

A history in sketches

All the Presidents' Doodles

After Somali militiamen killed eighteen U.S. soldiers in October 1993, President Clinton convened his national security team. He sat silently while being briefed. Then, his aide Richard Clarke recalled, "When they had talked themselves out, Clinton stopped doodling and looked up. 'Okay, here's what we're going to do.'"

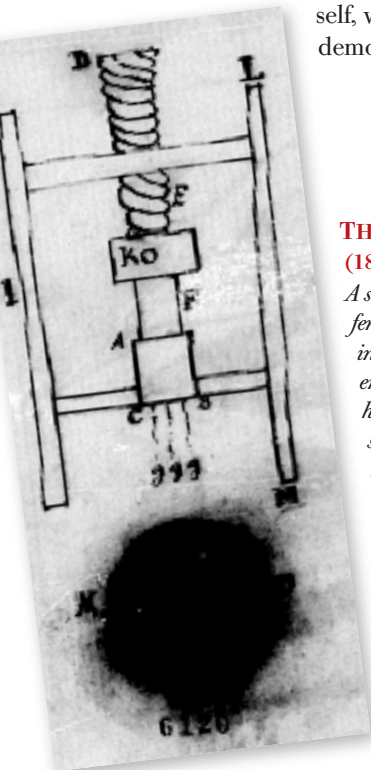
We imagine White House meetings as efficient and focused on grave matters; we don't imagine the president dithering, daydreaming, or making idle scribbles—especially during moments of national crises. But presidents, like the rest of us, doodle. Dwight Eisenhower drew sturdy, 1950s images: tables, pencils, nuclear weapons. A Herbert Hoover scrawl provided the pattern for a line of rompers. Ronald Reagan dispensed cheery cartoons to aides. John F. Kennedy reportedly doodled the word *poverty* at the last cabinet meeting before his death.

In an age of politics as scripted spectacle, these doodles, made without speechwriters or focus groups, promise a glimpse of the unguarded president. Since their meaning can be opaque even to the doodler himself, we can interpret them—as befits our democracy—as we wish.



ANDREW JACKSON (1829–1837)

Jackson was the first president to leave behind full-fledged doodles from his time in office. This drawing dates from 1833. Although Jackson's immediate predecessor, John Quincy Adams, had kept a pet alligator in the White House, the animal was more commonly associated with Jackson's military exploits. An 1828 campaign song, "The Hunters of Kentucky," celebrated Jackson's heroics at the Battle of New Orleans, in 1815, noting that in his brigade, "Every man was half a horse / And half an alligator."



THOMAS JEFFERSON (1801–1809)

A skilled draftsman and architect, Jefferson was also a noted epicure. While in Europe in the 1780s, he became enamored of pasta—so much so that he stuck a feather in his inkwell, sketched out a design, and called it a "maccaroni"-making machine. In 1802, he served macaroni and cheese in the White House.



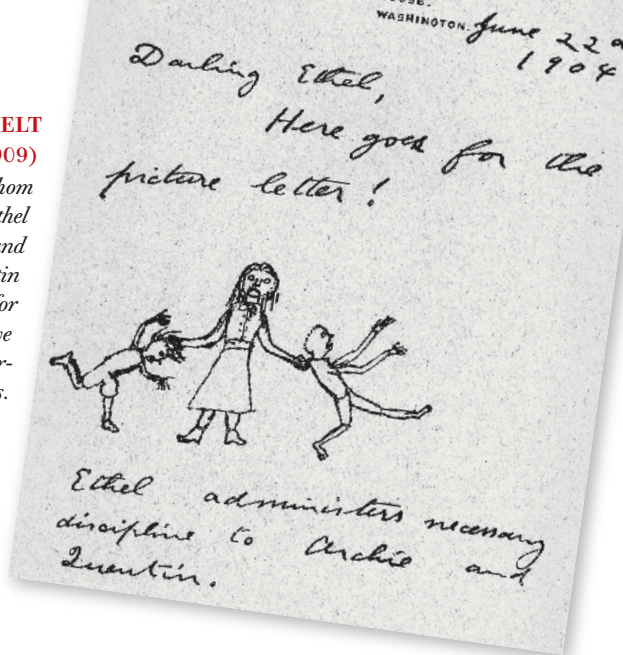
RUTHERFORD B. HAYES (1877–1881)

Hayes was a diffident doodler. He drew this woman's face in his "Diary of a Deferred Wedding Journey," recounting the details of a holiday he took with his wife, Lucy Webb, eight years after their 1852 marriage.

