

Ranking the Presidents

Today is Presidents' Day, originally known as Washington's Birthday, in the United States. Officially, it honors George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. The day is sometimes understood as a celebration of the birthdays and lives of all U.S. presidents.

As part of the observance, then, it is interesting to see how historians rank the men who have led our nation. According to a C-SPAN survey of presidential historians, here is the top 20 list:

Abraham Lincoln was voted as No. 1. Others were (2) George Washington, (3) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, (4) Teddy Roosevelt, (5) Dwight Eisenhower, (6) Harry Truman, (7) Thomas Jefferson, (8) John F. Kennedy, (9) Ronald Reagan, (10) Lyndon Johnson, (11) Woodrow Wilson, (12) Barack Obama, (13) James Monroe, (14) James K. Polk, (15) Bill Clinton, (16) William McKinley, (17) James Madison, (18) Andrew Jackson, (19) John Adams, and (20) George H.W. Bush.

That survey was taken in 2017. But in similar surveys across the years, Lincoln consistently held on to the No. 1 spot. In addition to all the landmark decisions he had to make, including commander-in-chief during the Civil War and issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, here's a story that might shed some light on his popularity:

President Lincoln often visited hospitals to talk with wounded soldiers during the Civil War. On one occasion, doctors pointed out a young soldier who was near death, and Lincoln went over to his bedside.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" asked the president.



The soldier obviously didn't recognize Lincoln, and with some effort he was able to whisper, "Would you please write a letter to my mother?"

A pen and paper were provided, and the president carefully began to write down what the young man was able to say:

My dearest mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty. I'm afraid I'm not going to recover. Don't grieve too much for me, please. Kiss Mary and John for me. May God bless you and father.

(more)

The soldier was too weak to continue, so Lincoln signed the letter for him and added, "Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln."

The young man asked to see the note, and was astonished when he discovered who had written it. "Are you really the president?" he asked.

"Yes, I am," Lincoln replied quietly. Then he asked if there was anything else he could do.

"Would you please hold my hand?" the soldier asked. "It will help to see me through to the end."

In the hushed room, the tall, gaunt president took the boy's hand in his and spoke quiet words of encouragement until death came.

In those tender moments, compassion became a bridge – between life and death, between a soldier and his commander-in-chief, between two patriots who were willing to give their lives (and did) for their country.

And every day, in the centers of Life Care and Century Park, our associates are using compassion to build bridges, too.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Colossians 3:12 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter