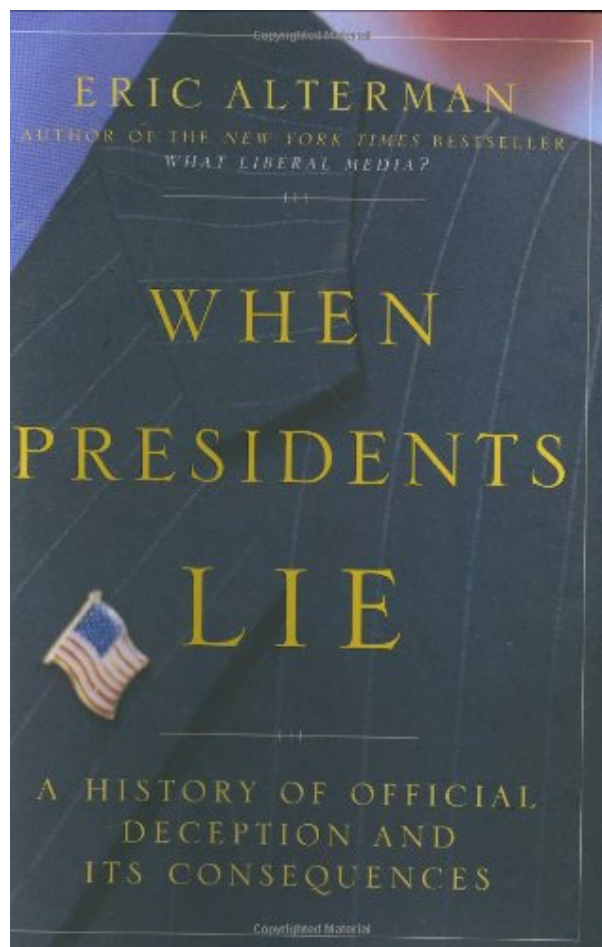
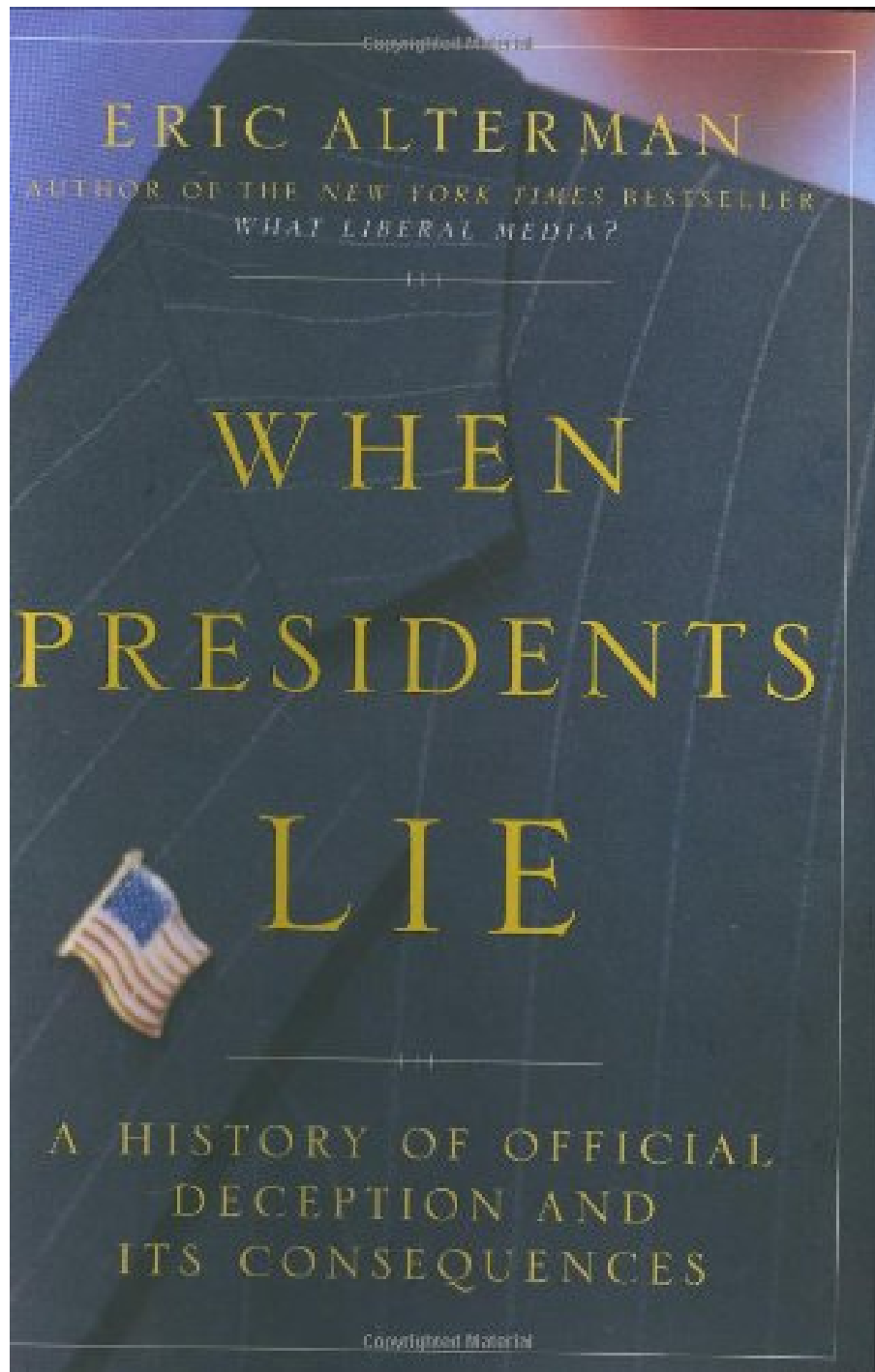


# WHEN PRESIDENTS LIE: A HISTORY OF OFFICIAL DECEPTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES BY ERIC ALTERMAN



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Lying has become pervasive in American life—but what happens when the falsehoods are perpetrated by the Oval Office? As the lies told by our government become more and more intricate, they begin to weave a tapestry of deception that creates problems far larger than those lied about in the first place.

