

RONALD REAGAN

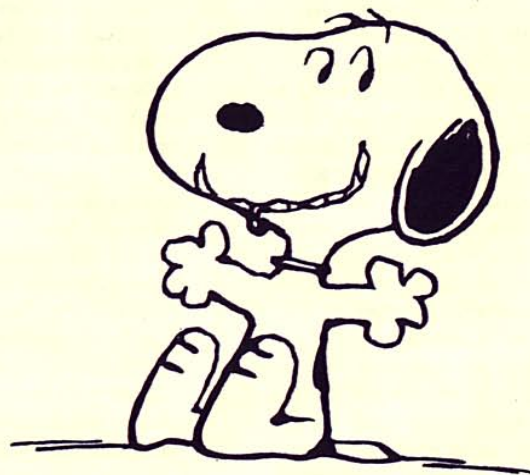
WELCOME HOME!!



I LUV U.

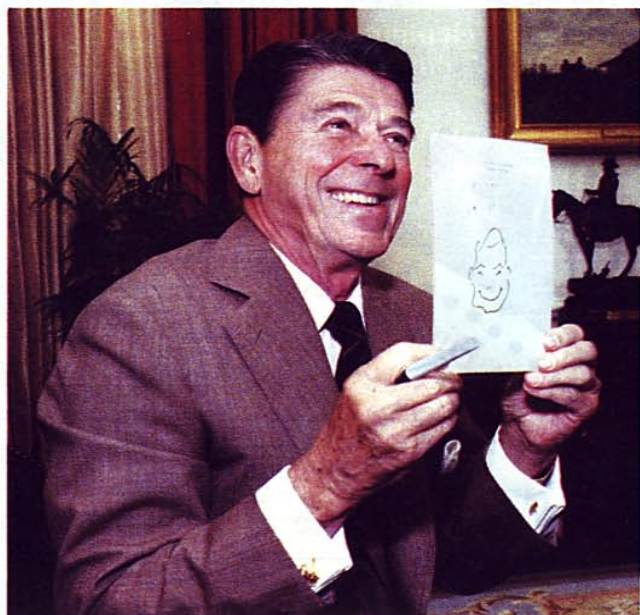
GUESS WHO?

BEING WITH YOU!!



LOOK WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I'M WITHOUT YOU.

Your Roommate



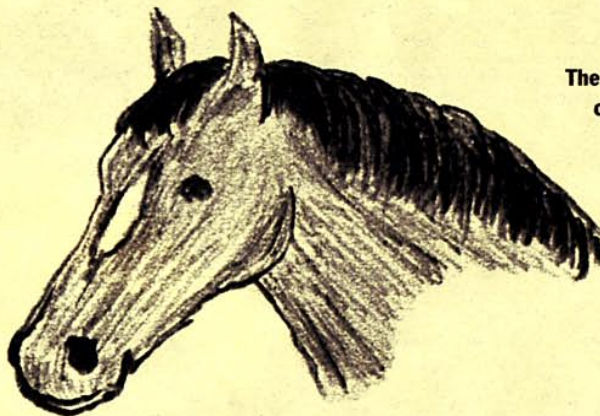
## THE DOODLE BUG

Reagan drew love hearts, Kennedy was obsessed by boats and LBJ sketched three-headed aliens. The doodles of America's presidents reveal what they were really thinking about during summit meetings and in the Oval Office. David Greenberg reports

### Ronald Reagan

Reagan's love for his wife, Nancy, is the central theme of most of his doodles (this page and opposite).

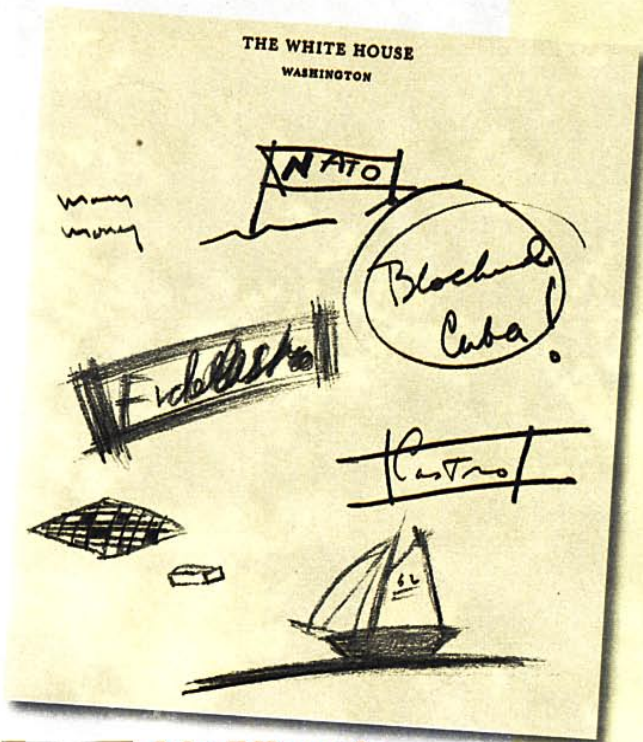
Caricatures of people and animals are interspersed with sappy messages to Nancy. The woman in this sketch (bottom centre) is probably his wife too



THERE I WAS DOODLING AWAY—THEN  
I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT YOU.

SO-O-O-O-O...



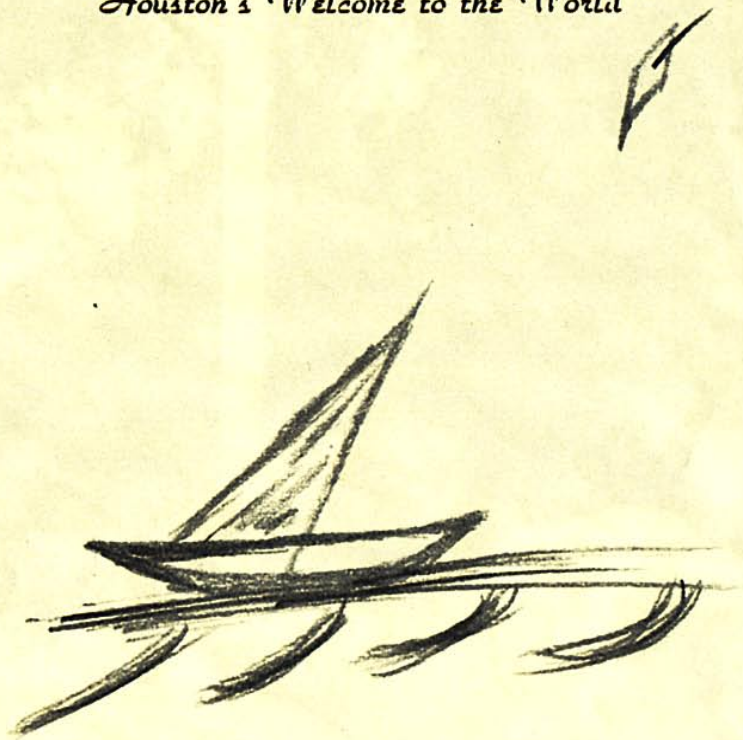


### John F Kennedy

Kennedy's doodles often had a nautical theme. He found time to draw during the height of the Cuban missile crisis (above), reminding himself almost absent-mindedly to 'Blockade Cuba!' A keen yachtsman, he sketched this boat (right) on the evening before he was assassinated

## THE RICE HOTEL

"Houston's Welcome to the World"



management, of his spontaneous side. If anything, American presidents are all the more image-conscious, which is perhaps why these drawings are so revealing: they capture the playful, primitive and absurd aspects of presidents, not normally seen in their public pronouncements.

For Franklin Delano Roosevelt, doodles show the passions he had away from the Oval Office. A fisherman, he was keen on drawing boats and fish; as a genealogist, he liked to sketch his family name and crest. His other great leisure pursuit was ordinary-sounding – stamp-collecting. He hauled his vast collection to wartime summits at Yalta and Casablanca in a steamer trunk. He designed stamps for the US postal service, including one in honour of Mother's Day.

