



The Presidents We Imagine: Two Centuries of White House Fictions on the Page, on the Stage, Onscreen, and Online (Studies in American Thought and Culture)

Jeff Smith

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In such popular television series as *The West Wing* and *24*, in thrillers like Tom Clancy's novels, and in recent films, plays, graphic novels, and internet cartoons, America has been led by an amazing variety of chief executives. Some of these are real presidents who have been fictionally reimaged. Others are "might-have-beens" like Philip Roth's President Charles Lindbergh. Many more have never existed except in some storyteller's mind.

In *The Presidents We Imagine*, Jeff Smith examines the presidency's ever-changing place in the American imagination. Ranging across different media and analyzing works of many kinds, some familiar and some never before studied, he explores the evolution of presidential fictions, their central themes, the impact on them of new and emerging media, and their largely unexamined role in the nation's real politics.

Smith traces fictions of the presidency from the plays and polemics of the eighteenth century—when the new office was born in what Alexander Hamilton called "the regions of fiction"—to the digital products of the twenty-first century, with their seemingly limitless user-defined ways of imagining the world's most important political figure. Students of American culture and politics, as well as readers interested in political fiction and film, will find here a colorful, indispensable guide to the many surprising ways Americans have been "representing" presidents even as those presidents have represented them.

"Especially timely in an era when media image-mongering increasingly shapes presidential politics."—Paul S. Boyer, series editor

"Smith's understanding of the sociopolitical realities of US history is impressive; likewise his interpretations of works of literature and popular culture. . . . In addition to presenting thoughtful analysis, the book is also fun. Readers will enjoy encounters with, for example, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Duck Soup*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Philip Roth's *Plot against America*, the comedic campaigns of W. C. Fields for President and Pogo for President, and presidential fictions that continue up to the last President Bush. . . . His writing is fluid and conversational, but every page reveals deep understanding and focus. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All readers."—*CHOICE*

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