



The Power and the Story: How the Crafted Presidential Narrative Has Determined Political Success from George Washington to George W. Bush

Evan Cornog

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A masterly new look at the American presidency, revealing the importance of the way presidents craft personal narratives-persuasive storytelling that has a crucial effect on the electorate and the nation.

Perfectly timed for the 2004 election, Evan Cornog's *The Power and the Story* raises a thesis so integral to the discussion that it's surprising it's never been posited before. The key to a successful election, administration, and ultimate legacy is, in great measure, the crafting of the presidential story. The impact of these stories on the electorate and the nation is almost beyond measure, because it is often these stories that we call American history.

The sheer narrative drive of "the war hero," "the Rhodes scholar," "the drunkard-or recovered alcoholic," "the small-town boy," "the log cabin," "the cherry tree," "the good old boy," "the Rough Rider," and on and on can come to define a leader, an administration, and an entire era. *The Power and the Story* is the investigation of the story behind that story: how, with deliberation and occasional manipulation, a president's crafting of his public image has surmounted scandal, capitalized on opportunity, obfuscated flaws, and created legend. And how presidential storymaking has been a professional undertaking on the part of the media and spin meisters as well-from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Karl Rove.

There is, of course, the larger story as well. Cornog's book is a meditation on the American psyche and our penchant for storytelling. Questions are raised about what makes for the quintessential story; in what sense are Americans misled by the neatness imposed by storyline; and perhaps, most important, why are we so eager to see our leaders in this easily comprehensible light? All questions very much of the moment, and Cornog's sound and fascinating answers to them make this book essential campaign-season reading-and a lasting investigation of the presidency.

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