Eric Alterman's *When Presidents Lie* is a compelling historical examination of four specific post-World War II presidential lies whose consequences were greater than could ever have been predicted. FDR told the American people that peace was secure in Europe, setting the stage for McCarthyism and the cold war. John F. Kennedy's unyielding stance during the Cuban missile crisis masked his secret deal with the Soviet Union. Misrepresented aggression at the Gulf of Tonkin by the North Vietnamese gave LBJ the power to start a war. Finally, Ronald Reagan's Central American wars ended in the ignominy of the Iran-contra scandal.

In light of George W. Bush's war in Iraq, which Alterman examines in the book's conclusion, *When Presidents Lie* is a warning—one more relevant today than ever before—that the only way to prevent these lies is America's collective demand for truth.

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- Signed by the author, Eric Alterman, fine hardcover, with fine dust jacket

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Well-written look at truth

By MKS

This book is a joy to read with clear, usually incisive and often very entertaining prose, and yet Alterman has kept an even hand by not focusing on Presidents of only one party.

I especially liked the brief section about Guatemala that is found within the larger section on Iran-Contra. Alterman recounts the facts often overlooked by so many: That in 1954 the CIA overthrew the democratically-elected Arbenz government, installed a dictator, and for decades thereafter supported dictators who killed 200,000 Guatemalan civilians. He even briefly mentions that the CIA overthrow resulted in major-league blowback in the form of radicalizing Dr. Ernesto Guevara, who was in Guatemala in 1954 and witnessed the overthrow, and as a result came to believe that only armed revolution could help the poor.

The irony of course is that those who are currently most vociferous about installing democracy in Iraq were those who had no problem with the U.S. support in the 1980s of Guatemalan dictators who directed the genocide of the Mayan Indians. It is the same cast of characters-- with Cheney leading the pack.

Alterman also impressed me in the Guatemalan subsection of his book with his reluctance to overstate. Alterman states that "one" of the reasons the CIA overthrew the Arbenz government was to please the United Fruit Company, which opposed Arbenz's economic policies. Well, that really was the main reason. United Fruit Company complained to two of its former lawyers who were high up in the U.S. government--the Dulles boys, John Foster who was Secretary of State, and Allen who was the head of the CIA. The result was quite helpful to the United Fruit Company.

The second area where Alterman pulls back a little is where he comments that because so many records are still being kept secret by the U.S. government, we don't know, beyond some verified CIA involvement, the extent to which the U.S. was complicit in the mass killings of tens of thousand of Mayans in the 1980s. Well, again, we do know a lot based on Department of Defense memoranda, State Department cables and CIA documents, which have been secured in part through the Freedom of Information Act. And the conclusion is not pretty. Of course the U.S. officials in the Reagan/Bush administrations knew about the butchery and yet continued to fund and train the butchers.

Alterman has convinced me of his evenhandedness. His incisiveness is wonderful to read.

33 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

Four Deadly Incidents

By John Matlock

I'm reminded about the old joke - How do you tell when a salesman is lying, his lips move and he makes noise. ==With politicians it has become almost accepted behavior up to the time that they got caught. We are all familiar with Clinton's lies, made under oath, about Monica, which got him impeached. Nixon, of course resigned over the lies regarding Watergate. This book, exhaustively researched concentrates on four specific incidents.

The first incident concerns Yalta, the Churchill-Stalin-Roosevelt conference at the end of WW II. At this meeting Roosevelt made concessions to Stalin that he subsequently expected to change. But he died ten weeks later and left the presidency to Truman who had not been at the conference and had not been informed of the deal that Roosevelt had cut. The result was the cold war, causing an immense amount of treasure and even lives over the next fifty years.

Second he describes the secret deal cut by Kennedy in regards to the Cuban Missile Crisis. This enhanced the Cold War and helped pave the way for the Viet Nam war.

Third is Lyndon Johnson's version of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents. These provided the basis for the congressional resolutions that allowed the United States to send an army to Viet Nam.

Finally is the Iran-Contra strategy of Ronald Reagan. At one meeting Reagan was told that his announcements might constitute an impeachable offense. He replied, they can impeach me if they want, visiting day is Wednesday.

I write this in the midst of the new presidential campaign. Kerry has just spoken out about Assault Rifles with the ability to kill dozens of people at a time, while the only thing in the legal definition that makes an assault rifle more deadly is the ability to attach a bayonet on the end. And Bush, well the fact that one of his

press aids said, The President is not a fact-checker, just about says it all.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A valuable resource as well as an eye-opener

By Ronnie Schenkein

I read this book when it came out in 2004 and have referred to it many times since. We need this clarity now more than ever.

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