



**SECRET LIVES**  
OF THE  
**U.S. PRESIDENTS**

**WHAT YOUR TEACHERS NEVER TOLD YOU  
ABOUT THE MEN OF THE WHITE HOUSE**

**BY CORMAC O'BRIEN**



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**BY CORMAC O'BRIEN**

**PORTRAITS BY MONIKA SUTESKI**



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## *Dedication*

For my parents, John and Mary Ann, who created a household in which seeking, questioning, and laughter were always welcome. Would that everyone had such inestimable role models.

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## *Introduction*

“When I was a boy, I was told that anyone could be president. I’m beginning to believe it.”—CLARENCE DARROW

Chief Executive. Commander in Chief. Leader of the Free World. The Big Cheese. Whatever you want to call him, the president of the United States wields a fantastic amount of power. He keeps the military at his beck and call. He can veto Congress’s best efforts at the drop of a hat. He receives birthday cards from foreign heads of state. His actions even affect the stock market, sometimes dramatically.

Love him or hate him, he’s the closest thing we have to a monarch, a figure who encapsulates elements of celebrity and patriarchy all at once. Little wonder, then, that the men who have held the title of “Mr. President” have become household names. (Except William Henry Harrison and Chester Arthur. Oh, and Benjamin Harrison.) George Washington was the Father of Our Country, Abraham Lincoln led the nation through its greatest trial, Franklin Roosevelt took on the Great Depression and fascist aggression, and John Kennedy stared down the Soviets during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Yadda, yadda, yadda.

At least, that’s what you read in the textbooks. And some of it is actually true. But what were these fellas really like? Here’s what the Constitution has to say: “No person except a natural born Citizen . . . shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.”

These prerequisites don’t narrow the field by much. Of course, we all know there are a few more unspecified requirements—anyone who wants to be president should probably have enormous piles of cash, close contacts in big business, white skin, and a penis. But compared with the situation in most other countries on Earth, eligibility for the highest office in this land is still pretty wide open. And if there’s any doubt in your mind about that, consider all the ninnies who have managed to get there.

Take Zachary Taylor. He dressed like an old shoe, never voted before becoming president, spat tobacco juice all over the Executive Mansion, and died from an overdose of bad cherries. Then there’s Warren Harding. Bad enough that his middle name was Gamaliel. But this was a man who liked to screw his mistresses in White House closets, lived in fear of his wife, and was a devout believer in his own outstanding incompetence. Rutherford Hayes held sing-alongs every night in the White House, William Taft was too big to fit in an ordinary bathtub, Lyndon Johnson drank Scotch out of a paper cup while driving, and Gerald Ford farted. A lot.

The giants of the presidential pantheon are just as colorful, from George Washington (who had a notoriously short temper) to Jack Kennedy (who had a notoriously long list of mistresses). Remember Ulysses S. Grant, whose generalship during the Civil War led to some of the most gruesome slaughters in American history? He hated the sight of blood. And how about Teddy Roosevelt, whose progressive politics brought him into conflict with some of the nation’s richest robber barons? He loved the sight of blood.

Not that we shouldn’t continue to revere these gentlemen for their accomplishments or thank them for their devotion. After all, they have one of the hardest jobs in the world. But through more than two centuries of war, legislation, and diplomacy, this country’s highest leaders have



displayed the consistent ability to remind us that they're not only presidents but also human beings—flawed, neurotic, hapless, bizarre, frightened, and sometimes depraved.

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And thank goodness. Because if they weren't, this would have to be a book about Hollywood celebs or corporate tycoons. And who wants another one of those?

# 1 GEORGE WASHINGTON

**February 22, 1732–December 14, 1799**

**ASTROLOGICAL SIGN: Pisces**

**TERM OF PRESIDENCY: 1789–1797**

**PARTY: N/A (first term); Federalist (second term)**

**AGE UPON TAKING OFFICE: 57**

**VICE PRESIDENT: John Adams**

**RAN AGAINST: John Adams, John Jay (first term); John Adams, George Clinton (second term)**

**HEIGHT: 6'2"**

**NICKNAMES: “Father of Our Country,” “The Old Fox”**

**SOUND BITE: “My movements to the chair of government will be accompanied by feelings not unlike those of a culprit who is going to the place of his execution.”**

Talk about a warm welcome—when General George Washington visited New York City at the end of the Revolutionary War, one local newspaper cheered, “He comes! ’Tis mighty Washington! Words fail to tell all he has done!”

