

The Best Bookshops in Washington D.C., USA

Jenny McArthur takes us on a tour of the best bookshops in **Washington D.C., USA**. If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, further information about contributing follows this article.



Image Credit: Washington D.C., USA ([Ted Eytan CC BY SA 2.0](#))

The Best Bookshops in Washington D.C.

A city of big 'P' politics, Washington D.C. is best known as the home of the US federal government, major international organisations, NGOs and a very high concentration of lobbyists and consultancies. Beyond the crowds of suits that dominate the city centre on weekdays, tourists and a constant stream of eighth-graders on a field trip to the capital, the city has a surprising number of well-established, independent bookstores. These are mostly found outside the centre – past the big-box office blocks and monuments of the commercial area to the historic rowhouses and eventually sprawling suburbs that spill over the District's boundaries into Maryland and Virginia. D.C. has an active and politically engaged cultural scene. In turn, many bookshops aren't just selling books – they also have regular seminars, book launches and signings, book clubs, writing groups, bars and cafes.

Politics and Prose

5015 Connecticut Avenue NW, 20008

Politics and Prose is a local institution, based in Chevy Chase in north D.C., with additional stores now open at Union Market and The Wharf. The expansive store has a vast collection and very knowledgeable staff, with a coffeehouse downstairs. The events programme is comprehensive, with talks almost every day across the three stores and daytime activities for children and families.



[Kramerbooks & Afterwords](#)

1517 Connecticut Avenue NW, 20036

Kramerbooks (the bookshop) and Afterwords (the cafe) have a smaller store just north of Dupont Circle, but it is packed full, with particularly good coverage of politics and current events. Book clubs run regularly, partnered with the Women's National Book Association and Brookings Institution. Unlike the other recommendations here, Kramerbooks is almost always open: 7.30am-1am daily, and until 3am on weekends.



[The Lantern Bookshop](#)

3241 P Street NW, 20007

For those overwhelmed by the potential distractions of brunch and book launches at P&P and Kramers, The Lantern, tucked away on a side street in Georgetown, only sell books. The shop is run by volunteers – mostly alumni of Bryn Mawr College – and across two floors of a rowhouse there is a wide-ranging collection covering politics, history, philosophy and travel.



[Second Story Books](#)

2000 P Street NW, 20036

Second Story Books also has a much simpler offering, specialising in rare and out-of-print books. Established in 1973, they have over half a million books in inventory – whatever doesn't fit in the Dupont Circle store is stored in a warehouse store in Rockville, MD. There are frequent book sales, and the sidewalk sales in particular are a good chance to pick up a bargain.





Beyond these independent book sellers, it is noteworthy – in the broader context of cities and their bookstores – to see new openings from online retailers.

For scholars of [late capitalism](#): as if devastating the traditional book retail market wasn't going far enough, in March 2018 Amazon added insult to injury by opening their first bricks-and-mortar [Amazon Books](#), on the site of a former Barnes & Noble. The large store is between a traditional book retailer and an electronics store, selling Amazon devices such as Kindle and Alexa, and taking payments via the Amazon app.

It is also worth checking out Capitol Hill Books, Bridge Street Books, Idle Time Books and Upshur Street Books.

Jenny McArthur is a lecturer at UCL Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy. Jenny has a background in civil engineering and economics and her research focuses on urban infrastructure governance, policy and finance. Twitter [@jen_m_mcarthur](#). [Read more by Jenny McArthur](#).

Note: This bookshop guide gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics. Thank you to Jenny McArthur for providing the images of The Lantern Bookshop and Amazon Books. The image of Second Story Books is credited to Elvert Barnes ([CC BY SA 2.0](#)), as is the image of Kramer Books ([CC BY SA 2.0](#)); the image of Politics&Prose is courtesy of Ted Eytan ([CC BY SA 2.0](#)).

Do you have a favourite bookshop? If there's a bookshop that you think other students and academics should visit when they're undertaking research or visiting a city for a conference, then this is your chance to tell us all about it.

As part of a [regular feature](#) on *LSE Review of Books*, we're asking academics and students to recommend their favourite two or three bookshops in a particular city, with the aim of building an exciting online series for our book-loving community of readers the world over.

Bookshops could be academic, alternative, foreign language, hobby-based, secret or underground institutions, secondhand outlets or connected to a university. We'd like to cover all world regions too.

If something comes to mind, we're looking for around 150 words per bookshop, detailing why each place is a must-see. Our editorial team can then find suitable photos and links to accompany the piece, though you're welcome to supply these too. We only ask that you focus on just one city or region, and two or three bookshops within it.

Email us now if you'd like to contribute: lseviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk