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DVDs: What Should Obama Watch?



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So people have been suggesting books for Obama to read. But what DVDs should 44 watch? We know he's very well read and that The Godfather is one of his favorite movies.

(I'm sure he's already seen An Inconvenient Truth), TV shows about people he should keep in mind (The Wire is a great example) or movies that illuminate serious ideas.

So what DVDs would you put on Obama's Netflix list?

ALSO OUT THIS WEEK:

CRITERION: El Norte isn't Criterion's only release. They've also put out Douglas Sirk's Magnificent Obsession (\$39.95; Criterion), a movie bedeviled with problems in earlier DVD releases.

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melodramatic master like Sirk. I prefer some of his other films, but boy does this look great and you get the equally over-the-top 1935 version starring Robert Taylor and Irene Dunne in the story of a playboy who becomes a world-class doctor so he can perform experimental surgery on the woman he loves and restore her sight. I've always associated Roberto Rossellini with neorealism so it's a shock for me to discover *The Taking Of Power By Louis XIV* (\$29.95; Criterion) and *Rossellini's History Films: Renaissance and Enlightenment* (\$59.95; Eclipse). The history films were made for TV in the 70s and are talkie expositions of Pascal, Cartesius and the like. *Taking of Power* is a look at the Sun King I'd never even heard of -- and by definition for me, any film not listed in Leonard Maltin's movie guide is "rare" and "little known." And only Criterion's "budget" line Eclipse would take the time to release three high-minded films that are 2 and almost 3 and over 4 hours long.

DOCUMENTARIES -- A film crew has been following Obama around since before he announced he was running for President (**Ed Norton is involved**) and boy, that promises to be a humdinger. Until then, we have the curio *Patti Smith: Dream Of Life* (\$24.98; Palm). It's interesting, but frustrating. Filmmaker Steven Sebring knew nothing about Smith when he began the project 11 years ago and his indifference to her stature perhaps helped Smith let down her guard. But is someone unmotivated by the work that makes her important really the best person to capture what matters about Smith? The film is elusive and beautiful but after 11 years with unimaginable access, it falls far short of what might have been. Also out: *Frontrunners* (\$29.95; Oscilloscope), a look at kids running for student body president at Stuyvesant High in NYC; *The Point Of Least Resistance/The Right Way* (\$24.98; Icarus), two Swiss artists who dress up in animal costumes (Rat and Bear) and meander about; *The End Of America* (\$29.95; Indieflix), the director's cut of the documentary about Naomi Wolf's argument that democracy itself was threatened during the Bush years; *MGM: When The Lion Roars* (\$29.95; MGM), a Patrick Stewart narrated six hour romp through the MGM archives with loads and loads of classic clips, a la *That's Entertainment: Blindsight* (\$27.98; Image), a look at six blind Tibetan teenagers climbing a mountain near Everest that manages to be fascinating without leaning on the tiresome effect of being "inspirational;" and *Our Daily Bread* (\$29.98; Icarus), an extremely well reviewed movie about food production that is both beautiful and fascinating. In sports, you've got *Raiders 3 Greatest Games: Super Bowl Victories* (\$26.98; Warner Bros./NFL), the complete original broadcasts of their 1977, 1981 and 1984 triumphs; and a wrestling cornucopia with *The Twisted Disturbed Life of Kane* (\$34.95; WWE) with more than 2 dozen matches and *Starrcade: The Essential Collection* (\$34.95; WWE) with more than 25 matches taken from the 1983-2000 history of the event.

BLURAY - A solid Western, *Appaloosa* has Ed Harris (who also directed) and Viggo Mortensen teamed up as lawmen dealing with Harris's mercurial, angle-seeking girlfriend Renee Zellweger and Jeremy Irons as a foppish baddie. Quiet, observant fun. It's \$35.99 on BluRay versus \$28.98 on regular DVD from New Line. Even on sale on Amazon, there's a big \$8 difference. It's a good looking movie, but that's no way to launch a new format. *Swing Vote* (\$34.99 on BluRay versus \$29.99; Touchstone) is closer in price but there's no reason for even a \$5 difference when purchasing this Capra-esque comedy about Kevin Costner, a voter who suddenly finds himself with the power to choose the next President. Happily, we didn't need this wish fulfillment in 2008. *Without A Paddle: Nature's Calling* (\$36.99 on BluRay versus \$29.98; Paramount) a dumb sequel to a dumb original movie that at least had the benefit of a fun cast led by Seth Green. The sequel doesn't have Green or even a nominal link to the original or any reason for being. If you must, rent it. Also out: Luke Wilson's sentimental drama *Henry Poole Is Here* (\$39.98 on BluRay versus \$29.98 on regular DVD though Amazon has it on sale for \$14, which is \$6 LESS than the regular; Anchor Bay); Mark Wahlberg's revenge fantasy *Max Payne* (\$39.98 on BluRay versus \$34.98 for the equivalent regular DVD special edition); Kiefer Sutherland's horror suspenser *Mirrors* (\$39.99 on BluRay, an absurd \$10 more than the regular DVD; Fox); and finally the gem of a comedy *Election* (\$29.99 on BluRay; Paramount), a terrific film that made Reese Witherspoon a star. Too bad it's listed at THREE TIMES the cost of the regular DVD (which is now discounted at \$9.98 and even on sale on Amazon costs twice as much. Prices do need to come down quickly if BluRay has a hope of surviving.

