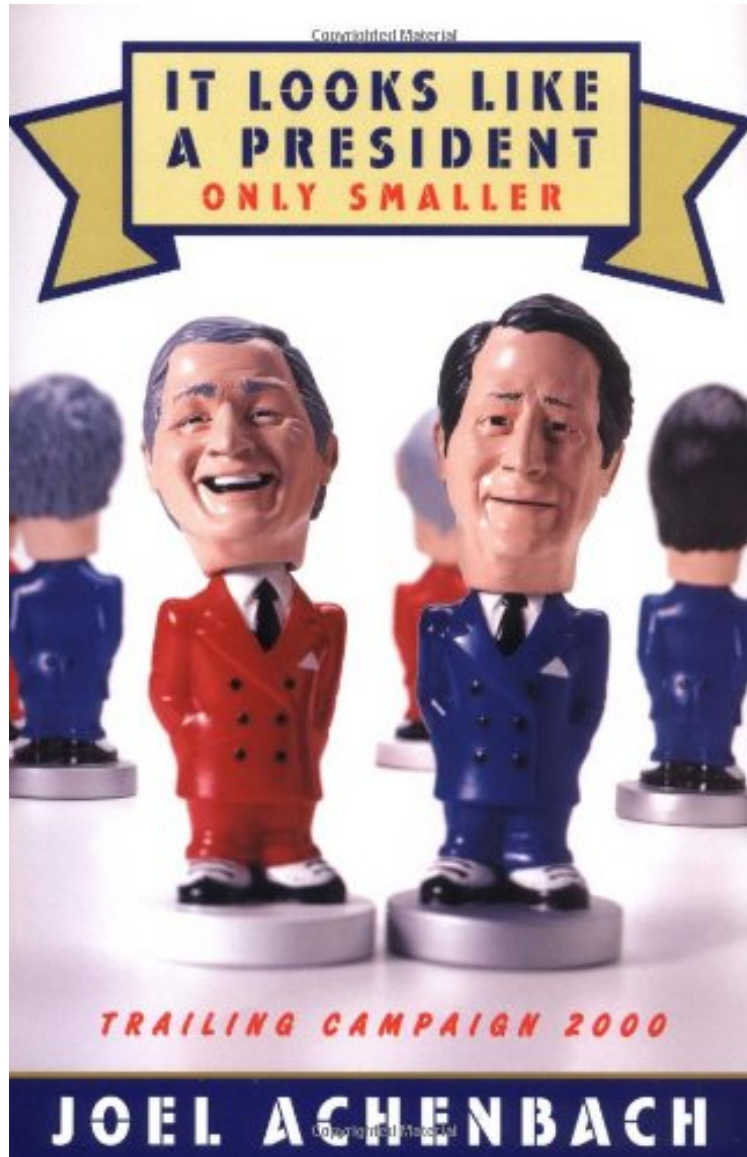


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It Looks Like a President Only Smaller: Trailing Campaign 2000

Joel Achenbach

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Joel Achenbach : It Looks Like a President Only Smaller: Trailing Campaign 2000 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised It Looks Like a President Only Smaller: Trailing Campaign 2000:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Deli History on WryBy E James LIEBERMANJ.A. makes the campaign fun to recall. He has a light touch and I smiled often and laughed more than once. A pleasure to read and

recommend.10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Funny and Insightful Election RecapBy A CustomerI know, I know. People are sick of hearing about the election. But if you are going to read any book on American politics this year, I suggest it be this one. Surprised? I was too.Achenbach, who writes a column for the Washington Post online, is at heart a humor columnist. And a good one. The book contains hysterical commentary on the entire campaign, from the primaries through the inaugural. That didn't surprise me. Achenbach's a funny guy.What did surprise me is that the book captures the essence of the 2000 election more poignantly and insightfully than any of the "serious" pieces I have read. Achenbach is at his root a journalist, and his humor is always digging at something deeper. Sure, he can make the obvious "W. ain't so smart" joke. But most of his commentary is both funny on the surface and incisive upon reflection. His writing about the recount captures the madness, mayhem and unique uncertainty of that process far more effectively than even the Post's own history of the election.Look, this is a funny book. If that's all you want, buy it. But it comes with an added bonus-- with wry humor it captures a surreal moment in American history perhaps the only way it can really be captured.0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Trying to make light of dark eventsBy A CustomerThis is a light book and can't get a heavy review. It does manage to earn four stars, but basically for one reason: It made me chuckle out loud a couple of times. That last star is always tough to earn. For a humor book, it would have needed to provoke some big belly laughs and provide some really interesting new perspectives, but at least for me it didn't go that far. In fact, if I didn't basically like the perspective, it could have dropped a star.The book is organized in four sections covering the primaries, the conventions, the actual campaign, and the rather bizarre recount. My capsule impressions are:1. Primaries: many serious elements, light humor2. Conventions: heavy sarcasm, but a little funnier3. Campaign: trying to be sarcastic, but mostly failing and relatively more unfunny stuff4. Recount: kind of wild and crazy, matching the reality, with a mix of serious and funny elementsOf course that's a very subjective evaluation. What I find funny might offend some other people, and vice versa. I felt there was a bit of evidence that the author personally preferred Gore, but it's actually possible that a Dubya-supporter would have felt the opposite. I probably laughed hardest at the jokes about Bush, but there were plenty targeted on Gore, too. And you can't be at all sure in a case like this. He may just like the politicians who provide the most amusing fodder for his humor columns.Except for a few interstitial comments, the articles which were collected to make this book were written as brief columns expected to have very short lives, and he frequently comments how he his morning's work could be obsolete and unfunny by the time it was published on the Web in the early afternoon. Also, he didn't include all of the columns he wrote, so these are presumably filtered as funnier or more interesting than average. As far as I can recall, the only column I'm pretty sure I had read before was the one he wrote as the editor of the imaginary Chad research magazine.Given my usual verbosity, I'm sure you should be surprised to hear that's about all I can say on this book. Because of the mix of reality and jokes, I can't really guess which is which. I think that some comics do have deep insights, and there might have been a few flashes here, but not a whole lot. You might find the book amusing, as I did, and maybe not. I did feel that it accomplished it's primary goal of being funny, but humor is a funny thing.

