



When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences

Eric Alterman

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At a time when most Americans assume that their presidents lie to them, no book could be more essential than bestselling author Eric Alterman's devastating analysis of the costs of executive duplicity. One of the best-known left-of-center journalist-historians in America, Alterman argues that those costs are not merely moral but *practical*. As examples, he uses four key lies told by presidents in the postwar era. From FDR at Yalta to LBJ in Vietnam, and from JFK in Cuba to Ronald Reagan in Central America, Alterman shows how attempts to mislead the American people ended up haunting their authors and dooming the very policies they were meant to advance. Closing with an examination of the Bush deceptions in Iraq, *When Presidents Lie* is history at its most compelling.

When Presidents Lie: A History of Official Deception and Its Consequences Details

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Author : Eric Alterman

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John says

This is the second Alterman book I've read. Again small, tightly packed typography. Three of the five "big lies" presented, LBJ (Tonkin Gulf), R. Reagan (Iran-Contra) and GW Bush (Iraq), are more engaging to read than two others, FDR (Yalta) and JFK (Cuban missile crisis). The latter two are adapted from author's doctoral dissertation, which, I surmise, may somewhat account for their stultified prose. Not discussed are lies told by R. Nixon and B. Clinton, reason being that they had no particular relationship to broad questions of war and peace. Conclusions: These presidents lied for political convenience. They didn't consider ramifications for truth telling and overall repercussions for domestic and international concord and tranquility.

Andrew Johnston says

A dense read, but an interesting one. "All politicians lie" is just a joke to most people, but Alterman demonstrates how tragically true it really is. Definitely not for anyone who wants to maintain any degree of trust in our government.

Jon says

Very valuable and impressive work. The author doesn't cut politicians of either major party any slack.

I'm still trying to figure out what this means considering it would apply to all presidents and many of our other elected leaders.

Highly recommended, if you can track down a copy.

Mark Woodland says

Tip of the iceberg! Focuses on just four of the 20th century presidents, but speaks volumes about the way things are commonly run in the White House.

Dan Wojcik says

The book does a wonderful job in discussing how Roosevelt lied about Yalta, how the Kennedy's manipulated the press about the Cuban missile crisis but begins to labor about mid way through the book with the Iran Contra scandals. The author seems to want to justify Clinton's behavior as acceptable lying. That being said the myth of Roosevelt at Yalta and the Kennedy's with castro becomes somewhat less.

The Amazing Jill says

Pretty good so far...

Bill says

Altermans points are interesting and important. The writing, however, is academic and so thick that it takes forever to get thru. I've given up after the second try, made it thru just one fourth of it.

Quannah says

This book points to the consequences of the lies told by our presidents. Altermans has thoroughly researched this subject, and eloquently tells the story of what happens when presidents lie, the reverberating consequences, and how those lies, once put into the public arena, have continued to be perpetrated by subsequent presidents. This creates a literal "web of lies" that become enmeshed with history, creating the "false history" that many of us are so familiar with.

I would recommend this book for anyone interested in presidential history, and hope that there will be an updated version after the current occupant of the White House leaves. Or, perhaps, that is an entire series of books alone.
