



# **First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama**

*Joshua Kendall*

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## **First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama** Joshua Kendall

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.

## **First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama Details**

Date : Published May 10th 2016 by Grand Central Publishing

ISBN : 9781455551958

Author : Joshua Kendall

Format : Hardcover 400 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Politics, Presidents, Biography, North American Hi..., American History

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# **From Reader Review First Dads: Parenting and Politics from George Washington to Barack Obama for online ebook**

## **Lori says**

I've been on a bit of a "presidential" angle in my reading lately and found this premise intriguing: analyzing presidential parenting styles in relation to their administrations. I found most of this text quite enjoyable in its look at various presidential child/parent relationships. Chapters on Grant's and Teddy Roosevelt's "no holds barred" broods, the grief stricken administrations of McKinley, Pierce and Coolidge, and the workaholic demands/isolation of FDR, LBJ and Carter (now that last one was REALLY surprising) were especially good reading. However, there are sections that drag, and for me, they diminished my overall enjoyment and rating. There is a very long discussion of John Tyler and yes, learning how reprehensible he apparently was--was eye opening--it went on too long. The same happens with the John/John Quincy Adams chapter; Rutherford B Hayes comes across as a delightful man, parent, and undervalued president, but that discussion needed to end earlier as well. Further complicating matters is the generational use of repetitive names, which becomes quite hard to keep clear--especially in the Adams and Tyler chapters. Events and people are also not always discussed in consistent chronological order; they are often discussed in a "back and forth" manner that sometimes created confusion, repetition, and the sense of "bogging down." Yet, despite those moments, I still recommend the book to anyone who is a presidential history enthusiast. Having recently lost my dad, a lot of this made me further appreciate and remember his loving and admirable qualities. For those interested in a bit of a "trilogy" I would put this with Karen Brower's fascinating "First Women" and Brady Carlson's engaging and humorous "Dead Presidents" for some fun historical reading.

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## **Emily says**

I actually really enjoyed this book. It was interesting to see how the different parenting styles affected each person's ability to lead the US. Of course, it's not a fool proof analysis but I think it gives a nice insight into how these men balanced family and career. The other presidential books I've read have focused primarily on leadership style, family background, etc but by focusing on a president as a father gives a more personal feel to these men. I will say this book was a bit slow in some parts, but overall the structure made sense. If you're into biographies and/or US presidential history, it's worth giving this book a perusal.

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## **Dan says**

A wonderful read that helps you remember that politicians, especially presidents, are in fact human beings. Some of them are very flawed. All of them are very flawed. But all of them also want what is best for their families. It's a nice reminder in these times.

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## **Michell Karnes says**

This book takes the premiss that when looking at a president's character a person should look at how he parented his children. All too often the only familial relationship looked at is the marriage relationship.

While the title says from George Washington to Obama some presidents are looked at more in-depth and others hardly at all. So while it was a good book and one I would recommend, the title is misleading. The book groups presidents by their parenting style rather than looking at the presidents in chronological order. Also, at times the text was difficult to follow because even within a section on a particular president the author jumped back and forth in time. All in all a good book with a different way of looking at and learning about past presidents.

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### **Joseph J. says**

What a unique find of a book! Purchased because I surprisingly enjoyed the author's bio of Noah Webster-rich in color of the times-this is another individual take on Presidential history. Divided into chapters by type of dad and not time in history, this book shows that the legacy of a dad in the White House may lead to frustration and tragedy. In the latter category, the story of the sons on John Quincy Adams-himself the son of a hard driving Presidential dad-is a tale of alcoholism and suicide. John Adams himself also had two sons who fell into alcoholism; John and JQ mirrored one another in scoring one "successful" son each. THE surprise of the book is in double-dealing dads; while Grover Cleveland and Warren G. Harding each sired illegitimate children, the lusty John Tyler may have fathered over fifty. While he had 7 with each of his wives, Tyler is now suspected of fathering numerous slave children, indeed which he sold into slavery. Even his second wife, the Long Island born Julia-younger than his children-fell into the slave mentality on a child has a monetary value. Interestingly, one of Tyler's legitimate grandsons was interviewed for this book. There is much color-Harding's juvenile romanticism stands out-and surprise as in the seemingly all-American Carter family. And there is tragedy with Coolidge and the dark story of Franklin Pierce so graphically told. Again, a unique and rewarding read into Presidential history.

