

White House Memoirs

BY JESSICA TEISCH

IN WASHINGTON, D.C., THERE'S A SAYING that every political memoir can be boiled down to these words: "If only they'd listened to me." That adage applies, of course, to everyone—from White House speech writers to secretaries of state to the presidential dog walkers.

In recent decades, the White House memoir has become somewhat of a ritual, where employees at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue—from top-level advisors to maids—have chronicled their personal and/or professional experiences, for better or for worse, with various members of the First Families. Some of the White House memoirs below, divided loosely by job occupation, are tell-alls—hardly a new phenomenon. Others keep their respectful distance from their employers and colleagues while still opening a window into the halls of Washington, D.C., and the inner sanctum of the White House.

While we discuss a range of memoirs below (many of them, not surprisingly, *New York Times* best sellers), we do not cover the doorstep tomes by former or sitting presidents, since memoirs by others are, generally speaking, far more entertaining.

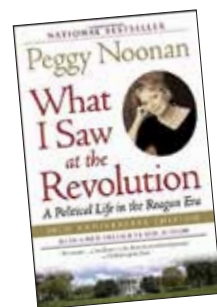
White House Staff Positions

What I Saw at the Revolution

A Political Life in the Reagan Era

By Peggy Noonan (1990)

"Reading *What I Saw at the Revolution* will give you a pretty clear idea of what it is that makes Noonan such an ambivalent figure. And not just for conservatives, either," noted a *Los Angeles Times* critic. Noonan, who spent two-plus years in the Reagan White House as a speechwriter, became notorious for taking credit both for the words she wrote and for her leaks to the press. In this memoir, she discusses not only her childhood on Long Island and her failed marriage but also the 1984 presidential campaign, the administration's macho and old boys culture, her thorny relationships with West Wing colleagues, and her reverence for Reagan. If her high-handed, glib style reveals some not-so-secret animosities, it also makes for highly entertaining and exciting reading.

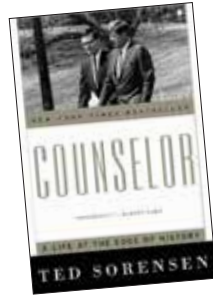


Counselor

A Life at the Edge of History

By Ted Sorensen (2008)

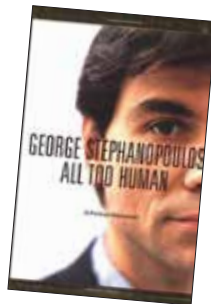
As he rose through the ranks of Washington, Sorensen became one of JFK's closest confidantes. Here, he opens the door into the world of Camelot and explores his own long and varied diplomatic career in the aftermath of Kennedy's assassination. Rumors persist regarding Sorensen's role in the ghosting of Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Profiles in Courage*, as well as his credit for lines from some of JFK's most famous speeches and for his crucial correspondence with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev during the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Sorensen brushes aside such questions, claiming only collaborative credit. "[In] Sorensen's extraordinarily lucid memoir," wrote a *Boston Globe* critic, "he lets his hair down, revealing poignant moments of his Kennedy White House years that he didn't feel appropriate to reveal while Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was alive." (★★★★★ **SELECTION** July/Aug 2008)



All Too Human

By George Stephanopoulos (1999)

"What is a nice boy like me doing in a brothel like the White House?" Stephanopoulos asks. He answers that question by exploring the mix of idealism and ambition that led him to serve as Bill Clinton's de facto press secretary and senior advisor. Like many political memoirs, *All Too Human* offers a partisan (and at times quite damaging) view of Clinton's rich parade of successes and failures. Yet Stephanopoulos also recounts his own sycophantic lust for power, the betrayals that led to his final break with whom he described as dirty schemers Bill and Hillary, his belated journey of self-discovery—and, not least—the measures he took to mitigate the screeching in his head (Zoloff). The hand-wringing and moral self-flagellation Stephanopoulos does here doesn't lead to exceptional analysis of the Clinton presidency, but it does offer "a knowing, slightly cynical treatise on modern politics" and "a classic morality tale" (*People*).



And the Goods News Is...

Lessons and Advice from the Bright Side

By Dana Perino (2015)

Perino, who served as press secretary (the first and only Republican woman to do so) under George W. Bush and now appears on Fox News's *The Five* details her childhood

in Wyoming and Colorado and her fortuitous rise in Washington and provides polite and cheerful advice on lessons learned. She advances the Bush-Cheney agenda while decrying Washington's partisanship; she discusses her professional challenges and involvement in politics and television. It's all extremely civil—and it's all good. And, for a political memoir, Perino's book is surprisingly short (288 pages).

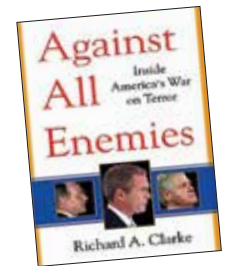


Against All Enemies

Inside America's War on Terror

By Richard A. Clarke (2004)

Clarke, a former antiterrorism adviser who served under various administrations, resigned in anger in March 2003. Here, he offers a scathing critique of the White House's handling of terrorism, claiming that George W. Bush repeatedly ignored evidence of an imminent al Qaeda attack. Then, after 9/11, the administration launched a unilateral invasion against Iraq in an effort to distract the American public from the real threat. "Clarke backs up his chronicle with meticulous detail, but the basic charges themselves should not be so controversial; certainly, they're nothing new. ... Clarke's distinction, of course, is that he was the ultimate insider—as highly and deeply inside, on this issue, as anyone could imagine. And so his charges are more credible, potent, and dangerous" (*Nation*).



THE CLINTON WARS | SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL (2003)

NO SUCH THING AS A BAD DAY: A MEMOIR | HAMILTON JORDAN (2001)

POTUS SPEAKS: FINDING THE WORDS THAT DEFINED THE CLINTON PRESIDENCY | MICHAEL WALDMAN (2000)

A POLITICAL EDUCATION: A WASHINGTON MEMOIR | HARRY MCPHERSON (1972)

EYEWITNESS TO POWER: THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP NIXON TO CLINTON | DAVID GERGEN (2003)

THE ENDS OF POWER | H. R. HALDEMAN (1975)

THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS | HENRY KISSINGER (1979); ♦ NATIONAL BOOK AWARD)

Secretaries of ...

Madam Secretary

A Memoir

By Madeleine Albright (2003)

In the personal stories Albright relates, *Madam Secretary* "is not a road map for future generations of statesmen," wrote the *New York Times* but a memoir pitched to a popular audience. A child refugee from Czechoslovakia in the late

1930s, Albright married a newspaper heir who betrayed her; taught and got involved in politics; became the first female Secretary of State (during the Clinton administration); and discovered her Jewish heritage. Casting herself rather than her colleagues as the main character, Albright spends twice as many pages on her traumatic divorce than she does on the failure of the United States to intervene in the Rwandan genocide. Her engaging, anecdotal memoir, which toggles between discussion of foreign policy issues (such as the Balkan and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts), her ambitions and mistakes, and sewing costumes for three children and grandchildren, underscores just how hard she worked to get where she did.

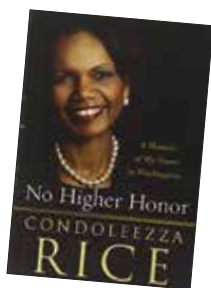


No Higher Honor

A Memoir of My Years in Washington

By Condoleezza Rice (2011)

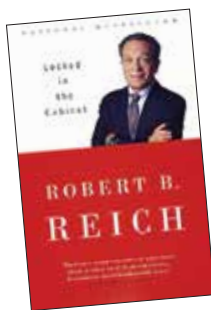
The former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under President George W. Bush—the first woman and the first black woman to hold those positions, respectively—takes readers into the back rooms of politics as she appraises her wheelings and dealings with global leaders and the challenges and successes that ensued. She more politely lambasts (the arrogant) Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney than they do her in their own recent books, while analyzing her own missteps in the face of situations like the Kyoto Protocol and the Iraq invasion. “Rice,” opined the *New York Times*, “has written an exhaustive brief to acquit herself before the bar of history, which she hopes will be more forgiving than the caustic judgments of the present.” Readers looking for a more autobiographical bent will find that in Rice’s *Extraordinary, Ordinary People: A Memoir of Family* (2010).



Locked in the Cabinet

By Robert B. Reich (1997)

Reich, who served as Secretary of Labor for Clinton’s first term, was a Friend of Bill and an even greater Friend of Hillary, so his memoir dishes out little in the way of juicy gossip. Describing himself as a “middle-aged loose cannon,” Reich explains how he fought to save American jobs and develop national policy amid gargantuan egos, competing agendas, and fudged numbers. Writing with warmth and humor, he relates his obstacles and successes as he recounts stories about his work and his work environment (“every memorandum will leak,” he says),



while raising serious questions about economic policy. “Mr. Reich has no real secrets to spill, but he is a clever and observant diarist,” noted the *New York Times*. “He is ruefully funny about Washington, even more so about himself.”

Duty

Memoirs of a Secretary at War

By David M. Gates (2014)

In one of the most popular political memoirs in years, Gates reveals what he really thought about his time as Secretary of Defense between 2006 and 2011, having already spent 26 years with the CIA and the National Security Council. In his second memoir (after 1996’s *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*), the even-tempered leader goes behind the scenes into war-room discussions with Presidents Bush and Obama and closed-door congressional meetings. Whether he is justifying the expense of mine-resistant vehicles or writing condolence letters to the families of deceased soldiers, his remorse, frustration, and deep sense of personal obligation to those he sent overseas shine through. “Informative, reflective, provocative and at times emotional, his book is essential reading for anyone interested in United States foreign policy” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). (★★★★ Mar/Apr 2014)

MY AMERICAN JOURNEY | COLIN POWELL (1995)

YEARS OF RENEWAL | HENRY KISSINGER (1999)

THE POLITICS OF DIPLOMACY: REVOLUTION, WAR AND PEACE, 1989–1992 | JAMES A. BAKER (1995)

PRESENT AT THE CREATION: MY YEARS IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT | DEAN ACHESON (1969; ♦ PULITZER PRIZE)

WORTHY FIGHTS: A MEMOIR OF LEADERSHIP IN WAR AND PEACE | LEON PANETTA (2014)

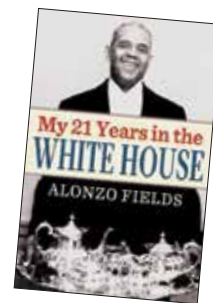
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN: A MEMOIR | DONALD RUMSFELD (2011)

Running the White House: The Head Butler, Party Planner, & More

My 21 Years in the White House

By Alonzo Fields (1960)

Fields served as the White House’s chief butler under presidents Hoover, Roosevelt (a very amusing man), Truman (his personal favorite), and Eisenhower. Over those 21 years, he evolved from the “black boy” working in a rigid racial hierarchy into a public servant who, under Roosevelt and later presidents, became a close confidante to those he served. Fields overtly addresses the hypocrisy of his position serving the



president of a democracy while being treated as a second-class citizen; he also recounts his meetings with foreign dignitaries and his witness to critical decisions, such as the one following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Fields's memoir, full of quirky anecdotes, is now considered a first-rate insider's look into past administrations.

Upstairs at the White House

My Life with the First Ladies

By J. B. West (1973)

West, who eventually became chief usher and social coordinator/executive director of grounds at the White House between the Roosevelt and Nixon administrations, spent ample time with the First Families. Here, he reveals priceless tidbits about the First Ladies: Lady Bird Johnson lived in a wee bit of a bubble; Bess Truman was funny; Harry and Bess Truman once broke the bed having sex; Mamie Eisenhower, who disapproved of "that girl" Jackie Kennedy, was effusively generous. West retired from the White House in 1968, after an investigation revealed that some of his friends had stolen mementos and that he, himself, was deemed a security risk for his homosexuality. Hardly a house tour of banquets and remodeling, *Upstairs at the White House* respectfully and humorously details the First Families' distinctive personalities and the significant decisions each made.

