

Hey Joe,

This is an exceptional book. It goes beyond just capturing stills from a film for marketing purposes. It is a historical archive of both the creation of Radical Media's mini-series about the four Presidents and the periods and presidents themselves. The photographs make you feel like you are back in the period, observing or being part of the times.

I am not sure how to comment effectively, but I think talking about some of the things that stand out for me is as good an approach as any.

First of all, technically, the way you are "playing with light" does more than use chiaroscuro and light sources to create a beautiful picture, it captures the period; captures the people in a way that puts us in the 1800s or early 1900s. The costumes don't look like costumes, they look like people's clothes. The shards of light in the forest scenes don't look like a film set; they combine with the actors to transport us back over a century.

Secondly, regarding the Presidents, your photos capture their souls and essence, as opposed to being good portraits of important people, well-framed and well-lit.

Beginning with the very first photo of Lincoln: thinking, planning, worrying; while the flag, out of focus in the background reminds us: this is not about a political dilemma, or family, or the economy. This is the Civil War. Your shots capture a man always trying to listen, connect, be empathetic. But also a man in the trenches, or exhorting a crowd to action.

Then you get Teddy, who is all action, heroic and confident, not plagued with the delays of thought like Lincoln. Your shots of him with the looming mountains in the background connect him to the history we know: of his years in the wilderness and the visionary legislation that created the Great Parks of America.

FDR, like his cousin, also confident, born to be in charge. That shot of him leaning back in his chair, cigarette holder in his mouth, hands relaxed, lets us see the man, not an actor. He is in the middle of the greatest economic disaster of our times, but you have got him looking like he knows it is all going to be okay. Then that shot of him in his wheelchair, legs and braces exposed: he doesn't see you but the two women, mistress and wife looking at the camera, aware you are catching him as he would hate to be seen: vulnerable.

Some of my favourite shots are of Grant, determined but not cold, cigar clenched firm. The photos from Grant are great regarding the action of the Civil War, men in movement, drummer boys, cannon loaders, soldiers getting weapons, flags flying like banners not emblems. And most important of all: no one looks like an extra. They all look like we are watching men in the 1860s.

Women. They are woefully absent in most of the films, but whereas many photographers would show them in beautiful dresses, made up and posing for the camera, your shots show real women, thinking, engaged in doing something, being alive, not paused for a portrait.

Churchill. Sure, you have the obligatory gruff face, puffing on a cigar. But that close-up of him, light in the eyes, shows his intelligence, sly humour, always aware of what he wants.

The crowd scenes like the meeting in the huge open, wooden-floored space with men around a table show the context, and the feel of the period buildings, but the light and focus on a few of the faces bring the individuals to the fore, within that context. The black folks, watching Eleanor and that incredibly good-looking police commissioner, not aggressive, not looking like they are about to riot, no need for police. But there they are, silhouetted along the window-line, ominously watching. Once again, nobody looks like an extra. The photo is an archive.

Well, that my two cents worth.

Well done, my man. They were lucky to get you.

Stephen Jennings (Series Dialect Coach)