

*“General American Intellectual History”*

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My book collection is first a window into my own intellectual history, and second a window into American Intellectual History in general. The beginning of my collection, the acquisition of which also marked the beginning of my intellectual maturity, was Willard Sterne Randall’s biography of Thomas Jefferson. The book was a gift from my parents, following on my long-time fascination with Jefferson. In years before we had often made visits to Jefferson’s memorial in D.C. and even made the pilgrimage to Jefferson’s home, Monticello.

What fascinated me about Jefferson was less his accomplishments and more his methods. He was a thinker. A biography of Jefferson is in many ways summed up by a catalog of the books that he read. I pored over Sterne’s biography and yearned to learn for myself about Montesquieu’s *Spirit* and Locke’s *Two Treatises*. I started reading some philosophy texts directly, but mostly just looked for more books on Jefferson. I didn’t bring Randall’s *Jefferson* to school with me. I left most of my Jefferson books behind, because while Jefferson was my starting point, my interests had begun to move.

What really endured from my fascination with Jefferson was an interest in the ideological underpinnings of the American revolution. That is how books like Wood’s *Creation of the American Republic* or Maier’s *American Scripture* made their way into the collection. This is probably the period with the best developed collection of texts of intellectual history in my collection. I wasn’t introduced to the father of American intellectual history, Perry Miller, until college, but his *Errand* is a fascinating look at the way religious faith shaped America.

In college my interests continued to expand into the later periods of history, particularly modernism, which is an area where I hope my collection will continue to grow. I also came to appreciate the works of the early romantics and abolitionists and the writers who I like to call the later romantics: Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright.

Sometime in high school, I also began to look into scientific history, of a sort. Edward Wilson’s *Naturalist* first got me interested in the areas of scientific biography and the worldview of the modern scientist. This is the area where I think my collection is most deficient. Important texts like *Silent Spring* and *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* are notably missing—although they won’t be for long. At the same time there are some surprising books like David McCullough’s *Truman* that appear in this section which appear out of place but are really books exploring the central ideas of scientific modernism.

This is just the beginning of my collection though. It will grow and mature with me for the rest of my life.