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Ranking the Presidents: Continuity and Volatility

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As a scholar I know that ranking and rating presidents is not very rigorous and does not necessarily tell us what we would like to know, nevertheless I find it irresistible. What we really want to know is which presidents did the best job in office and how they stack up against each other. But the whole process of surveying presidential historians and scholars is problematical for a number of reasons. Most importantly, we do not agree on the criteria that should be applied or how to balance personal qualities with administration achievements. We do not know how to compare fairly presidents who face differing historical situations which all have varying constraints and opportunities. And the choice of which scholars to survey is always a difficult question. Public opinion polls are even less reliable and more mercurial.

Fred Greenstein had a point when he said that "Presidential greatness is sort of nonsensical....Because greatness is a value judgment...."[1]Week in Review section, (19 February 1995), p. 1. Certainly our political values as well as our personal reaction to presidential personalities come into play in our judgments, both as scholars and as citizens answering poll questions. Greenstein's approach to evaluating presidents is presented in his book, *The Presidential Difference*, in which he evaluates each of the modern presidents based on six different criteria, with different presidents performing better or worse in the different categories.[2] In contrast to comparing "greatness" his is a much more nuanced approach, and in Greenstein's book, reasonably objective. It avoids the personal partisan values temptation better than the "greatness" approach and is quite useful in comparing presidents.

Nevertheless, I find the "greatness" rankings to be not only irresistible to my appetite as a political junkie, but also useful in helping us (as scholars and as citizens) think about what we value in political leadership. Some scholars resist the idea of ranking on principle because it cannot do justice to the unique historical circumstanced faced by each individual president.

But deliberation about how to rank presidents is inherently useful in a democratic and republican polity, even if it is not as reliable and precise as we scholars would prefer. In ranking presidents, we are forced to make complex trade-offs in values and to compare individuals who are not directly comparable, just as during an election we are forced to choose among a small number of individuals rather than create the perfect candidate. But in voting, just as in ranking, it is useful to articulate our criteria and values. Thus the exercise is useful in helping us think about presidents, even if ranking is not precise or reliable.

So, despite the many legitimate reservations that scholars have about ranking presidents, I think that if it is done thoughtfully and the criteria are articulated and debated, it is a useful exercise, and I enthusiastically participate. In this essay I will address several aspects of "the

rating game": stability and change in presidential rankings, the relationship between public opinion and presidential ratings by professionals, and possible future changes in the rankings of contemporary presidents.

I. Continuity and Volatility in Presidential Rankings

Despite the varied methodologies and difference in the times of the scholarly rankings of presidents, the degree of agreement in the ranking of presidents is striking.[3] In most of the major polls over the past half century, the top president has been Abraham Lincoln and the next two have been George Washington and Franklin Roosevelt, with Washington generally ranking number two until the 1980s, after which he is replaced by Franklin Roosevelt.[4] There was also general consensus on the other "great" presidents, with Jefferson, Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and sometimes Truman sharing the "great" category. Harding, Grant, and Nixon were consistently in the "failure" category. Despite this consistency at the top and bottom over the past half century, there are interesting changes and discrepencies among the mid level ranks, particularly Truman and Eisenhower, which will be addressed below.

It is useful to keep in mind that, despite the consistency noted above, reputations of historical figures often fluctuate with changing times, as do other historical evaluations. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. notes that historians "...remain prisoners of their own epoch....Every generation of historians has its distinctive worries about the present and, consequently, its distinctive demands on the past."[5] He observes that the reputations of the progressive presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were in eclipse during the decade or two after their deaths. And he notes that even Franklin Roosevelt was not universally considered a great president for the first decade after his death. "We are always in a zone of imperfect visibility so far as the history just over our shoulder is concerned. It is as if we were in the hollow of the historical wave; not until we reach the crest of the next one can we look back and estimate properly what went on before."[6]

This perspective may help us to understand the two cases of striking contrast in evaluation over the past half century: the historical reputations of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, two presidents who did not have particularly cordial relations, yet who both have enjoyed a resurgence in their reputations in recent years.

