

White House Wit, Wisdom and Wisecracks

Phil Dampier, Ashley Walton



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In January 2013, Barack Obama was sworn in for a second term as the 44th President of the United States of America. The only African-American to occupy the White House, this charismatic and eloquent leader is carrying on a rich tradition of oratory which started with the Founding Fathers of the 18th century. This comprehensive collection of witty one-liners, historic pronouncements, personal insights and philosophical musings should contain something for everyone. It goes without saying that you will find the goofs and gaffes of more recent incumbents of the office, but what clearly emerges from the more serious quotations in this compilation is how many of the problems faced by the earliest Presidents still resonate today. When George Washington said "Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom", Andrew Jackson admitted "I have always been afraid of banks" and Herbert Hoover declared "Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the national debt", they could have been talking of 21st-century crises. In our 24-hour TV news and internet world, how would the earliest leaders have stood up to scrutiny? More than a few Presidents were wooden and unsuited to the Oval Office, while others were the cream of their generation and could have succeeded in whatever career they chose. Some quotations have become beacons of inspiration - like these pearls of wisdom: Thomas Jefferson's drafting of the Declaration of Independence: " - that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And JFK's timeless exhortation: "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country." As Commanders-in-Chief, Presidents are in charge of the most powerful armed forces ever known, yet humour is often their best weapon. Harry S. Truman: "You want a friend in Washington? Get a dog." Ronald Reagan: "I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of national emergency - even if I'm in a Cabinet meeting." And Barack Obama: "I'm so over-exposed I'm making Paris Hilton look like a recluse."

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