While FDR drew the subjects of his hobbies, drawing was Dwight D Eisenhower's hobby. Ike often worked at his easel with the television on. Painting even rivalled another famous pastime for his affection. "I've often thought," he once wrote, "what a wonderful thing it would be to install a compact painting outfit in a golf cart." Ike couldn't bring his easel into cabinet meetings. Instead he would take out his pencil and doodle on his daily agendas, FBI reports, or whatever paper he had before him. He drew still-life objects that were solid, sturdy and unremarkable – rather like Ike himself. On one memo, from June 28, 1954, Eisenhower was

clearly preoccupied with the American-backed coup in Guatemala that had just forced the popularly elected leftist president, Jacobo Arbenz, to resign. Eisenhower wrote the words "internal security" and sketched a small flotilla of boats at sea, as if headed southward to restore order. Presiding over it all was a portrait of the president himself as a young man, looking trim, and sporting – as he always did in these self-portraits – a full head of hair.

John F Kennedy's doodles also bear the imprint of cold-war drama. In meetings, JFK was known to radiate an electric energy, which he expressed through his fingers – "drumming the table, tapping his teeth, slashing impatient pencil lines on a pad", as his aide, the historian Arthur M Schlesinger Jr, wrote. On a given page, words like "Vietnam" or even "Iraq" would recur, often encased in sharply drawn rectangular boxes.

During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when Kennedy had to stop the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev from installing missiles 90 miles from American shores, JFK wrote Fidel Castro's name on a piece of White House stationery. He added with a directive (to himself?) to blockade Cuba, and a sketch of a small dinghy that hardly seemed up to the task of keeping Soviet ships from reaching Castro.

Kennedy's boats, however, were not limited to one or two doodles. He drew them ➡➡➡

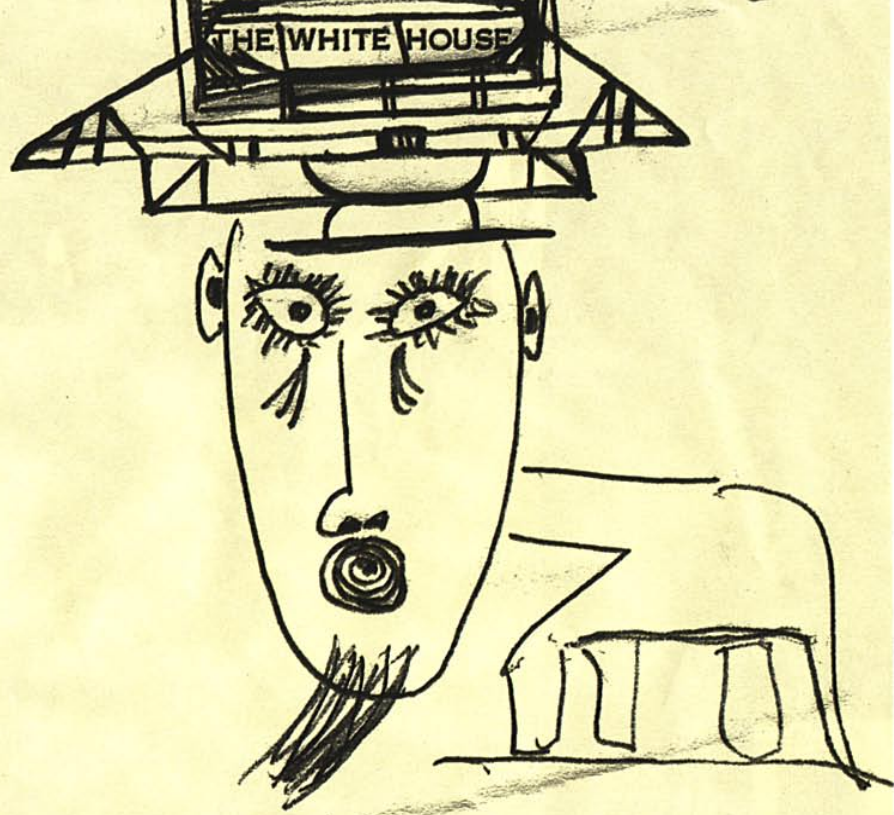
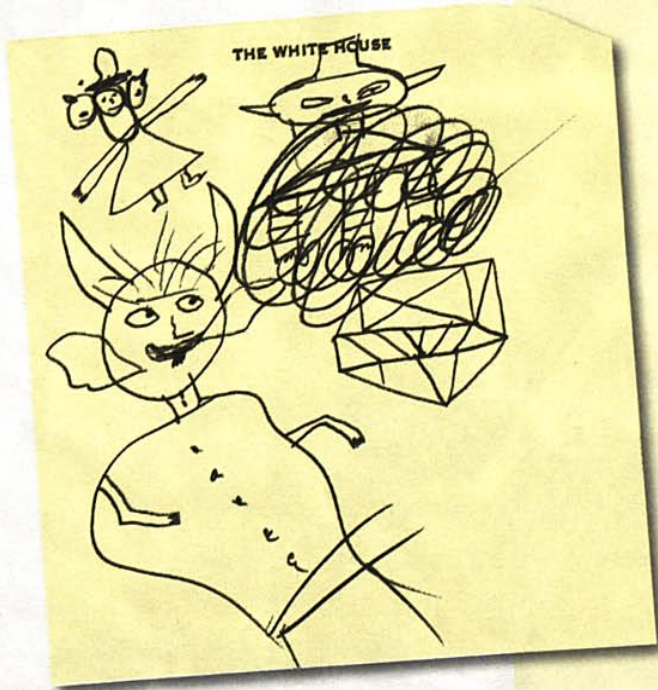
Last year someone scooped up a bunch of doodles at Tony Blair's seat at the annual Davos economic summit. Graphologists had a field day interpreting them. Analysts deemed Blair to be struggling with his concentration, "not a natural leader", and "an unstable man who is feeling under enormous pressure". Then it was learnt that the doodles were actually drawn by Bill Gates. Blair's entourage could scarcely conceal their delight in responding to the news.

