

Lincoln and Washington More Different Than Alike, Say Psychologists Who Study the Presidents

HOUSTON, TX /Send2Press Newswire/ – Washington and Lincoln were both admirable men, but were more different than alike according to psychologists Steve Rubenzer and Tom Faschingbauer of the Foundation for the Study of Personality in History. And despite their pre-eminent status in American history, there have been other presidents who had more personal assets for the job.

Rubenzer and Faschingbauer are co-authors of “Personality, Character, and Leadership in the White House: Psychologists Assess the Presidents” (ISBN: 1574888153), Potomac Books, 2004.



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Caption: Book Jacket for 'Personality, Character, and Leadership in the White House'

Washington and Lincoln did share some prominent qualities. Both were wise, not bullheaded or stubborn, and did not make decisions based on willfulness, nervousness, or egotism. They were not greedy, selfish, or self-indulgent. They didn't rush or seem harried and were not antagonistic or argumentative. As presidents, both relied on their staff to formulate their options but did not tolerate unethical behavior. Both were able to visualize the long-term consequences of their decisions and had a deep understanding of the problems

they faced.

But there are a lot of differences. Lincoln was quite a slob compared to Washington, who kept things in their place even more than most presidents. Lincoln tossed things just about anywhere to get them out of the way, sometimes keeping legal papers in his stovepipe hat. Not surprisingly, he spent a fair amount of time looking for things he lost.

Washington, unlike Lincoln, was a polished dancer, moderately attractive, and a bit of a drinker, but he was also cold, impersonal, dignified, and formal. He presented as he was: a high-ranking, powerful individual. Lincoln lacked poise and social presence, but he was much more witty, natural, quicker to laugh, playful, and eloquent.

He was also much more moody than Washington, and occasionally felt worthless and depressed. He once said, "If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth.... To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better." Lastly, Lincoln was emotionally sensitive and responsive: Many things could evoke his feelings and he was moved by poetry. Washington was not.

Although Washington and Lincoln have been rated among the top three presidents in every historian poll, the psychologists found several other presidents had more of the right stuff personality-wise. They found the personal qualities it takes to be a great president (dominance, ambition, intelligence, competence, energy, enthusiasm, compassion, and the ability to lie well.) Teddy Roosevelt had more of this right stuff than any other president (runners up were FDR and Woodrow Wilson).

The surprising thing is that TR, the prototypical personality for successful presidents, is unique – no other chief executive has his combination of intellect, energy, self-discipline, and ambition. No wonder that both Bill Clinton and G. W. Bush have turned to the indomitable TR for inspiration.

But presidents are recognized not for who they are, but for their achievements. TR lamented that he would never be regarded as a great president because he lived in relatively quiet times. And rightly so; the most honored presidents are those like Washington and Lincoln who successfully resolved a crisis. Even if Washington and Lincoln don't match TR in potential, they exceed him in actual accomplishment. They are also perhaps the most worthy icons any country ever had.

Ancient Rome's most renowned figure, Julius Caesar, is remembered for seizing power and destroying the Republic. Washington and Lincoln are remembered for far more noble things. Their repeated ranking as our best presidents is the clearest statement Americans can make of our national ideals.

More information about "Personality, Character, and Leadership in the White House: Psychologists Assess the Presidents," including reviews, is available at www.TestingThePresidents.com.

News issued by: Foundation for the Study of Personality in History

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Original Story ID: (109) :: 2005-02-0217-004

Original Keywords: Dr. Steve Rubenzer, Dr. Tom Faschingbauer, Presidents, Lincoln and Washington, Personality, Character, and Leadership in the White House: Psychologists Assess the Presidents, ISBN: 1574888153, Potomac Books Foundation for the Study of Personality in History