during election season since the Clinton era and the things they actually accomplished for working class people which is very little to nothing. Frank's dissection of the way in which meritocracy and the rise of the professional class has allowed the Democrats to turn their backs on serious issues of inequality is compelling--and scary. It's pretty damning evidence I have to admit that this book helped me challenge my own perspective on my so-called liberalism. So glad Thomas Frank has stepped into the ring this election season.

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