We were all disappointed that Blair did not reveal himself – a doodle by a world leader gives us a rare glimpse, in this age of relentless image



## Lyndon B Johnson

The doodles of this president are childlike, with three-headed figures, cats with devil horns and alien faces (below). The drawing on the right, however, may be a combination of Johnson's efforts and the work of someone else – this era was particularly prolific in the White House's doodling history



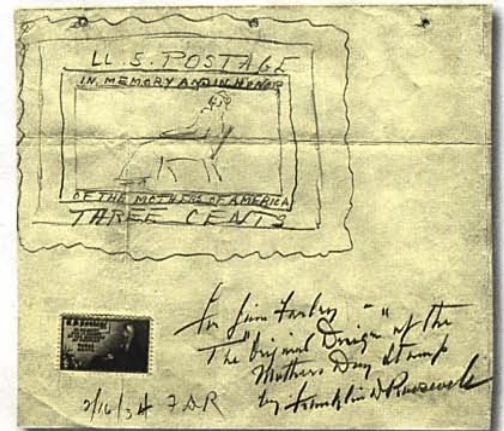
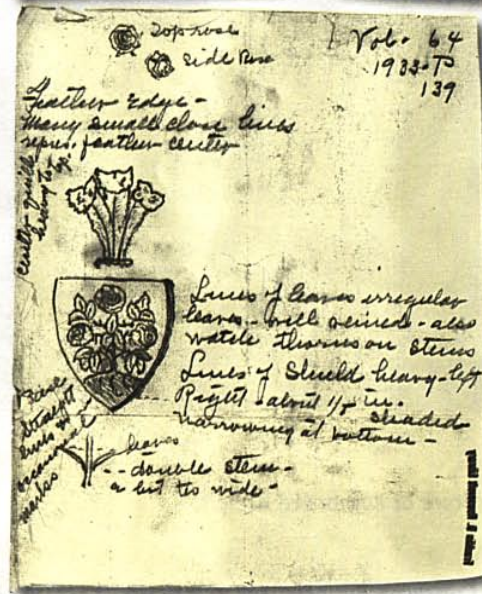
## Doodles show the passions Roosevelt had away from the Oval Office

constantly; a favourite model was his own sloop, which he named the Victura – the boat on which he taught Jackie to sail. Of all the doodles in Kennedy's oeuvre, the freest, most elegant-looking is also one of a boat, outlined in four simple lines and gliding on a sea rendered with quick pencil strokes and four little waves. The picture was completed the evening before Kennedy met his death in Dallas.

