



C-SPAN RELEASES THIRD HISTORIANS SURVEY OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Abraham Lincoln Retains Top Position; Barack Obama Ranks 12th Overall by Historians; George W. Bush Advances since 2009 Survey

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(Washington, DC, February 17, 2017) – As the nation marks Presidents Day 2017, C-SPAN is releasing the results of its third Historians Survey of Presidential Leadership, in which a cross-section of 91 presidential historians ranked the 43 former occupants of the White House on ten attributes of leadership.

As in C-SPAN's first two surveys, released in 2000 and 2009, Abraham Lincoln receives top billing among the historians. George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Theodore Roosevelt retain their top five status, while Dwight Eisenhower moves into the top five for the first time.

Former President Barack Obama enters the ranks for the first time in the #12 position. Notably, his leadership category ratings range from #3 for "Pursued Equal Justice for All," to #39 for "Relations with Congress." His predecessor, George W. Bush, has benefitted somewhat from the passing of years: His ranking at #33, is up three places from our 2009 survey. Dwight Eisenhower also advanced three spots since 2009, moving to the #5 position from #8 overall. Bill Clinton remains unchanged at #15.

The biggest presidential loser from our 2009 survey is Andrew Jackson, who was #13 in 2009, and who now stands at #18 overall.

Three presidents continue to hold the same bottom rankings as they did in 2000 and 2009: James Buchanan remains in last place at #43, preceded by Andrew Johnson (#42), and Franklin Pierce (#41). Note that they rank even lower than William Henry Harrison, who served for only one month.

The most-average U.S. president, as rated by our historian participants is Ulysses S. Grant, who ranks 22 out of 43 presidents.

A team of academic advisors has guided C-SPAN for each of its three surveys: Dr. Douglas Brinkley, Professor of History at Rice University; Dr. Edna Greene Medford, Professor of History, Howard University; and Richard Norton Smith, presidential historian and biographer. The team approved the ten criteria, the same used in C-SPAN's 2000 and 2009 Surveys, consulted on the list of invited participants, and supervised the reporting of the results.

Full rankings for each of the 43 presidents as well as shareable/social media graphics are available at www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2017 .

Our Advisory Teams' Observations:

- **Douglas Brinkley:**
"Once again the Big Three are Lincoln, Washington and FDR - as it should be. That Obama came in at number 12 his first time out is quite impressive. And the survey is surprisingly good news for George W. Bush, who shot up a few notches."
- **Edna Greene Medford:**
"Although 12th is a respectable overall ranking, one would have thought that former President Obama's favorable rating when he left office would have translated into a higher ranking in this presidential survey. I am especially surprised that he was ranked at 7th in moral authority (despite heading a scandal-free administration); 19th in administrative skills; and 8th in economic management (despite having helped to save the auto industry and significantly reducing unemployment). But, of course, historians prefer to view the past from a distance, and only time will reveal his legacy."
- **Richard Norton Smith:**
"The golden age of the American presidency, according to this survey, is 1933-1969. Five presidents from this era each rank in the top ten which tells you something about the criteria that historians tend to use. It reinforces Franklin Roosevelt's claim to be not only the first modern president but the man who, in reinventing the office, also established the criteria by which we judge our leaders."

Methodology

C-SPAN's academic advisors devised a survey in which participants used a one ("not effective") to ten ("very effective") scale to rate each president on ten qualities of presidential leadership: "Public Persuasion," "Crisis Leadership," "Economic Management," "Moral Authority," "International Relations," "Administrative Skills," "Relations with Congress," "Vision/Setting An Agenda," "Pursued Equal Justice for All," and "Performance Within the Context of His Times." Surveys were distributed to historians, biographers, and other professional observers of the presidency, drawn from a database of C-SPAN's programming, augmented by suggestions from the academic advisors. Participants were guaranteed that individual survey results would remain confidential. Survey responses were tabulated by averaging all responses in a given category for each president. Each of the ten categories was given equal weighting in the total scores. Overseeing tabulations, as they did for the past two surveys, were C-SPAN co-CEO/CFO Robert Kennedy and Dr. Robert Browning, a political scientist who serves as Executive Director of the C-SPAN Archives.

About C-SPAN

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