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## Of Course, It All Began with Ayn Rand by Bart Frazier

Like so many others, Ayn Rand has heavily influenced the paths that I have chosen in my life. And like most everyone else, it began with *Atlas Shrugged*.

I was nineteen when someone gave me a worn, pocket-sized edition of *Atlas Shrugged*. Unlike so many others my age at the time, I was not what some people might call a lost individual. I certainly felt no need to “find myself.” I was a proud leftist.

I paid little attention to politics, current events, or philosophical debate then. I wasn’t dumb and I liked to read, but I enjoyed novels and literature and found political science, economics, and their ilk a bore. When it was handed to me, all I knew of *Atlas Shrugged* was that it was a work of fiction that several people had told me was a great read.

And it was.

It was radically different from the novels I was accustomed to reading, and the heroes were unlike the protagonists popular with people my age at the time. You simply could not understand life if you had not read *Catcher in the Rye*, and seen it through the blue-colored glasses of miserable Holden Caulfield. If you were not familiar with *Death of a Salesman*, the pointlessness of life itself could not be conveyed to you through pathetic Willy Loman.

The list of my favorites at the time is long. The over-indulgent characters of Hemingway. The morally vacuous characters of Fitzgerald and the all-out assault on business of Salinger’s. The portrayal of our putrid human nature by Orwell, Steinbeck, and Huxley. Don’t get me wrong — these are great books and I still love them for the great works they are. But they are not inspiring and they always draw the picture of a person that the reader would never want to emulate.

Not so with *Atlas Shrugged*.

John Galt, Dagny Taggart, Hank Rearden, Francisco d’Anconia — these were characters like none that I had ever encountered in a novel. They were people that a reader could aspire to be, they celebrated life, and they were heroes in the truest sense. They were honest and honorable. They believed in principle instead of pragmatism. And without my realizing it until the end of the book, they had me cheering against the government.

At the time, if I had been told that *Atlas Shrugged* was a novel about the evil of the state, I would have declined to read it. But because it was an exciting read with an intricate plot and a mysterious protagonist, I couldn't put the book down and ended up cheering against the government along the way. Many libertarians forget how radical an idea this is to most people even today.

Most people conflate the government with society. Whatever the government does is for society's benefit. Government officials always act with our benefit in mind, not their own. Our government is more than a protector of rights; *it is the embodiment of the country itself*. If you criticize the government or its actions, you are not a true patriot; you are un-American. As Archie Bunker would say, "My government, right or wrong!"

The beauty of *Atlas Shrugged* is that it makes the case against government in a solid yet entertaining way. I flew through the book — couldn't put it down. When I finished, I suddenly felt that there was more to this whole government thing. Maybe there was another viewpoint about government that I wasn't aware of. Was it possible that my representatives, *my* representatives, were not looking out for *my* best interest? Had Ayn Rand written anything else? ([She had, by the way.](#))

*Atlas Shrugged* opened up paths that I had never considered before. Jefferson, Madison, Washington — these were names that I equated with irrelevance, not irreverence. Wasn't Thoreau just a crazy old hermit? Who on earth is Lysander Spooner? This stuff pertains to economics?

But the biggest question I had was, "Am I the only person who thinks like this?" My answer came not long after finishing *Atlas Shrugged*. I was driving past the capitol building in Tallahassee, Florida, where a small demonstration was going on. And among the many placards that people were waiving at the capitol steps was a sign that read, "Where is John Galt?" I knew then that I was not alone because I had just found out that for someone else, it had all begun with Ayn Rand.

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