Kennedy's energy in his doodles is contained; that of his successor, Lyndon B Johnson, is out of control. A man of gargantuan appetites, Johnson ate, drank and smoked with abandon. He would unzip his flies in front of a colleague, show off his penis and say: "Have you ever seen anything as big as this?" The same lack of restraint informs his doodles: violently drawn, scary-looking animals with spiky ears, three heads or multiple legs.

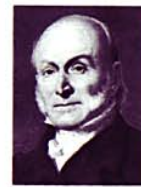
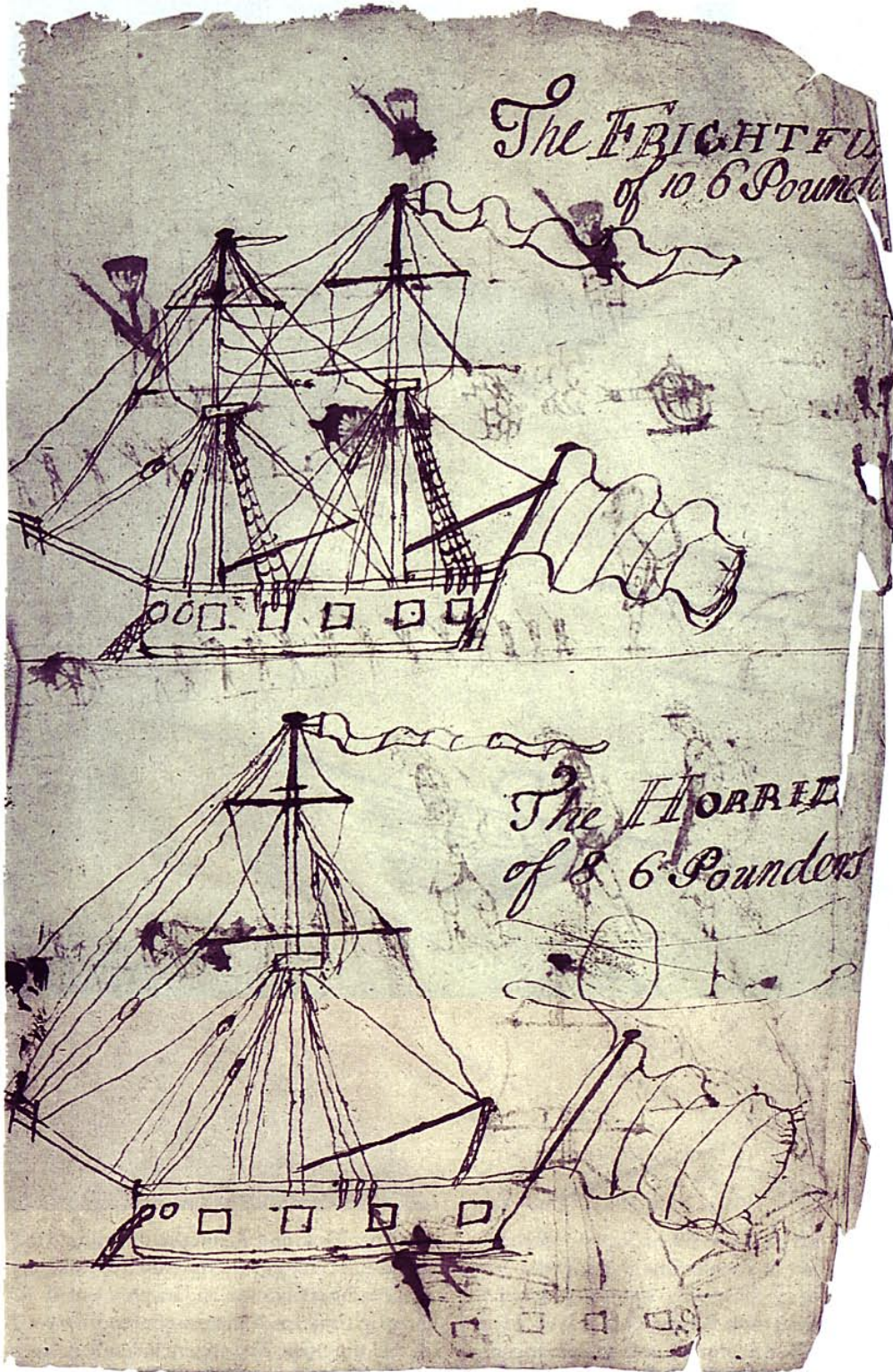
Johnson guarded his doodles obsessively. "On board the presidential jet," the journalist David Halberstam once wrote, "he often doodled as he spoke with reporters, and if he left to talk with someone else and noted a reporter moving to pick up a scrap of presidential doodle, he did not find it beneath him to walk back and snatch it away."