These sentiments were shared by virtually every American. Having defeated the mightiest nation on earth (with a healthy dose of French help), the tall, stately Virginian had achieved the stature of a demigod in American eyes. It’s no wonder he became the fledgling nation’s first chief executive; in fact, the office was created by the Founding Fathers with old George in mind.

George Washington’s salary was around a million dollars in today’s money—and he indulged in such luxuries as leopard-skin robes for all of his horses.

Washington was a minor Virginia aristocrat born of humble means whose career in surveying, land speculation, and militia service blossomed into immortality. Over the course of the American Revolution, he managed to avoid losing an army of underfed, underpaid, and often underwhelming rebels to the fierce predation of the British Empire and went on to assume the role of patriarch to an embryonic country. Above all, he resisted the impulse to become king over a people willing to make him one—no small feat, that.



As president, he established many of the customs we take for granted today. The inaugural address was his idea (although the actual speech was written primarily by James Madison). He also liked to be called “Mr. President,” which (when you consider that the Senate wanted to call him “His Highness the President of the United States of America, and the Protector of Their Liberties”) shows good judgment indeed. During his two terms, he put down a very serious insurrection (the Whiskey Rebellion) and, by acting as referee in their many heated disputes, prevented Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton from tearing each other to pieces.

Of course, it’s stuff like this that gets your face on a quarter, but there’s another side of the coin. The Father of Our Country had just as many flaws as any other dysfunctional dad. Here are some of the highlights.

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### DREAMS OF WEEMS

Chopping down the cherry tree. “I cannot tell a lie.” Throwing a dollar across the Rappahannock River. These are the myths that come to mind when we think about George Washington, and they’ve been standard fare in textbooks for years. But why? Where did they come from? Blame it all on Mason Locke Weems, a parson who, almost immediately after Washington’s death, published a book of his (alleged) exploits. *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues and Exploits of General George Washington* says a great deal about how the young nation viewed its late patriarch. People wanted to remember him as something more than human, and that’s just how Parson Weems portrayed him.

AN ODD COUPLE

For most of his life, Washington was in love with a woman named Sally Fairfax, wife of George William Fairfax—Washington's neighbor and best friend. Although his passions for the worldly and beautiful Sally probably never waned, Washington settled for a much more practical match: the widow Martha Custis, whose considerable holdings made him the wealthy gentleman he longed to be. The two were married in January 1759 and made a very odd couple indeed—George, a giant for the time at about 6'2", towered over his portly bride, whose head didn't make it to his shoulders.

### WOODEN TEETH???

Hardly. You try keeping wood in your mouth without ending up with a maw full of rotting pulp. Washington did have to endure numerous sets of dentures, however, many of which were painfully inadequate. He even had one pair constructed out of hippopotamus bone, a particularly porous material that absorbed much of the first president's port, staining the dentures black. No wonder he never smiled.

### *Pitching a Fit*

You could say George Washington was all the rage—in more ways than one. At the Battle of Kip's Bay, when Connecticut militia retreated from British soldiers without firing a shot, the general exploded with an apoplectic fury, hurling his hat to the ground, swearing himself blue in the face, and cane-whipping everyone within reach.

A few years later, Thomas Jefferson, while serving on Washington's cabinet, had this to say about the president's reaction to a bit of particularly bad press: "The President was much inflamed. [He] got into one of those passions when he cannot control himself . . . [yelling] that BY GOD he had rather be in his grave than in his present situation."

### IT'S A LIVING

According to historian Willard Randall, "the first president of the United States, George Washington, needed the job." The Revolutionary War had put Washington in serious financial straits, and accepting the highest office in the land—a responsibility he was somewhat loath to assume—was the answer to his money troubles. He soon proved just how big a spender a chief executive could be. His salary was \$25,000 (equivalent to about a million dollars today), of which an incredible seven percent was spent on alcohol. He even splurged on such luxuries as leopard-skin robes for his stable of matched horses.