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### **Marlene says**

The author did not just write about how the relationship some presidential dads had with their kids, but also the effect their personalities had on their presidency. I enjoyed the book, but thought some of the chapters were too long. I think the author could have been more concise in some cases. I also would have enjoyed it more if it had been mostly about modern-day presidents; however, that was not the author's intent. Given that, there are some pretty interesting stories about some of the presidents. The number of children fathered and the number of children who died was startling to me. Even more interesting was how many of the children of presidents turned out.

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### **Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says**

Wavering back-and-forth between two and three stars. Lots of snarky comments about some of these presidents. I may also be a little emotional and sensitive to those directed at President Obama, considering these are his last days in office. And, for the next four years we won't actually have a president, but a spoiled child who fights with people on Twitter. Fantastic.

Full review to come

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Check out my review on my blog <http://allthebookblognamesaretaken.bl...> or [www.facebook.com/AllTheBookBlogNamesA...](http://www.facebook.com/AllTheBookBlogNamesA...)

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### **Danielle says**

#### **An Engaging and Unique Historical Perspective**

Well written and detailed, I found it difficult to stop at times. Appreciated that it didn't give a sanitized version of history.

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### **Candy says**

The large cast of characters gets confusing, but I found the idea of comparing parenting with governing styles interesting.

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### **Mandy says**

With a nice balance between personal reminiscence and researched fact, this exploration of the parenting styles of the US's presidents makes for some interesting and often intriguing reading. Of the 43 men who have held this highest office, all of them have had some sort of experience of being a father – either of their own biological children, or from having adopted. How they approached the paternal role demonstrates much about their characters, and, to some extent, how this is reflected in their roles as presidents. Arranged thematically, and thus jumping around rather a lot chronologically, I sometimes found the book a little jumbled and confusing – personally I would have preferred a straight chronological approach – the book is well-written on the whole and offers some fascinating glimpses into the family dynamic behind the White House doors.

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### **Lee Adams says**

I had high hopes for this book. I love the concept. The book is a tome of fascinating information but the author's writing and chaotic organization of the material are much to be desired. The book has chronic ADHD mentioning a topic, quickly moving on to the next, then jumping back again to the original 100+ pages later. There is no cohesion. Unfortunate.

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### **Gail says**

"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."

"Decades later, the White House staff was still telling stories about how 'there was never a morning in the year that the whole five did not go and pile in to the bed with President and Mrs. [Teddy] Roosevelt.'"

"Play was as essential to the President as to his offspring. That Christmas, between lunch and dinner, Roosevelt squeezed in several hours of single stick—a form of fencing—with two friends from his Rough Rider days . . . whom he dubbed his 'playmates.'"

"Like TR, [Hayes, a] Republican, who easily identified with the concerns of children, would also insist that it was the President's duty to help protect America's little guys from its big guys."

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## **John says**

Review to come.

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## **Kristy says**

I definitely agree with some of the other reviews. While it was interesting to read, the format didn't seem to flow. Some of the First Dads I was surprised at how little they were mentioned, while others got a bit lengthy.

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## **Paul Clarke says**

In 'First Dads', Joshua Kendall has come up with a fun perspective through which to view the U.S. Presidents. Kendall creates six categories of fathers and drops each president into one of the following buckets: Preoccupied, Playful Pals, Double Dealing Dads, Tiger Dads, the Grief Stricken and the Nurturers.

The last category is the one held in the highest esteem and our outgoing president Barack Obama is identified as one of them, which is consistent with his public image. There are surprises too. FDR (Preoccupied) is depicted as an inattentive parent who didn't offer much guidance to his children who would go on to have troubled lives despite being someone who used the office to help the less fortunate. Also, Jimmy Carter (Tiger Dad) famous for his humanitarian work was a martinet as a parent, whose children rebelled against their health conscious father by smoking cigarettes and getting high on the roof of the White House. The Grief Stricken provides unique insight into the office holders. Our presidents are often depicted as men of great strength in the face of adversity but not all of them were. Franklin Pierce and Calvin Coolidge, who both lost children while in office, became greatly diminished in their ability to perform their job afterwards, showing that human frailty reaches the most powerful among us. Kendall's book provides an entertaining way to explore two of the great american pastimes: parenting and the presidency.

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