Compared with Johnson, Richard Nixon was downright inhibited. "Any letting my hair >>>



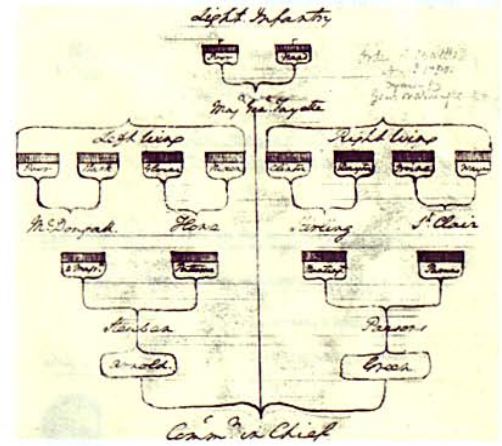
## Franklin D Roosevelt

Roosevelt was a family man – he even married a cousin. The family coat of arms (left) obviously held great significance for him. A keen philatelist, he also designed stamps for the US postal service; this sketch (above) was used by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for a Mother's Day stamp (inset)



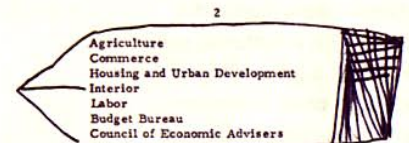
## John Quincy Adams

Adams drew this sketch (far left) of ships as a boy during the war of independence, when the British Navy was anchored in Boston Harbor. He and his mother watched the burning of Charlestown by British forces during the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775



## George Washington

Washington found a practical application for his doodling skills, as this order of battle (above) shows. It was drawn in midsummer 1780 while he planned an attack on the British Army in New York. His earlier career as a successful surveyor sharpened his youthful attitude for meticulous drawing



[It seems appropriate that either the Budget Bureau or the Council of Economic Advisers will coordinate the work.]

An Interim report should be presented to the Cabinet Committee by April 15 and a final report by May 31.

*Paul W. McCracken*  
Paul W. McCracken

down, I find that embarrassing," he said. This cramped his doodling style. In an unintentional pun, he once described himself as "a square doodler" – not only lacking in hipness, but also prone to drawing "squares and diamonds". Occasionally he could also turn out a real gem.

Of all the US presidents, Ronald Reagan was perhaps the most comfortable with pencil and napkin. Early in his life he considered a career as a cartoonist, and he mastered a repertoire of classic American types circa 1930: the football

player in a stiff-arm pose, the monocled plutocrat, the rugged cowboy (who always bore a strong resemblance to Reagan himself). Like his presidential rhetoric, his doodles evoked a series of warm associations with an idealised American past. This was how Reagan saw the world.