Adapted from Presidential Doodles: Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles and Scrawls From the Oval Office, *by the creators of* Cabinet Magazine, *to be published this month by* Basic Books. Text *by* David Greenberg, *a professor at Rutgers University and the author of* Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image.

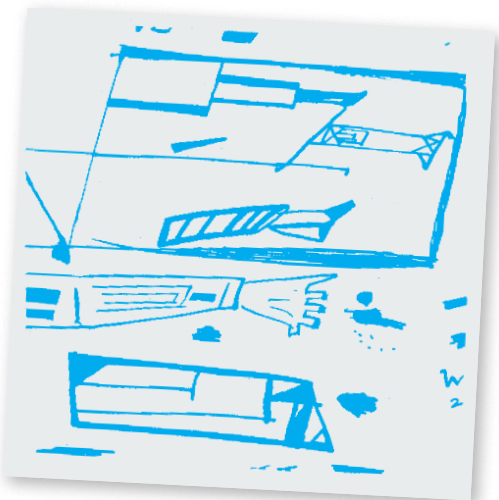
THEODORE ROOSEVELT
(1901-1909)

Roosevelt's boisterous brood of six, to whom he often wrote "picture letters," included Ethel (ten years old in 1901), Archie (seven), and the youngest of the Roosevelt litter, Quentin (four). The boys developed a reputation for mischief. On one occasion, Quentin drove his toy wagon through a full-length portrait of First Lady Lucy Webb Hayes. TR was more often amused than angry.



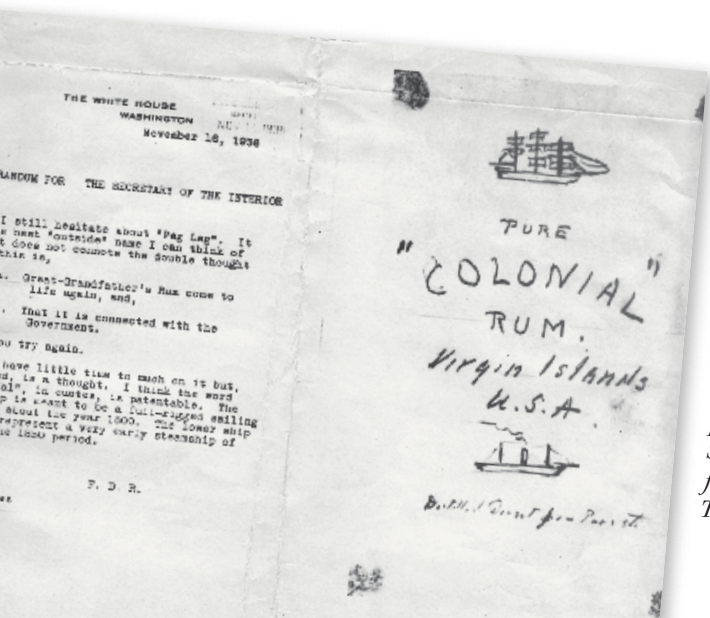
WARREN G. HARDING
(1921-1923)

Harding is considered one of the worst presidents in American history. The Teapot Dome scandal stood as the benchmark for presidential sleaze until Watergate. But during his presidency he was seen as a handsome, grand-living embodiment of the Roaring Twenties, an image reflected in the energetic Art Deco aesthetic of his doodles.



HERBERT HOOVER
(1929-1933)

Trained as an engineer, Hoover was one of the most prolific presidential doodlers. His pictures are consistently geometric, intricate, and clever in the way they link disparate parts into a larger whole. But while his doodles hint at elaborate and expansive visions, they never included any people. This failure to take human beings into account was all too evident in his slow reaction to the Great Depression.



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
(1933-1945)

FDR's drawings as president were mostly related to his hobbies: genealogy, stamp collecting, ships, and fishing. After Prohibition was repealed, in 1933, the Department of the Interior established a company to promote economic development in the Virgin Islands. Interior Secretary Harold L. Ickes was tasked with choosing a name and a label for the company's rum. He proposed "Peg Leg Rum," but FDR balked. They ultimately chose a blander name: "Government House."

LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE
MONDAY, JUNE 28, 1954 --- 8:30 AM

- 1. Springfield Amendment to the Extension of Trade Agreements Act (Secretary Bullock)
- 2. Report on Status of Legislation in Senate Finance Committee (Senator Millikin)
- 3. Senate Report (Senator Boardman)
- 4. House Report (Speaker Martin)

Guatemala

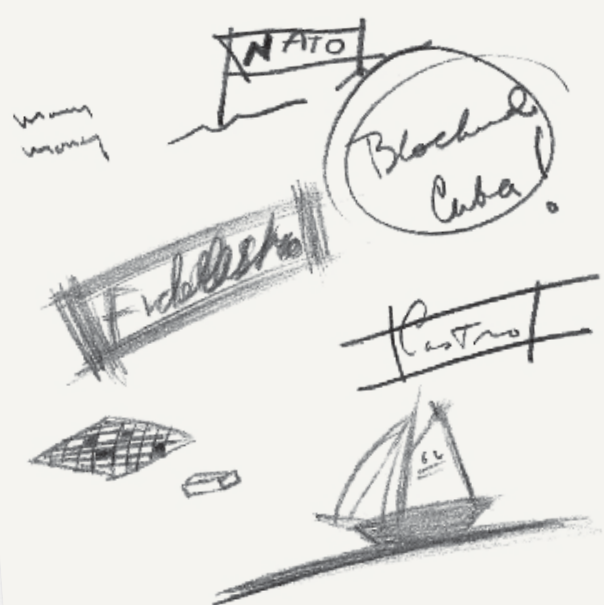


DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
(1953-1961)

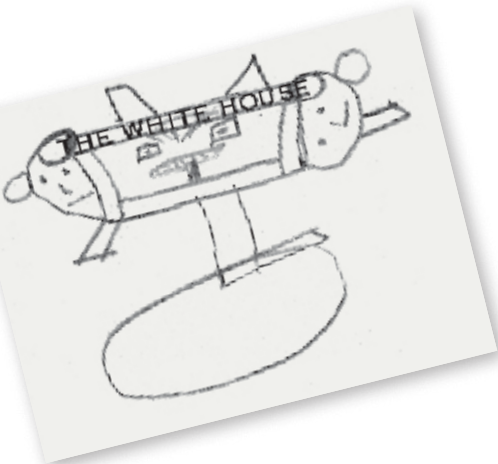
More than any other president, Eisenhower doodled on agendas, memos, and other official documents. This agenda, from June 28, 1954, didn't list the crisis in Guatemala as an item for discussion, but Eisenhower did. The day before, CIA-backed forces had deposed the government of Jacobo Arbenz in favor of a regime that was more pro-American (or at least more pro-United Fruit Company). With Guatemala clearly on his mind, the president sketched himself as a trim young man with big gunboats backing him up—a strong leader restoring order to the strife-torn Latin nation.

JOHN F. KENNEDY
(1961-1963)

Where Hoover's doodles are abstract and geometric and Eisenhower's concrete and pictorial, Kennedy's are heavily textual—reflecting his verbal, cerebral nature. He often repeats a word or phrase and sets each one in its own individual box. In some doodles, Kennedy writes one or two or three words over and over, in a tense, almost obsessive repetition—as if he were trying to work through whatever anxiety was confronting him. Although one should attempt presidential mind reading with the utmost caution, it seems safe to say that in this doodle JFK was concerned about Vietnam.



Kennedy drew this doodle during the height of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. "Blockade Cuba!" he reminded himself. Though Kennedy used Navy ships to blockade the island nation, the vessel in this doodle is probably his own boat, the *Victoria*, which he drew often.



LYNDON B. JOHNSON
(1963–1969)

Johnson's White House may well have been the most dedicated to doodle collecting. After each meeting, an aide would round up whatever notes were left, even if they had been crumpled or ripped up. Here the president shows his predilection for drawing figures with three faces. The drawing also reveals his habit of building his doodles around the words The White House on his stationery. At various times Johnson turned his residence into a flag, a pagoda, and a prison.

RONALD REAGAN
(1981–1989)

Like his folksy stories, Reagan's kitschy doodles—most of them cartoon renderings of himself as a bandana-wearing cowboy, a running back, or a rugged leading man—trigger warm associations with an idyllic American past. Many reveal a distinct aesthetic of cuteness. Reagan liked to draw babies and horses and was not afraid to use gooey terms of endearment—particularly when writing to Nancy.



HERE I WAS DOODLING AWAY—THEN I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT YOU.
SO...OOO...



GEORGE BUSH

Rose

1 confirmed dead

1 possible dead

How bout all the rest? Any more dead ones?

GEORGE H. W. BUSH
(1989–1993)

The one significant drawing—a sad, tearful face—currently available in Bush's presidential papers appears on a memo he wrote to Rose Zamaria, his secretary. According to Zamaria, the president was responding to her request that he sign a stack of letters—part of a mass mailing—addressed to people he knew. Looking over the names, Bush realized that one intended recipient was dead and another might be. "You see," explained Zamaria, "he was such a funny guy."