



# White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters

*Robert Schlesinger*

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## **White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters** Robert Schlesinger

In *White House Ghosts*, veteran Washington reporter Robert Schlesinger opens a fresh and revealing window on the modern presidency from FDR to George W. Bush. This is the first book to examine a crucial and often hidden role played by the men and women who help presidents find the words they hope will define their places in history.

Drawing on scores of interviews with White House scribes and on extensive archival research, Schlesinger weaves intimate, amusing, compelling stories that provide surprising insights into the personalities, quirks, egos, ambitions, and humor of these presidents as well as how well or not they understood the bully pulpit.

*White House Ghosts* traces the evolution of the presidential speechwriter's job from Raymond Moley under FDR through such luminaries as Ted Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., under JFK, Jack Valenti and Richard Goodwin under LBJ, William Safire and Pat Buchanan under Nixon, Hendrik Hertzberg and James Fallows under Carter, and Peggy Noonan under Reagan, to the "Troika" of Michael Gerson, John McConnell, and Matthew Scully under George W. Bush.

*White House Ghosts* tells the fascinating inside stories behind some of the most iconic presidential phrases: the first inaugural of FDR ("the only thing we have to fear is fear itself") and JFK ("ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country"), Richard Nixon's "I am not a crook" and Ronald Reagan's "tear down this wall" speeches, Bill Clinton's ending "the era of big government" State of the Union, and George W. Bush's post-9/11 declaration that "whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done" -- and dozens of other noteworthy speeches. The book also addresses crucial questions surrounding the complex relationship between speechwriter and speechgiver, such as who actually crafted the most memorable phrases, who deserves credit for them, and who has claimed it.

Schlesinger tells the story of the modern American presidency through this unique prism -- how our chief executives developed their very different rhetorical styles and how well they grasped the rewards of reaching out to the country. *White House Ghosts* is dramatic, funny, gripping, surprising, serious -- and always entertaining.

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