### SEMINAL ISSUE

Was the Father of Our Country sterile? It's possible. Although he enthusiastically embraced the role of stepfather (Martha had children from a previous marriage), he never sired any children of his own. Some speculate that he'd been rendered sterile by sickness. He had contracted malaria and smallpox simultaneously when he was just seventeen years old, a double affliction that

could've done the trick.

Interestingly enough, it was the man's lack of a blood heir that allowed the Founding Fathers to imbue the office of president with real power. Because the framers of the Constitution created the position of chief executive with Washington in mind, any fears they may have had about the first president getting delusions of kingly grandeur could be put to rest. After all, what's a monarch without an heir? For his part, Washington consistently denied having any such notions whatsoever. In fact, he made no secret of the fact that all he really wanted to do was get back to Mount Vernon and spend his golden years growing tobacco and drinking Madeira by the fire.

## BAD MEDICINE

**George Washington, who spent the vast majority of his life outdoors, who reveled in horse riding and swordsmanship, who had a physique remarkable for its size and strength, and who managed to avoid getting killed through two savage wars, appears to have died of a cold.**

**Or pneumonia.**

**Or was it strep throat?**

**It isn't clear from the contemporary accounts what sent Washington to the beyond, but we do know that his throat was very sore and constricted and that the men attempting to cure him, like most eighteenth-century physicians, were quacks. They bled him four times, despite Martha's protests. They made him drink a concoction of molasses, vinegar, and butter. And they filled him full of laxatives in an attempt to purge his foundering system but succeeded only in forcing the poor geezer to spend many of his last hours on earth with a chamber pot. With medicine like that, who needs sickness?**

## 2 JOHN ADAMS

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**October 30, 1735–July 4, 1826**

**ASTROLOGICAL SIGN: Scorpio**

**TERM OF PRESIDENCY: 1797–1801**

**PARTY: Federalist**

**AGE UPON TAKING OFFICE: 61**

**VICE PRESIDENT: Thomas Jefferson**

**RAN AGAINST: Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Pinckney, Aaron Burr**

**HEIGHT: 5'7"**

**NICKNAMES: “His Rotundity,” “Colossus of Independence,” “Duke of Braintree”**

**SOUND BITE: “No man who ever held the office of president would congratulate a friend on obtaining it.”**

It was John Adams’s great misfortune to be the one man who had to fill the shoes of George Washington. But, then, someone had to do it, and Adams had everything to recommend him to the position.

Adams’s wife, Abigail, used the East Room of the White House for hanging wet laundry—a practice that may have increased her husband’s grouchiness.

Born and raised in the Massachusetts hamlet of Braintree, Adams was a consummate thinker, a gifted writer, and indispensable to the revolutionary cause. He made a name for himself by eloquently defending in court the British soldiers accused of killing colonists in the infamous Boston Massacre, a task well suited to a man who believed that laws applied equally to all. The constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts—one of the oldest such documents still operating in the world—was his creation. And his diplomatic postings to France, the Netherlands, and England made him the most experienced and widely traveled American ambassador of his time.



Then again, he was also a pigheaded, intemperate prima donna who constantly wrestled with his own insecurity—and many historians still aren't sure how the fragile new country managed to survive its second chief executive.

When Washington finished his term as president in 1797, he urged his successors to avoid party politics—a request they completely ignored. The emerging partisanship of Federalists and Republicans was so pervasive, it makes today's arguments between Democrats and Republicans seem like child's play. Though a Federalist, John Adams tended to avoid party preferences and make decisions based on his own opinions, a habit that earned him enemies in both factions.

Complicating matters was the fact that his vice president, Thomas Jefferson, was not a Federalist but a *Republican*. Until the electoral system was modified in 1804, the position of vice president was filled by whichever presidential candidate came in second. As you might expect, Adams and Jefferson got along poorly; Jefferson used every available opportunity to fuel opposition to his boss in the press.

Dissension, name-calling, and mudslinging dominated their entire term. Even foreign nations threw decency to the wind. In a scandal that would come to be known as the XYZ Affair, the French foreign minister tried to bribe a group of American envoys. The incident caused Adams to wonder if his VP were secretly aiding French spies, and it led to the president's biggest blunder, the Alien and Sedition Acts, which actually made it a crime to speak or print libelous opinions about the government. Though he didn't originate the acts, Adams signed them into law, thereby feeding the widespread belief that he had delusions of kingship. (Jefferson would later scrap them when he became president.)

In the end, Adams's rocky term reflected qualities that one can't help associating with the man himself. For John Adams was a complex and difficult man indeed . . .

## TALK ABOUT A HEARTY BREAKFAST . . .

Whenever his governmental responsibilities allowed, John Adams spent as much time as he could at his farm in Quincy, Massachusetts. While there, he rose with the sun and began nearly every day by downing a “gill” of hard cider (a gill being roughly equivalent to half a pint).

## MR. POPULARITY

John Adams once described his principal attributes as “candor, probity, and decision.” His contemporaries probably would have added four more: irritability, vanity, vanity, and irritability. Adams was headstrong, perhaps to a fault; he was convinced of his own genius and ability, and his temper blew with alarming frequency. Those around him took note, including:

**Thomas Jefferson:** “*He is vain, irritable, and a bad calculator of the force and probable effect of the motives which govern men.*”

**Ben Franklin:** “[Adams is] sometimes absolutely mad.”

**Abigail Adams** (his devoted wife): “[You have] a certain irritability which has sometimes thrown you off your guard.”

**James McHenry** (secretary of war, noisily fired by Adams): “*Actually insane.*”

## HIS ROTUNDITY

As vice president under George Washington, Adams was president of the Senate, which empowered him to cast a deciding vote whenever the Senate was equally divided. Aside from this, it was understood that his role was mostly passive and that he would essentially keep his mouth shut. When it came to the subject of how to address the president, however, Adams voiced his opinion with every opportunity: “Whether I should say, ‘Mr. Washington,’ ‘Mr. President,’ ‘Sir,’ ‘may it please your Excellency,’ or what else?” Adams believed that noble-sounding titles bestowed dignity on an office; his opponents accused him of being pompous. Neither side would let the issue die, and the debate turned really nasty when Adams’s opponents began referring to him as “His Rotundity.”

Incredibly, it took the new Senate nearly a month to agree on “the president of the United States.”

## *Pen Pals*

Nothing but mutual love and respect was evident when John Adams and Thomas Jefferson first met. Their backgrounds could not have been more different: Adams, a Yankee lawyer who abhorred slavery, almost never went into debt and had a modest farm that would never make him rich; Jefferson, a Virginia gentleman, depended on slavery, lived his life grandly, and always owed money to someone. Despite this, they instantly impressed each other and put their extraordinary heads together on creating a nation. In Europe, while serving as diplomatic envoys, they grew even closer, finding fascination in each other’s company and ideas.

But in time, such mutual admiration would disappear, a casualty of their vehement, often



vicious disagreements over the French Revolution, states' rights, the limits of executive power, and other issues that typically divided Republicans and Federalists. During Adams's presidency, their communication essentially ceased, and a silence endured for years—until their mutual friend, Benjamin Rush, got them to start writing each other again. In their final years, Adams and Jefferson kept up a correspondence that remains one of the most extraordinary in the English language, reflecting the thoughts, fears, ideals, and geniuses of two of history's most outstanding intellects.

They died on the same day—July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

### 3 THOMAS JEFFERSON

**April 13, 1743–July 4, 1826**

**ASTROLOGICAL SIGN: Aries**

**TERM OF PRESIDENCY: 1801–1809**

**PARTY: Republican**

**AGE UPON TAKING OFFICE: 57**

**VICE PRESIDENT: Aaron Burr (first term); George Clinton (second term)**

**RAN AGAINST: Aaron Burr, John Adams, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (first term); Charles Cotesworth Pinckney (second term)**

**HEIGHT: 6'2"**

**NICKNAMES: "Sage of Monticello," "Philosopher of Democracy"**

**SOUND BITE: "I wish to see this beverage [beer] become common instead of the whiskey which kills one-third of our citizens and ruins their families."**

In 1962, when President John Kennedy entertained a group of Nobel Prize winners in the White House, he heralded the event as the most distinguished gathering of intellectual talent that ever graced the Executive Mansion—except for when Thomas Jefferson dined there alone.

