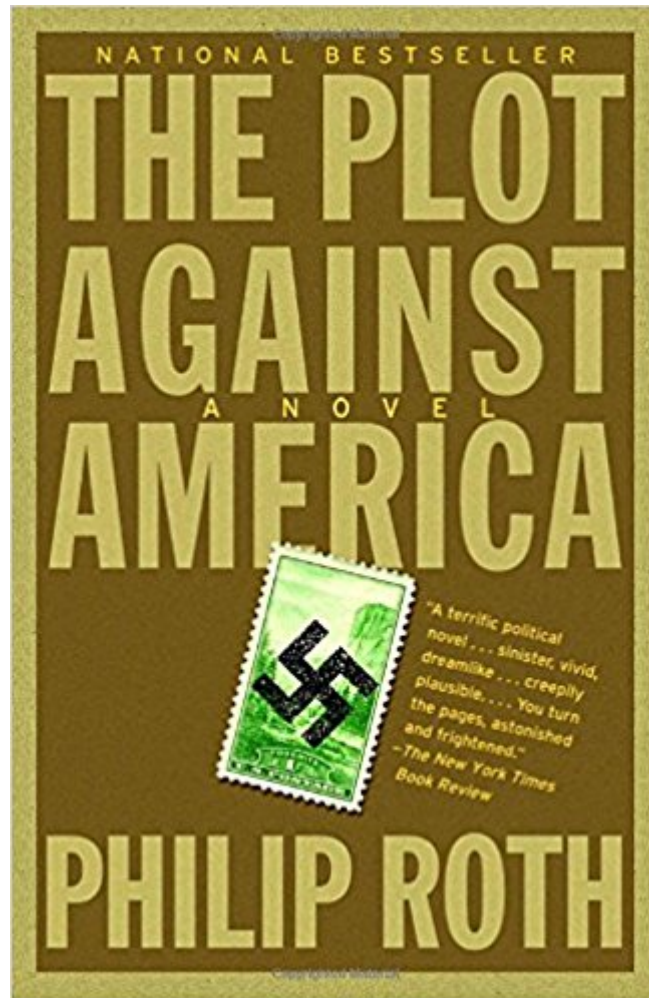




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The Plot Against America



Synopsis

Never more relevant than now, this national bestseller will challenge all who believe that “it can’t happen here.” “A terrific political novel . . . Sinister, vivid, dreamlike . . . creepily plausible. . . You turn the pages, astonished and frightened.” • The New York Times Book Review “In an extraordinary feat of narrative invention, Philip Roth imagines an alternate history where Franklin D. Roosevelt loses the 1940 presidential election to heroic aviator and rabid isolationist Charles A. Lindbergh. Shortly thereafter, Lindbergh negotiates a cordial “understanding” with Adolf Hitler, while the new government embarks on a program of folksy anti-Semitism. For one boy growing up in Newark, Lindbergh’s election is the first in a series of ruptures that threaten to destroy his small, safe corner of America—and with it, his mother, his father, and his older brother.

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Customer Reviews

"What if" scenarios are often suspect. They are sometimes thinly veiled tales of the gospel according to the author, taking on the claustrophobic air of a personal fantasia that can't be shared. Such is not the case with Philip Roth's tour de force, *The Plot Against America*. It is a credible, fully-realized picture of what could happen anywhere, at any time, if the right people and circumstances come together. *The Plot Against America* explores a wholly imagined thesis and sees it through to the end: Charles A. Lindbergh defeats FDR for the Presidency in 1940. Lindbergh, the "Lone Eagle," captured the country's imagination by his solo Atlantic crossing in 1927 in the

monoplane, Spirit of St. Louis, then had the country's sympathy upon the kidnapping and murder of his young son. He was a true American hero: brave, modest, handsome, a patriot. According to some reliable sources, he was also a rabid isolationist, Nazi sympathizer, and a crypto-fascist. It is these latter attributes of Lindbergh that inform the novel. The story is framed in Roth's own family history: the family flat in Weequahic, the neighbors, his parents, Bess and Herman, his brother, Sandy and seven-year-old Philip. Jewishness is always the scrim through which Roth examines American contemporary culture. His detractors say that he sees persecution everywhere, that he is vigilant in "Keeping faith with the certainty of Jewish travail