MOVIES -- *Brideshead Revisited* (\$29.99; Miramax) is a woebegone attempt to remake the classic novel that was captured nigh on perfectly in the brilliant miniseries. I can't think of a single novel that was given the definitive version via a miniseries and then was later remade into a two hour feature film that had any reason for being, much less outdoing the miniseries. If you've got 12 hours or so to tell a story and do it wonderfully, how can anyone hope to top it with a two hour

"Washington Unplugged"

Arianna was on CBS' "Washington..."

Alex Leo The "Real Housewives Of New York City" Flowchart Of Hate

I'm a little embarrassed to love this show as much as...

"BRUNO" TRAILER! Calamity, African Babies, Chase Scenes And More (NSFW VIDEO)

IT'S HERE! The trailer for this July's Sacha Baron Cohen...

NATO Leaders Focus On Afghanistan, But Most Reject Obama's Plea For Troops (SLIDESHOW)

STRASBOURG, France — On the eve of the NATO...

First Lady Fashion At Friday's NATO Concert (PHOTOS)

Another night, another fashion opportunity for NATO leaders and their spouses! See...

Diana Palin, Sarah Palin's Sister-In-Law, Arrested For Breaking Into Home

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Police say Alaska Gov....

John Oliver Explains The Real Reason You Never Touch The Queen (VIDEO)

John Oliver was upset enough to drop his monocle when he...

Obama Teases Reporter From India During Press Conference (VIDEO)

Obama held a conference packed with press from around the world on Thursday. He called...

Jim Cramer Declares The Depression "Over" (VIDEO)

On Thursday's episode of "Mad Money" host Jim Cramer declared that the depression...

Scientists Find Rocket Fuel Chemical In Infant Formula

ATLANTA — Traces of a chemical used in rocket fuel were found in samples of...

Least Wasteful Cities In America (SLIDESHOW)

It's great to love the city you live in, and better to

film? It's possible, I suppose, but awfully difficult. This version, which mildly downplays the homoerotic subtext of the miniseries (and book), doesn't come close despite a fine cast including Emma Thompson, Michael Gambon, Ben Whishaw and Matthew Goode. If you can't answer the question "why are we making this again and what can we do better than the last one?" then perhaps you shouldn't. Also out: Jackie Chan's terrifically fun *Supercop* (\$18.99; Weinstein/Genius); *Taxi Blues* (\$24.98; Koch), a well-reviewed glimpse into the Wild West atmosphere of Putin's Russia; two Audrey Hepburn films nicely remastered -- *Funny Face* (\$24.99 which is \$10 more than the 50th anniversary edition put out just two years ago; Paramount), a sweet film despite the creepy age difference between her and Fred Astaire and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (\$24.99 -- \$12 more than the version put out just two years ago and do they really think DVD prices should be rising?; Paramount), which is half delightful and half so racially insensitive even David Dukes would blush; horror franchise hits *My Bloody Valentine* (\$19.98; Lionsgate/Paramount) and *Saw V Unrated Collector's Edition* (\$39.95; Lionsgate), which has really fun packaging; cult in the making *Repo: The Genetic Opera* (\$19.98; Lionsgate); the inexplicably successful monster movie franchise *Underworld & Underworld Evolution Double Feature* (\$19.94; Sony); Gordon Scott's b-movie sword and sandal flick *Samson and the 7 Miracles* (\$19.98; Retromedia) with a bonus of an entire other movie *Ali Baba and the 7 Saracens* that Scott has nothing to do with but at least has the number "7" in its title for continuity's sake; *Brick Lane* (\$28.96; Sony), a so-so adaptation of the fine novel by Monica Ali; the dumb rom-com *My Best Friend's Girl* (\$29.95; Lionsgate) starring Dane Cook; the costumer *The Children Of Huang Shi* (\$28.96; Sony); *The Express* (\$29.98; Universal), the story of Ernie Davis, the first black athlete to win the Heisman with Dennis Quaid as the coach who pushes him along; and *On Each Side* (\$24.95; First Run Features), an Argentinian film about the lives transformed while a bridge is being built between two cities over a period of years.