Mrs. Kennedy and Me

By Clint Hill with Lisa McCubbin (2012)

Hill, a former Secret Service agent, was in the presidential motorcade when JFK was assassinated; he continued to serve Jackie Kennedy and then Presidents Johnson and Nixon until he became the Assistant Director of the Secret Service. Here, Hill looks back on JFK's tragic death and his own failure to protect him; he also highlights his career, in particular his working and personal relationship with the private but charming Jackie (referred to, respectfully, as "Mrs. Kennedy"). Far from depressing, his memoir is one of warmth, friendship, and love for the Kennedys, filled with unparalleled anecdotes without the gossipy tone. See also Hill's memoir *Five Presidents: My Extraordinary Journey with Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford* (2016).

DOG DAYS AT THE WHITE HOUSE: THE OUTRAGEOUS MEMOIRS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL KENNEL KEEPER | TRAPHES BRYANT (KENNEL KEEPER; 1975)

WHITE HOUSE STORY: A DEMOCRATIC MEMOIR | MELINDA BATES (WHITE HOUSE VISITOR'S OFFICE DIRECTOR; 2009)

ALL THE PRESIDENTS' PASTRIES: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE WHITE HOUSE, A MEMOIR | ROLAND MESNIER (EXECUTIVE WHITE HOUSE PASTRY CHEF; 2007)

DINING AT THE WHITE HOUSE: FROM THE PRESIDENT'S TABLE TO YOURS | JOHN MOELLER (CHEF; 2013)

MY THIRTY YEARS BACKSTAIRS AT THE WHITE HOUSE | LILLIAN ROGERS PARKS (HOUSEMAID AND SEAMSTRESS; 1961) ■

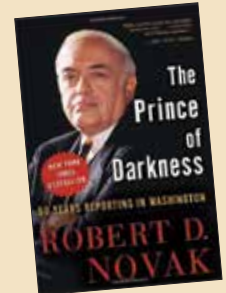
Journalists and the White House

The Prince of Darkness

50 Years Reporting in Washington

By Robert Novak (2007)

Novak, a syndicated columnist, political reporter, and television commentator in Washington who wrote breaking news about politics and politicians for 50 years (he outed Valerie Plume as a CIA agent), was an idiosyncratic conservative and later an ideologue. He had the right friends in the right places (the first president he covered was Harry Truman), and he walked a fine balance between exploiting his insider access and rewarding his sources. In this brutally candid and gripping memoir, Novak recalls his youth, his conservatism (apparently congenital), his regret over neglecting his family, the alcoholism and gambling that nearly ruined him, and his relationship with his powerful friends and foes. "As artless as it is fascinating," concluded the *New York Times Book Review*, "*The Prince of Darkness* dishes gossip and delivers payback to enemies for ancient slights; and on nearly every page it illustrates Novak's noisome journalistic methods."

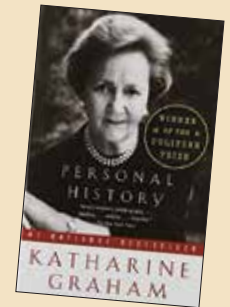


Personal History

By Katharine Graham

♦ PULITZER PRIZE

She ruled Washington's political and media scene for decades, and the family newspaper she headed, the *Washington Post*, made and broke policies and politicians. Here, Graham reveals her "personal history": her mother's narcissism; her wealthy father's purchase of the bankrupt paper in 1933 and her own ambitions as a young journalist; her marriage to a poor but ambitious Supreme Court clerk; her rise in Washington social circles and her husband's takeover of the newspaper; and his abuse, affair, and suicide that left Graham in charge of the *Washington Post*, which published excerpts of the *Pentagon Papers* and broke the story of Watergate when most women ran their households and little else. "Katharine Graham turns out to have had not two lives but four," reported the *New York Times*, "and the story of her journey from daughter to wife to widow to woman parallels to a surprising degree the history of women in this century. It's also a wonderful book."



FEAR AND LOATHING ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL '72 | HUNTER S. THOMPSON (1973)

WHAT IT TAKES: THE WAY TO THE WHITE HOUSE | RICHARD BEN CRAMER (1982) ■