

Title: Presidential Humor: The Remaking and Remarkings of William Jefferson Clinton

Abstract: In American society, political humor is reflected in the climate of the times. Humorists have used a variety of famous personages as the butts of their jokes. United States presidents have served as some of their prime targets. Historically, Adalbert J. Volcks's pen attacked Abraham Lincoln and Will Rogers quipped about Franklin Roosevelt. More recently Vaughn Meader characterized John F. Kennedy, David Frye portrayed Richard Nixon, Earl Dowd welcomed us to the L.B.J. ranch, Chevy Chase and Dan Aykroyd created new images of Presidents Ford and Carter for their Saturday Night viewers, Rich Little and Johnny Carson portrayed precious moments in the Ronald Reagan presidency, and Dana Carvey remade George H. W. Bush's gesture, voice, and trademark phrases with unmatched comic genius. President William Jefferson Clinton was no exception.

This paper includes an analysis of presidential humor of the Clinton years. It encompasses humorous remakes of President Clinton by comedians like Phil Hartman and Rich Little; cartoonists like Paul Conrad, Paul Szep, Jules Feiffer, Kevin Kallaugher and Pat Oliphant; social satirists like Garry Trudeau, Mark Russell, and lyricists Bill Strauss and Elzina Newport of the Capital Steps; and comic artists like C.F. Payne and Philip Burke. The paper reflects the humorous remarks of President Clinton at a variety of ceremonial occasions as well as formal and informal situations. The analysis looks at the interplay of the remakes and remarks. The paper contains over 100 humorous observations about Clinton during both terms of his presidency.

It is the purpose of the paper to (1) focus on the media and their attempt at presidential humor; (2) analyze the President's own use of humor—especially in light of these media findings; and (3) present a historical perspective of Clinton's legacy as portrayed by these comic artists.

Humor has the potent ability to communicate ideas and information that contribute to the image of elected officials in a democracy. President Clinton's image as the Comeback Kid, the Lord of the Fries, and Elvis and Slick Willie were pervasive throughout his eight years in office. To understand the humor of the 1990's---or, for that matter, the humor of fifth century Athens---we must, of course, first grasp the phenomenon itself, no easy task. This study attempts to take a small step forward.

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