

Six Presidents

Nobody asked but ...

The Presidents of the United States are a motley crew. So far the scorecard reads 45 attempts, 45 klunkers. I am not saying there were no honorable persons in the group ("honorable" itself is a very iffy word). I have the highest regard for the intellects of Jefferson and Madison. I believe that John Adams was among the greatest lawyers (a rare occurrence). But, to me, there is no such thing as a great President. To have been one places a black mark on that career. Few have risen above.

On some occasions, some wisdom has been dispensed independently of the degradation to the office. Here are some of my favorite quotes from the first six:

- George Washington (1789-1797)

It is far better to be alone than to be in bad company.

- John Adams (1797-1801)

Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.

- Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809)

I predict future happiness for Americans, if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them.

- James Madison (1809-1817)

Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors, must arm themselves with the power knowledge gives.

- James Monroe (1817-1825)

It is only when the people become ignorant and corrupt, when they degenerate into a populace, that they are incapable of exercising their sovereignty. Usurpation is then an easy attainment, and an usurper soon found. The people themselves become the willing instruments of their own debasement and ruin.

- John Quincy Adams (1825-1829)

America... goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all.

But every person who has served in this inauspicious capacity, in my view, has a great atrocity to their name. Again, the list:

- George Washington — The Whiskey Rebellion
- John Adams — The Imperial Presidency and The Alien and Sedition Acts
- Thomas Jefferson — Slavery at Monticello
- James Madison — The Bill of Rights and The Federalist Papers
- James Monroe — General Andrew Jackson vs the Seminoles
- John Quincy Adams — Lost both popular vote and that of the Electoral College

— Kilgore Forelle