JFK wasn't far off the mark. Thomas Jefferson was the walking, talking embodiment of the Enlightenment, a polymath whose list of achievements is as long as it is incredibly varied. As if penning the Declaration of Independence, sitting as governor of Virginia during the Revolution, and serving as secretary of state in George Washington's first term weren't enough, he went on to do much more—architecture, linguistics, agriculture, philosophy, music, prose, you name it. While others dabbled, Jefferson mastered.

He left behind a vast collection of essays and correspondence, which reveal a mind of stunning complexity and apparent contradictions. Jefferson was an avowed abolitionist whose fortune relied on a large population of slaves; a forward-thinking humanist whose opinions on minorities such as Native Americans could be truly alarming; a man whose awkwardness around women stood in stark contrast to his legendary romances.



Since this was an era before candidates chose their running mates, Thomas Jefferson was free to challenge his boss, John Adams, in the election of 1800. His victory marked the first time that his new party, the Republicans, held the office of chief executive, and they looked upon the triumph as a second revolution. Jefferson used the opportunity to make a clean break with his Federalist predecessors. If they had cloaked the chief executive in a mantle of aristocratic solemnity, he brought it back down to earth. While they embraced the British model of government, he was a Francophile. And while they believed that the masses needed to be led by a class of educated gentlemen, he put his faith in the ordinary man.

Thomas Jefferson was fond of greeting ambassadors in his pajamas—a practice that most of them found appalling.

Despite his preference for a less active federal government, his two terms were eventful ones. After purchasing the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon for \$15 million (thereby doubling the size of the United States), he sent Lewis and Clark to discover just how big a bargain it really was. He worked tirelessly to retire the national debt that the Federalists had worked so hard to maintain. He aggressively promoted westward expansion. And while he mostly managed to avoid the labyrinth of European hostilities, he did endure one nasty run-in with Britain (when the British ship *Leopard* fired on the American *Chesapeake*, drawing the two nations perilously close to war). Through it all, Jefferson endured a ceaseless barrage of acrimony from the Federalist press, which fanned whatever flames his detractors were willing to spark.

Revolutionary, leader, inventor, romantic—the Sage of Monticello was all of these and more. How much more, you ask? Well, let's see . . .

## CHILLIN' CHIEF

Jefferson believed that Washington and Adams had both acted a bit too much like kings during their terms as president. And few things irritated him more than kings. To Jefferson, the Revolution had done away with tyranny and all its trappings—a new age had dawned, and it didn't have room for fancy titles, powdered wigs, elaborate regalia, or any other aristocratic mumbo jumbo. As far as Jefferson was concerned, the president was just another voting member of the Republic, and he was proud to act like one.

Not everyone agreed, of course, and there were countless ways to offend foreign dignitaries back in the early nineteenth century—one of which was to greet them in your pajamas. As Andrew Merry, British minister to the United States, fumed, “I, in my official costume, found myself at the hour of reception he had himself appointed, introduced to a man as president of the United States, not merely in an undress, but **ACTUALLY STANDING IN SLIPPERS DOWN TO THE HEELS**, and both pantaloons, coat, and underclothes indicative of utter slovenliness and indifference to appearances, and in a state of negligence actually studied.”

## *Promises, Promises . . .*

Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence included a fiery condemnation of slavery, but the Continental Congress struck it from the document. That Jefferson had taken the opportunity to shed light on the issue is no surprise—he was a devout opponent of slavery, and he lobbied against it for virtually his whole life.

Of course, we would be more inclined to applaud his efforts were it not for the fact that *he owned so many slaves*. His home was one of the largest slave-operated estates in the country. That he often endeavored to make their lives easier is a fact—he gave as many as possible household duty, sparing them the hardship of working in the fields. And he freed them when he could, although bestowing liberty upon a person who had known nothing but servitude had its share of complications. When Jefferson freed his chef, James Hemings, the poor guy didn't know what to do with himself, begged to be taken back, became an alcoholic, and ended up committing suicide.