Reagan often doodled for his wife, Nancy. His notes to her – studded with little hearts or tears to show his sadness at her absence – overflow with teenage emotion, embarrassing terms of endearment ("Dear Mommie, Poo Pants") ➔



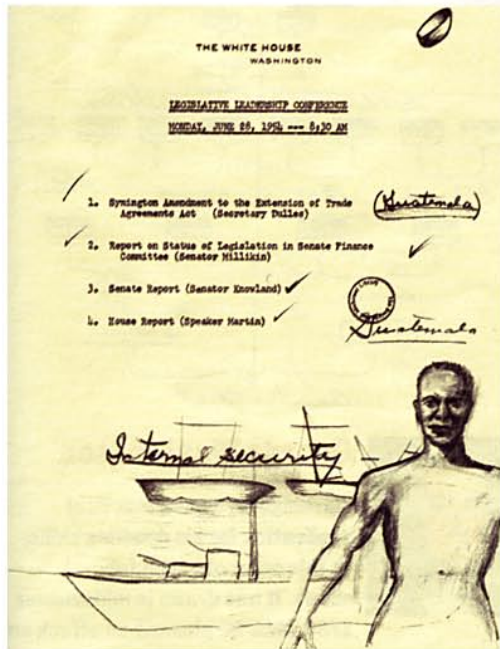
## Richard Nixon

He was known for being inhibited, so it is not surprising to find that Nixon did few doodles. Those he did draw were stilted (above). He once described himself as being 'probably a square doodler'. 'I draw squares and diamonds and that sort of thing,' he told the writer Frank Gannon

Reagan was perhaps the most comfortable with pencil and napkin

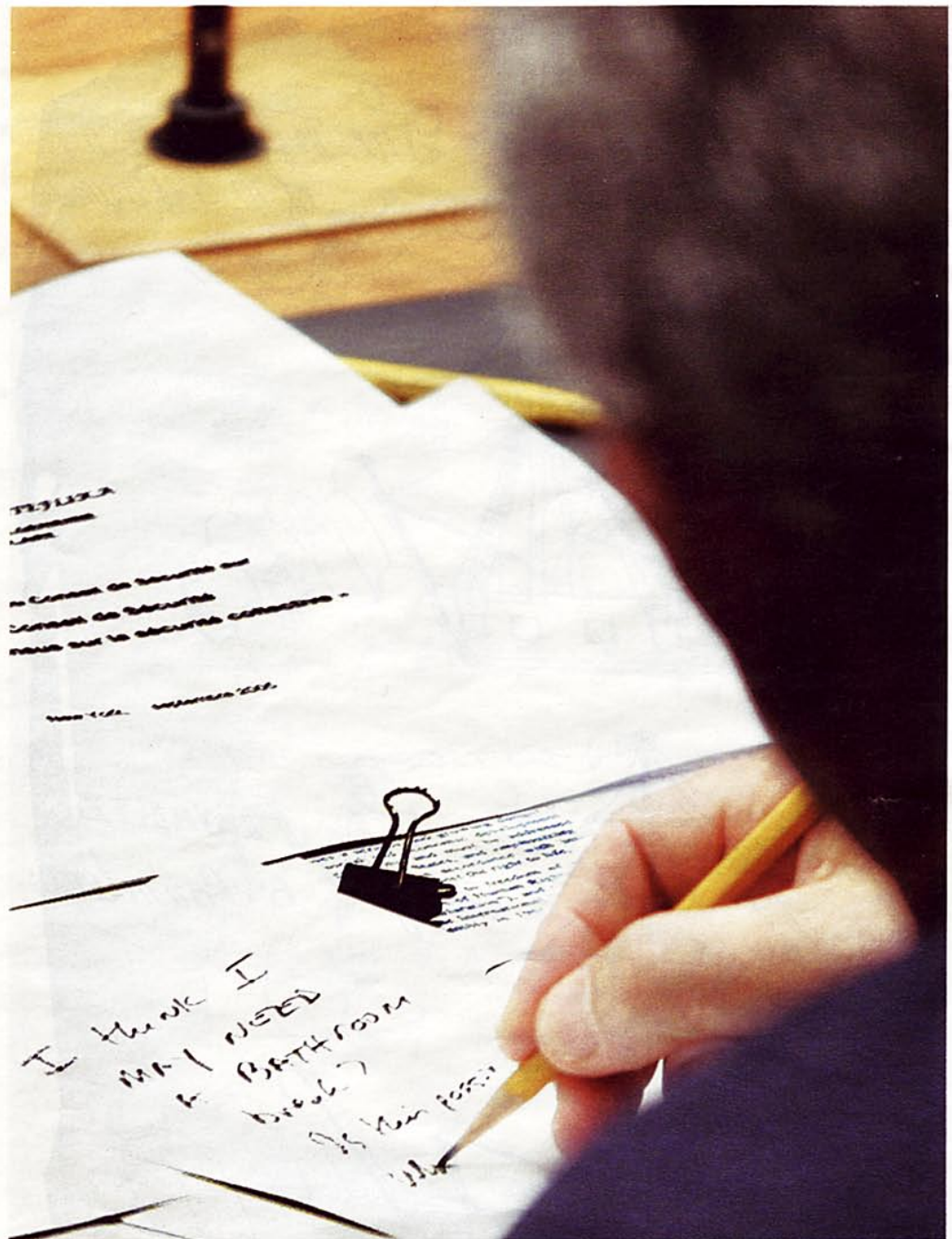
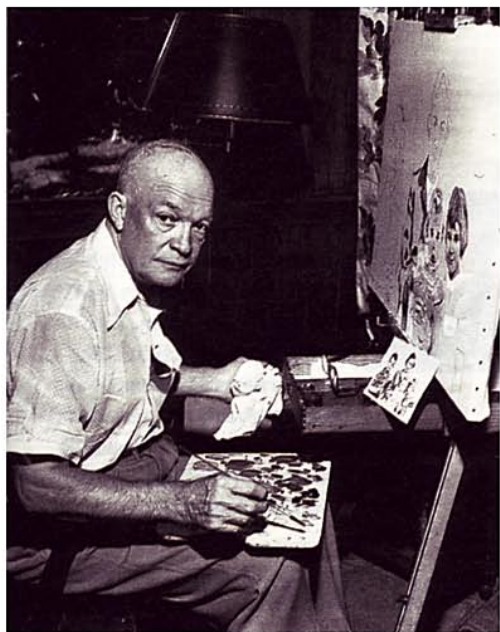
## George W Bush

