



A brief history of the US presidency

Description

US : After George Washington, things got kind of dicey. Jefferson versus Adams happened twice. The first time, Adams won, and the next time, Jefferson won. Sound familiar?

The election of 1800 showcased the introduction of the ticket — the coupling of president and vice president — rather than making the electoral runner-up vice president...since, under the old rule, both were likely to be bitter rivals. The ratification of the 12th Amendment in 1804 formalized this process.

Partially due to the limits of early 19th-century medical ability, presidents had a tendency to die in office. Between Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln, no president was ever inaugurated for a second term — eight presidents over a period of 28 years — though some of these results may have also reflected the opinions of the voters.

Lincoln was the first president to be murdered while in office, and the practice continued with Garfield and McKinley shortly thereafter. Kennedy's murder didn't happen until over 60 years after McKinley's, the delay possibly being due to more sophisticated security...until...

A most interesting story concerns John Tyler, who, as vice president, succeeded William Henry Harrison, when Harrison managed to catch cold at his inauguration and die 30 days later.

In 1843, aboard the USS Princeton on a "pleasure" cruise down the Potomac, Tyler was below deck when a topside gun exploded while firing a salute. The U.S. secretaries of state and the Navy were killed. The Navy secretary's daughter was down below with Tyler, and they married soon thereafter. Almost sounds like pulp fiction.

Oftentimes, when the vice president would ascend to the presidency on the death of the president, no new vice president would be selected to fill the void.

Also, presidents seeking a second term would often change their running mate. Lincoln's first veep was Hannibal Hamlin...what a great name. FDR had three vice presidents.

Speaking of FDR, no overview of the U.S. presidency would be anywhere near complete without

including the exceptional three-plus terms of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Not only is he the only person ever to serve more than two full terms — a feat that cannot now be repeated because of the 22nd Amendment — but such also occurred during some of the most critical years of American and world history.

He was also the only paraplegic to ever be president, even though only one photograph of him in a wheelchair was ever taken, and that was probably by accident.

The election campaign of 1932 has been seriously mischaracterized. Writers, especially of the left, make the Depression the main issue, with FDR being considered better able to deal with it than stodgy old Herbert Hoover.

However, Prohibition was the real dominant issue — this according to Paul Johnson in *Modern Times*. I posed this to my mother, since that was the first election in which she ever voted. She slapped her face and said, “That’s right! Roosevelt was a ‘Wet,’ and Hoover was a ‘Dry.’”

Soon after the election was concluded, another financial panic began, taking the form of a run on the nation’s banks. Hoover implored the incoming FDR to make a speech so as to calm things down, but FDR declined.

And so, from November 8, 1932 to FDR’s inauguration on March 4, 1933, the United States endured a run on the banks that has not since been repeated in its severity.

When FDR took office, he closed the banks and boasted to the American public that he had a list of every person who recently withdrew gold from a bank and, if all of them didn’t put it right back, they’d be sorry.

When the banks re-opened, things calmed back down. Shortly thereafter, the Constitution was amended to move the inauguration up a month and a half to January 20. This is known as the “Lame Duck” Amendment.

A particularly intimate biography of FDR was written by the well known political columnists Joseph and Stewart Alsop. They just happened to be FDR’s cousins, and thus knew him quite well.

As a schoolboy at Groton, FDR was known as the “Feather Duster” because he was such a superficial lightweight. Some speculators say he eventually became a serious person because of his polio, but the Alsops say that his love affair with Eleanor’s private secretary caused the tension in his life that forced him into serious adulthood. Ultimately, he died in the arms of the same mistress.

Thaddeus Russel, in *A Renegade History of the United States*, devotes an entire chapter to expressing the similarities between FDR’s New Deal and Hitler’s Third Reich.

The immense concentration of authority in the head of the government and its consequences is the most obvious of these similarities. Though, with more subtlety than Hitler’s racist rantings, the New Deal also endorsed eugenics, the forced sterilization of individuals who were deemed “unfit” to reproduce.

Both FDR and Hitler considered such genetic “culling of the herd” a profound benefit for the destiny of

the human race.

Unmentioned by Russel is that both FDR and Hitler pioneered the exploitation of modern technology for political gain. Hitler used loudspeakers to enhance his communication to the masses at outdoor rallies.

FDR did him one better and became a broadcast radio personality, and thus a familiar presence in many of America's living rooms.

In the years following the New Deal, much of the power concentrated in the Executive continued to remain intact. Some political scientists say the three branches of our federal government are not really co-equal — with Congress being on top due to its control of the purse strings.

The presidency, however, is but one person and is thus not subject to the wrangling and compromises needed to achieve a majority. And the Judiciary, though it is the final arbiter of what our laws actually mean, has no direct ability to enforce its rulings.

An odd aspect of the presidency has to do with the names that we know some of them by. Ulysses S. Grant's real first name was Hiram, but U.S. Grant was politically more appealing. Woodrow Wilson's real first name was Thomas...so ordinary. Harry S. Truman inserted the "S" for a better cadence, since he had no middle name.

By Mark C. Ross

Category

1. History-Archaeology-Past Mysteries
2. Main
3. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

03/28/2024