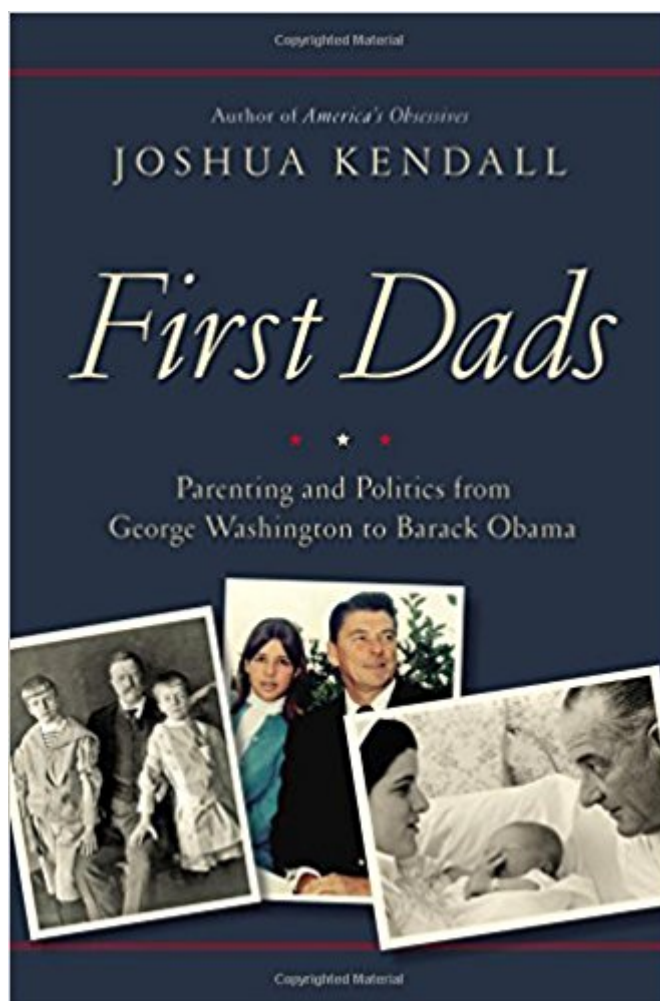


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First Dads: Parenting And Politics From George Washington To Barack Obama



Synopsis

Every president has had some experience as a parent. Of the 43 men who have served in the nation's highest office, 38 have fathered biological children and the other five adopted children. Each president's parenting style reveals much about his beliefs as well as his psychological make-up. James Garfield enjoyed jumping on the bed with his kids. FDR's children, on the other hand, had to make appointments to talk to him. In a lively narrative, based on research in archives around the country, Kendall shows presidential character in action. Readers will learn which type of parent might be best suited to leading the American people and, finally, how the fathering experiences of our presidents have forever changed the course of American history.

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Customer Reviews

• A key reason why George Washington was unanimously elected as our first president was because he had not fathered any children of his own. • This distinction would prevent him from establishing a monarchy to pass the reins of power to an heir. Of the 43 presidents including Washington, only five have not produced progeny. Award-winning journalist Joshua Kendall examines how these men have handled a job that has arguably the greatest responsibility of any in the world, while developing and sustaining a role as parent. Kendall divides his exploration into six parenting categories. The "Preoccupied" certainly included Franklin Delano Roosevelt, content to leave the treatment of his children to his mother and his wife, the former an autocratic spoiler and the latter a frustrated disciplinarian. After he was stricken with polio, FDR's withdrawal from

fatherhood was more marked, and his children grew up unfocused and impulsive. Theodore Roosevelt, though, was solidly in the "Playful Pals" group, with Christmas a central family-focused season. TR was in many ways like a kid himself, and a vocal proponent of large families. "Double Dealers" include the privately manipulative, domineering John Tyler, who fathered more than 50 children among his slaves, a sin not unique among men of high office in America, but Tyler boasted of it. His sexual indiscretions went so far as "staging wild sex parties with his two adult sons." Dwight Eisenhower was a "Tiger Dad," unable to control his temper and frequently disparaging and humiliating his son, John. Ike's fits of anger were so notable that behind the scenes, he was called "the terrible-tempered Mr. Bang."

In our family, there are ten of us who call my father "Dad", and it always amazed me that he found the time to be the voracious reader he used to be! Then again, his job as a H.R. manager for a large company required him to spend a lot of time on planes and in hotel rooms while we were growing up, so I guess that's where he devoured them. He's in his late 70s now and, unfortunately, the ravages of Alzheimer's have rendered him incapable of focusing enough to maintain his interest in reading. His physical immobility (needing a lift to move him into his wheelchair, the bathroom, etc.) had left our mom physically unable to care for him at home many years ago, but that dear lady does visit him every day at his nursing home without fail. The days are long for Dad, so she's always looking for things to stimulate his mind; occasionally she'll be able to read an article or a portion of a book before he drifts back off to sleep. When I heard about this book coming out, it seemed like a perfect Father's Day gift (by the way, I was able to find this hard cover elsewhere for just \$13.99 with free shipping, which was a few bucks less than Amazon's advertised free shipping with book orders over \$25 always sounds good, but so many times recently I've found that Amazon's price is much higher on books I've wanted - I guess that's what pays for all of that free shipping! Just be sure to shop around and make sure you're getting the best deal.) Mom always enjoys having new sources of material to read from to Dad... I say it was a "perfect" gift in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, since Dad had always found it amusing to administer Myers Briggs personality tests to his children, right in the middle of our family Christmas get togethers years ago!

"First Dads" offers a fascinating glimpse at the personal lives, parenting styles, and historical legacies of our nation's presidents. Written in an accessible, engaging style with good flow and pacing, the text should appeal to anyone with an interest in parenting and appetite for history or celebrity. Kendall doesn't offer up much by way of parenting advice, aside from confirming the

old Goldilocks theory: not too permissive and not too authoritarian, but just right, has proven best for America's first kids • too. A novel conclusion rocked one of my core beliefs though. I've always thought everyone should strive to be the best parent they can be, and that those who manage and attend to children well will naturally excel in other areas too. But Kendall says the best dads haven't made for the most effective presidents. It's a new lens through which to consider our attempts to "have it all." In this respect and others, I wonder whether Kendall can possibly offer the right take on the vast number of presidencies and historical events he covers. His presentation of the likelihood of George Washington having an illegitimate son, for example, differs with Thomas Fleming's extensive research on the subject. (Kendall basically says, "Could have been true," while Fleming writes in "The Intimate Lives of the Founding Fathers" that it almost certainly didn't happen.) Generalizations about the effectiveness of the Obama administration also may be premature. That said, "First Dads" is well worth reading, even if just for interesting factoids like the following: "As Grant's volunteer aide-de-camp, Fred would live and eat in his father's tent for most of the war. On many a night, father and son would sleep side by side."

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