During his long career, Roth has shown himself a master at creating fictional doppelg ngers. In this stunning novel, he creates a mesmerizing alternate world as well, in which Charles A. Lindbergh defeats FDR in the 1940 presidential election, and Philip, his parents and his brother weather the storm in Newark, N.J. Incorporating Lindbergh's actual radio address in which he accused the British and the Jews of trying to force America into a foreign war, Roth builds an eerily logical narrative that shows how isolationists in and out of government, emboldened by Lindbergh's blatant anti-Semitism (he invites von Ribbentrop to the White House, etc.), enact new laws and create an atmosphere of religious hatred that culminates in nationwide pogroms. Historical figures such as Walter Winchell, Fiorello La Guardia and Henry Ford inhabit this chillingly plausible fiction, which is as suspenseful as the best thrillers and illustrates how easily people can be persuaded by self-interest to abandon morality. The novel is, in addition, a moving family drama, in which Philip's fiercely ethical father, Herman, finds himself unable to protect his loved ones, and a family schism develops between those who understand the eventual outcome of Lindbergh's policies and those who are co-opted into abetting their own potential destruction. Many episodes are touching and hilarious: young Philip experiences the usual fears and misapprehensions of a pre-adolescent; locks himself into a neighbor's bathroom; gets into dangerous mischief with a friend; watches his cousin masturbating with no comprehension of the act. In the balance of personal, domestic and national events, the novel is one of Roth's most deft creations, and if the lollapalooza of an ending is bizarre with its revisionist theory about the motives behind Lindbergh's anti-Semitism, it's the subtext about what can happen when government limits religious liberties in the name of the national interest that gives the novel moral authority. Roth's writing has never been so direct and accessible while retaining its stylistic precision and acute insights into human foibles and follies. Copyright     Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This is a fascinating work of counterfactual historical fiction. It is extremely realistic, and if one didn't know the actual history one could be fooled by the novel's excellent mimesis (imitation) of the historical context it portrays. The novel is rich with details and is bursting with juicy tidbits. Philip Roth is one of the best writers of modern American literature. This novel should be of particular interest to Jews, as it portrays a hypothetical fascist America. (For a similar book, see *It Can't Happen Here* (Signet Classics).) *The Plot Against America* is also somewhat of a political thriller, and the novel's portrayal of the presidency definitely carries contemporary relevance, considering the 2016 election. Those who are fascinated by presidential threats/assassinations and the line of succession and will have their appetites whetted. (See also *Assassinations, Threats, and the American Presidency: From Andrew Jackson to Barack Obama* and *Living Dangerously: The Uncertainties of Presidential Disability and Succession*). I read *The Plot Against America* for a literature course, but it's so enjoyable that I would've read it even if I didn't have to.

I read *The Plot Against America* for a book group discussion we had on April 9. Considering current events an important part of our discussion concerned the interesting similarities between the fictional presidential administration and our actual current presidential administration - with which we found many. Certainly our real president would hop around in his plane the same as Charles Lindbergh though Lindbergh flew himself while today the plane is owned - but the overall impact on waiting crowds seems the same. Also the terse not quite diplomatic jargon seems similar. But most of the discussion concerned having a president that seemed okay or even encouraging to people who discriminated against other US citizens because of their race or religion applied pretty fairly - though today we might change the religion somewhat to non-Christian religions in general. There were also some frustrations with a common Rothian theme associated with individual sexual behaviors of young men, though in this one it was through the eyes of one young enough not to know what that was. There was also the interest in how well Roth seems to communicate so clearly that you can easily get a sense of what is happening. Though also occasionally things seem confusing. We were all concerned about how fact and fiction seemed to blend so well that we felt confused about whether or not specific things were historical or not or both. How much of perceived prejudice is in the imagination of the perceiver? But also how striking it seemed that a book over ten years ago could predict so many events now happening.

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This book is not entirely the "alternative history," semi-scientific fiction you may think. It centers around, and mostly describes, the family life environment of a 9-year old little Jewish boy living in

Newark during a terrible time for his family. The alternative history forms a cause and a framework, but is not the main story. The protagonist, along with his parents and their neighbors, are living in fear and agonizing suspense of seeing the US Government apparently sliding toward fascism, after the fashion of Nazi Germany or fascist Italy. The American people have elected the antisemitic and Nazi-admirer Charles Lindbergh as President. Dazzled by his charisma, his physical beauty, his glorious heroism, his great feats of aviation; and sympathetic as to the terrible loss of his infant son, the American people are then utterly thrilled by his flying from state to state to campaign. Lindbergh is easily elected with his atrocious VP and soon starts new and alarming political changes especially affecting American Jews. The author does an outstanding job of filling in detail how such a thing could happen in the US, and he does it far better than anything I have ever read. It is utterly and completely believable and does not require the usual stretch of imagination because unlikely or implausible events and coincidences occur. I could not find the big, glaring errors and silly assumptions that one must accept as suspension of disbelief in most novels and movies. The book does not allow the new President to reach extremes like concentration camps or mass murders, but his acts toward the Jews are ominous as he moves and isolates them. His use of the Department of Justice to nudge the US into a police state is subtle and convincingly frightening as well. So far, a wonderful novel. Now for the problem. About 80% through the book, the author apparently lost interest or became tired, because he quickly stops the progress of all the suspenseful events without providing a climax or a closure. He simply ends his writing. The beautiful logic he uses in building the plot, step-by-step, each with believable detail, vanishes. Roth hurriedly ends the book with discussion of some fuzzy theories of what the American people think might have happened with their President. The reader, in fact, cannot figure out what happened to the President, to the little Jewish boy, or to the country. The expected ending simply does not occur. So what happened? What came after? The reader will see some theoretical possibilities, but none are actually established as to what occurred. It is utterly unsatisfying. Yes, it is still good reading and worth the tiny price (\$.01 plus \$3.95 shipping). But be prepared for the book tailing off into not much of anything.

Philip Roth is one of my favorite authors. Interested in the human condition, the Jewish-American condition, and the male condition, his books each offer a unique exploration into a compelling topic with universal themes. The genius about this book in particular is how Roth examines the issue of America "selling out" to Hitler from many plausible yet conflicting viewpoints. From the indignant father to the quietly prideful mother, to the damaged orphan nephew to the lonely aunt to the ever

curious boy, anti-semitic events are presented, described, experienced and analyzed with clearly developed voices that reach out from the 1940's to touch our hearts today, in the age of Internet-based news and every changing political grounds. I found this book to be very rewarding, both from a literary and a plot standpoint. The story arc progresses steadily until the last 15% of the book, where the pace increases to frenetic, confrontation leaps out on every page, and conflicting viewpoints are resolved. I highly recommend!

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