Despite Jefferson's reliance on slave labor, he couldn't avoid serious financial woes. He even had a manufacturing enterprise going for a while, in which he subjected young African men and boys to the monotonous routine of producing nails—as many as a ton of them per month. And for what? By the time of his death, Thomas Jefferson was \$107,000 in debt—a deficit that Jefferson's heirs partially alleviated by sending most of his slaves to the auction block.

## TOM FOOLERY

By all accounts, Jefferson was devoted and faithful to his wife, Martha, during the ten years they were married before her death. But that didn't stop him from walking all over *other* people's marriage vows.

Consider Betsey Walker, the wife of Jefferson's close friend, John Walker. In 1768, John

ventured to New York to negotiate a treaty and asked Jefferson to keep an eye on Betsey. Jefferson promptly proceeded to do more than just that. Their indiscretions didn't come to light until years later, at which time John Walker's opinion of both his spouse and his "trusted" friend took a precipitous nosedive.

Or consider Maria Cosway, the wife of portraitist Richard Cosway. In 1786, Jefferson—then a widower—was minister to France, where he met and fell hard for Maria, a beautiful, talented musician and artist. While walking with her through the countryside, in an apparent fit of romantic zeal, Jefferson attempted to leap a fence and fractured his wrist. It isn't clear whether the couple consummated their attraction for each other. However, Maria—a devout Catholic who'd considered entering a convent in her youth—probably wasn't as crazy about the idea as Jefferson, whose firm belief in natural philosophy included a conviction that sex was perfectly right and normal for lovers (even those cheating on their husbands).

### FOREIGN FELON

Jefferson's knowledge of and passion for all things agricultural were truly extraordinary (the man even had a family of plants named after him, for crying out loud: *Jeffersonia diphylla*). Driven by a desire to see the South freed from its reliance on cotton, he was always on the lookout for crops that could replace it.

While touring the south of France in 1787, Jefferson discovered that Italian rice was preferred to the American import grown in the Carolinas. Intent on discovering why this might be so, he took a detour into the Italian region of Lombardy on a mission of rice reconnaissance (a journey that, because it required crossing the Alps, was extremely dangerous at the time). There he discovered that the good folks of Lombardy were growing a superior strain of crop—whose export for planting outside of Italy was a crime punishable by death. Undaunted, Jefferson proceeded to literally stuff his pockets with seeds. He even went so far as to bribe his mule driver into smuggling some of the stuff and keeping his mouth shut. The rice is grown in parts of the United States to this day.

### WHEN JEFFERSON MET SALLY

**In September 1802, James Thomson Callender, a onetime supporter of Thomas Jefferson who had taken a beating in the press and was bent on revenge, printed the scandalous accusation that President Jefferson "keeps, and for many years past has kept, as his concubine, one of his own slaves. Her name is SALLY." And so began the American preoccupation with Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings—what historian Joseph J. Ellis says "may be described as the longest-running miniseries in American history."**

**Sally Hemings, a mulatto, wasn't only one of Jefferson's slaves—she was also the half sister of Jefferson's late wife, Martha. Their romance began when Hemings was seventeen and Jefferson was forty-eight and continued on and off until Jefferson's death at age eighty-three. Recent DNA evidence confirmed that they had at least one child together and perhaps as many as five. The kicker? Jefferson was known to abhor interracial relationships, and the propagation of children by such a match made his hair stand on end.**

**Go figure.**

**For all that, Jefferson didn't even give the poor woman her freedom. In his will, he provided for the release from bondage of only five of his slaves. Sally was later given "unofficial" freedom by Jefferson's daughter, Martha Randolph.**

## THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO TOM

"The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," a written work begun by Jefferson during his first term as president and concluded in 1820, was a sincere expression of his understanding of what Jesus Christ contributed to Western notions of morality. It was also, from a dyed-in-the-wool Christian standpoint, a work of outright blasphemy. In effect, he'd gone through the Gospels, removed anything remotely supernatural, rearranged the wording to suit his own humanist tastes, and produced a work that revealed Jesus Christ as a really neat fellow with ideas worthy of the greatest ancient thinkers but devoid of the otherworldly qualities that made him the center of Christianity. No wonder Jefferson kept the project a secret (it was discovered by his daughter after his death).