It Looks Like a President Only Smaller is the hilarious, eviscerating diary of one of the most amazing contests in American political history -- from the presidential primaries in New Hampshire, to the fat-cat convention parties in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, to the bizarre vote-counting debacle in Florida. The diarist is a veteran Washington Post reporter, satirist, and explainer of the inexplicable. This is his summary of the historic Supreme Court decision in Bush v. Gore: "In keeping with the Court's ambition to provide an unambiguous and unanimous decision in Bush v. Gore and thereby legitimate the outcome of the 2000 presidential election, we present herein a majority opinion signed by Justices Rehnquist, Scalia, Thomas, O'Connor, and Kennedy, with a partial dissent to the majority by Justices Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas, a full dissent by Justices Stevens, Souter, Breyer, and Ginsburg, a partial dissent to the full dissent by Justices Breyer and Souter, a needling, invective-filled dissent to the partial dissent to the majority opinion from Scalia, and a spitwad [attached] from Justice Stevens...The Court will note that it did manage on Tuesday afternoon to assemble a respectable 6-3 majority in favor of the Chinese take-out." As Joel Achenbach trails Campaign 2000, he channels the unfocused rage of the street protesters, gleefully infiltrates celebrity-choked Hollywood bashes, and roams the remote highways of the battleground states. Whether ruminating on the Confederate flag controversy in South Carolina, rewriting breaking news in the form of a le Carré novel, or mimicking the dyspeptic voice of the editor of the (fictional) newsletter Chad Watch, Achenbach fashions a page-turning comedy that takes the measure of America at the millennium.

.com It's not entirely clear whether Washington Post reporter Joel Achenbach is a journalist who writes with humor or a humorist who engages in journalism, but that hardly matters. It Looks Like a President Only Smaller is a witty chronicle of the 2000 presidential election that bears no resemblance to The Making of the President. As Achenbach writes in his introduction: "There was no intention at any point to document comprehensively the events of 2000; these are word-doodles, some marginalia on the historical record." The result is a fast-paced and funny account of the Bush and Gore campaigns. Here's a (satirical) memo sent to George W. Bush from his advisors, right after John McCain

beat him in the New Hampshire primary: What did McCain do that we didn't do? The obvious answer is: He campaigned vigorously and honestly and openly, and told people what he believed. It was a brilliant maneuver on his part and we are kicking ourselves for not having thought of it first.... We have prepared a packet of three-by-five cards containing spontaneous comments that you may want to make. Here's Achenbach on the Democratic candidate: "Al Gore, despite all appearances, is actually a human being. He's super nice. He does normal-person things all the time. He's only weirdly stiff, mannered, and mechanical on the exterior. You'd really like him if you were to spend twenty or twenty-five years getting to know him." Some of the jokes fail, but most of the time they're right on target--and in any event, it's usually only another sentence or two before the next punchline. Readers who laugh at the humor of Dave Barry will also enjoy Achenbach, especially if they don't take their politics too seriously. --John J. Miller

From BooklistCyberspace gives Washington Post science reporter Achenbach--author of *Captured by Aliens* (1999)--a chance to branch out; his thrice-weekly column, "Rough Draft," appears on washingtonpost.com. With a bit of editing, those columns form the basis for his often tongue-in-cheek campaign "diary." Achenbach warns readers not to take him too seriously, for his observations are merely "word-doodles, some marginalia on the historical record." (Let the reader beware: although some pieces are fairly straight, if funny, reporting, others make up "facts" for their humorous impact.) Not an essential acquisition but appropriate where political humor circulates. Mary Carroll

Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved "Surely the most unusual--and most entertaining--book the extraordinary presidential race of 2000 is likely to produce." -- Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, April 22, 2001