Bush has not released any of his doodles, but this note (right), caught by a photographer, reveals how his mind wanders in meetings. Written to the secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, during a UN meeting in 2005, the message reveals a childlike meekness from the all-powerful president of the US



## Dwight D Eisenhower

Drawing was Ike's hobby (below) and his doodles often revealed what was on his mind. The well-proportioned young man in this sketch (above) is a flattering self-portrait. There is no mention of the Guatemala crisis in the memo, but the clue is in the presidential scribbles, and pictures of gunboats



and cute furry animals. When Nancy published some of these in a book of his letters, it was tempting to see the move as a public-relations manoeuvre. In truth, Reagan had always used his doodles as PR. He proudly gave them to friends, colleagues, and "pen pals" who sent him fan letters. By showing off his doodling, Reagan underscored his boyishness and lack of pretension, to offset the tough-guy image he otherwise cultivated.

Previously, the doodle might be said to express the private impulses of the American leader. But with Reagan, even this last remnant of unscripted presidential communication was co-opted by a politician who cannily understood how much, in the modern age, the personal had truly become the political.

Presidents after Reagan have been loath to disclose their doodles. Despite a 1978 law mandating the release of most presidential records, George Bush Sr found a loophole to deem

reams of official documentation off limits to the public. Bill Clinton, too, has refused to make any available for publication, and his presidential library in Arkansas, having just opened, has yet to yield any either. The present incumbent has also rejected requests for doodles – surpassing even the paranoid Richard Nixon (who was willing to draw doodles for collectors) in his secretiveness in this respect.

Clinton and the Bushes have had personal details splashed across the newspapers that are far more embarrassing than any silly drawings. But in this age of intense scrutiny, they have failed to learn the lesson from Reagan: that a few sops towards the disclosure of their private business can go a long way towards blunting the desire for inquiries into their public business ■

*Presidential Doodles*, by David Greenberg and Cabinet Magazine, is published by Basic Books, price £14.99. It is available at the BooksFirst price of £13.49 including postage and packing. Tel: 0870 165 8585