## A MASTER TINKERER

Among Jefferson's numerous talents was the art of invention. Monticello, his elegant Virginia manor, was peppered with bizarre and often amusing creations of its master's vast imagination. They include a copying machine that allowed its user to write two identical letters at once; "magical" sets of doors (as one pair is opened or closed, the following pair does so automatically); and dumbwaiters (that's right, Jefferson invented them). One of his most celebrated "conveniences" was a closet in which he had installed a "turning machine"—a sort of rotating set of clothes hangers that could be turned with a stick.

## *Cold Feet*

**In a time when people were lucky to make it into their fifties, Thomas Jefferson lived to the ripe old age of eighty-three. What was his secret? According to him, cold foot baths. For sixty years, he would soak his feet every morning in cold water.**

## A MINOR OMISSION

Jefferson left behind specific instructions for the design of his tombstone. On it, he insisted, should be inscribed the following:

*HERE WAS BURIED*

*THOMAS JEFFERSON*

*AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE*

*OF THE STATUTE OF VIRGINIA FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM*

*& FATHER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA*

Notice anything missing? Yep—our third president didn't think his two terms as chief executive were worth mentioning. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

---

## 4 JAMES MADISON

**March 16, 1751–June 28, 1836**

**ASTROLOGICAL SIGN: Pisces**

**TERM OF PRESIDENCY: 1809–1817**

**PARTY: Republican**

**AGE UPON TAKING OFFICE: 57**

**VICE PRESIDENT: George Clinton (first term); Elbridge Gerry (second term)**

**RAN AGAINST: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, George Clinton (first term); DeWitt Clinton (second term)**

**HEIGHT: 5'4"**

**NICKNAME: "Father of the Constitution"**

**SOUND BITE: "Nothing more than a change of mind" (spoken just before he expired).**

No man had more to do with the writing of the American Constitution than James Madison. His "Virginia Plan" was adopted as its basis, and his considerable intellect was instrumental during the months of debate that created a new government. Indeed, his career reads like the early history of the Republic itself.

A devoted patriot from the moment war broke out in 1775, Madison helped create the independent government of his native Virginia. He was appointed to the Continental Congress in 1779, where he argued persuasively for a strong central government. Along with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, he composed the Federalist Papers, which persuaded many reluctant Americans of the need for a potent federal government with the power to tax.

Madison was extremely learned, wise beyond his years, even-tempered, and a compassionate supporter of an America capable of exerting great influence in the world. He even had the good sense to marry Dolley Payne Todd, who would go on to become one of the country's most beloved first ladies. Thomas Jefferson, a close friend in whose administration Madison served as secretary of state, hailed him as "the greatest man in the world."



Now for the bad press. As invaluable to the founding of the United States as Madison was, things turned ugly when he was elected president. His administration has been slammed by contemporaries and historians alike—and you can't really blame them. After all, Washington, D.C., was sacked and burned by the British on his watch (ouch). It seems matters of international diplomacy and war weren't exactly Madison's strong suits.

At 5'4", James Madison has the distinction of being the shortest president in U.S. history.

Nevertheless, by the time he'd finished his stint as president, the economy was booming, and the United States was on its way to international respect. So things definitely could have been a lot worse.

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### **SIZE ISN'T EVERYTHING**

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were both quite tall. Even John Adams had size (albeit width, not height). Compared with his predecessors, James Madison was virtually a prawn, and he still holds the distinction of being the shortest chief executive in the nation's history. At 5'4", the impression he made was hardly presidential. At his inauguration, Louisa Catherine Adams, wife of future president John Quincy Adams, described the new president as "a very small man in his person, with a very large head." (She was referring to the man's intellectual capacity, by the way, not the size of his actual cranium—just in case you were envisioning the fourth president of the United States as some sort of extraterrestrial.)



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