TV -- I'll bet Barack and Michelle Obama's daughters would enjoy *The Powerpuff Girls: 10th Anniversary Collection* (\$59.98; Warner Bros.). It collects together all 78 episodes starring Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup, the three pint-sized but tough crime fighters. Extras include a new episode, a special about the show, the holiday special, a poster and more. Saturday morning is still a wasteland if you're looking for independent, smart female role models who can take care of themselves and yet are genuinely human. All that in a silly, amusing cartoon series? Yep. Also out: *The American Future: A History* (\$34.98; BBC Video), the latest documentary churned out by Schama (and yes, that's the word), with the popular historian looking a bit adrift as he tackles American culture and history; *Chris Rock's Kill The Messenger Collector's Edition* (\$29.98; HBO), his latest funny stand-up show which has some great extras -- you see the entire performance in three cities (Johannesburg, London and New York City), plus a chat with Rock and a digital copy; *George Wallace Special Edition* (\$24.98; Warner Bros.), the Emmy-winning miniseries starring Gary Sinise in the role of his life as Alabama governor Wallace, who ultimately abandoned every hateful principle he held dear (getting shot and losing elections will do that to a man); *Make 'Em Laugh: The Funny Business Of America* (\$34.95; Rhino), a six part PBS series hosted by Billy Crystal and narrated by Amy Sedaris about comedy that like most such series is more notable for the great clips than the context the show places them in; *Captains and the Kings* (\$39.98; Koch), the soapy miniseries starring Perry King, Blair Brown and Henry Fonda from back in the day when they turned these out like clockwork; *Lovejoy Season Four* (\$69.98; BBC Video), the latest installment in Ian McShane's star-making turn as the antique dealer/crime fighter; *Saxondale Complete Seasons 1 & 2* (\$39.98; BBC Video), Steve Coogan's roadie/philosopher series -- it was *Alan Partridge* that made him famous forever in the UK but this show is an enjoyable goof as well; *Tess Of The D'Urbervilles* (\$34.98; BBC Video), the latest version of the Thomas Hardy novel that -- like *Brideshead Revisited* -- has no reason for being other than the fact that it's been a few years since the last one; *Little Britain USA* (\$29.98; HBO), the UK sketch show that hasn't quite translated -- it seems more a collection of grotesqueries than characters they care about or are interested in; *The Last Detective Complete Collection* (\$99.99; Acorn) is the third successful series starring Peter Davison, who previously had fun with *Dr. Who* and especially *All Creatures Great and Small*; *This American Life Season Two* (\$18.99; Showtime/Paramount), a delightful series that unfortunately is only for sale at Borders -- boy, do I hate these exclusive agreements; *Til Death Second Season* (\$29.95; Sony), the Brad Garrett sitcom that is no *Raymond*, I'm afraid; *Matlock Second Season* and Conan's favorite show *Walker Texas Ranger Sixth Season* both come complete (\$49.99; Paramount) so why do they tease out *My Three Sons First Season Volume Two* (\$39.98; Paramount) which means it'll cost \$80 to buy one season of a show that's almost 50 years old?; *Emergency! Season Five* (\$39.98; Universal) seemed pulse-pounding at the time, though now thanks to *ER* et al I keep thinking, 'Hurry Up!'; History Channel has a gift for attention-



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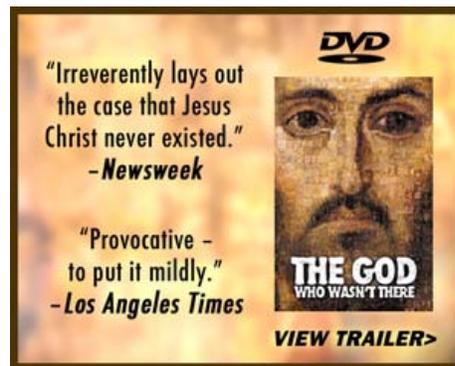
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grabbing names, such as *Jurassic Fight Club Season One* (\$39.95; History) and *Monster Quest Season Two* (\$44.95); and finally the sixth and final season of *The Rockford Files* (\$39.98; Universal), which means saying goodbye to one of TV's iconic detectives, the always roughed up, always in debt Jim Rockford and one of TV's best actors, James Garner, who is still around and working and probably making certain he gets the money due to him from the DVD sales. Thanks, Jim.

So tell me, what DVDs do you recommend to Barack Obama and why?

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Fellini's ROMA

Fellini's AMARCORD
Mel Brooks' BLAZING SADDLES
William Friedkin's THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Plus pretty much anything directed by Akira Kurosawa, Juzo Itami, Nagisa Oshima and Yasujiro Ozu. TAMPOPO, RAN, DOUDESKADEN, THE BAD SLEEP WELL, FAMILY GAME AND MARUSA NO ONNA (A TAXING WOMAN---but the sequel to it kinda stinks) especially. All come in subtitled versions.

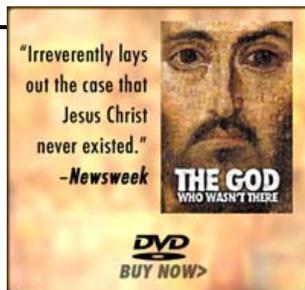
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