Truman's reputation among professional historians has been consistently quite high, ranking at number eight in most polls from the 1962 Schlesinger, Sr. poll through the 1982 polls of Murray, Porter, and the Chicago Tribune and in the 1996 Schlesinger, Jr. poll. But his reputation among professional historians is in sharp contrast to his popularity when he was president. Immediately after Franklin Roosevelt's death and Truman's accession to the presidency, his public approval according the Gallup Poll was above 85 percent, but once in office his popularity began a continuous slide down to 32 percent in September 1946.[7]

Truman felt that he was unprepared for the presidency and said that he thought that a million men were more qualified for the office than he was. During his presidency many Americans seemed to agree with that assessment. The Republican Speaker of the House said that Truman was "the worst president in history," and liberals felt that he was such an unworthy

heir to their hero FDR that they tried to draft Eisenhower to run as the Democratic nominee in 1948.[8] Yet, in 1948 Truman became the patron saint of presidents who are down in the polls and running for reelection when he came back from what was assumed to be Thomas Dewey's insurmountable popularity to win election in his own right. After his election in 1948 his popularity rose to near 90 percent, but after the Korean War seemed to drag on without an end in sight, his approval reached a low of 23 percent in 1951.

His low poll numbers early in his administration probably reflected an unflattering contrast in the public mind with Franklin Roosevelt who had led the nation through World War II. Truman's low numbers late in his administration undoubtedly reflected the frustration of the Korean War. But by the time of the first poll of historians to include Truman, Schlesinger, Sr.'s 1962 survey, scholars had had a decade to put things into some perspective. By then it was evident that the Marshall Plan had helped get Europe back on its feet and that NATO was an effective alliance against Soviet aggression. In future decades the high professional evaluations of Truman continued, with the successful Cold War policies of the 1960s and 1970s and the final demise of the Soviet Union in the next decade.

In contrast to Truman, Eisenhower was famously popular with the American people; his poll ratings dropped below 50 percent briefly only twice during his two terms, and most often hovering around the 70 percent figure. But his public popularity was not reflected in the evaluations of professional historians who ranked him at number 20 in both the Schlesinger, Sr. 1962 survey and the Maranell 1970 survey (behind Herbert Hoover in both polls), and the Historical Society Poll did not rank him in the top ten. But things had changed by the 1980s; the 1982 polls of the Chicago Tribune, Murray, and Porter studies ranked him nine, eleven, and twelve respectively. The Schlesinger, Jr. poll of 1996 and the C-SPAN poll of 2000 ranked him ten and nine.

There are a number of explanations that might be adduced to explain these changes in evaluation. The most important is the passage of time. As noted, Truman's initial high ranking came a decade after his term ended. Time gives us some perspective and enables us to put a particular president in historical context. Time also helps for two other reasons: the longer range success or failure of a president's policies can be judged, and a particular president can be contrasted with the performance of his successors. Eisenhower's reputation has been enhanced on all three of these counts.

Although Eisenhower was not an activist in domestic policy, his initiation of the interstate highway system had profound effects on the country and is now an essential part of our total transportation infrastructure. Eisenhower was not an activist in foreign policy either, but he did keep the United States actively engaged with the world. In fact, one of the reasons that Ike chose to run for president was the fear that the isolationist wing of his party would try to disengage the country from what he felt were its international responsibilities. After ending the war in Korea as he had promised to do in his campaign, foremost among Eisenhower's challenges was the Cold War with the Soviet Union. But with many challenges and temptations to engage in military action, Eisenhower managed to keep the U.S. at peace while at the same time preserving U.S. allies and positions around the world.

Eisenhower also looked increasingly good with respect to his successors. After Kennedy's Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba (though planned by the Eisenhower administration), Ike's excessively deliberate foreign policy process looked much better than it did when Kennedy decided to throw it out in the first days of his administration. It also looked good in comparison to the lack of central control and policy deliberation that allowed the opening to Iran in the Reagan administration to degenerate into the diversion of funds to the Contras in Nicaragua, in contravention to public law in the 1980s.

But perhaps the most striking contrast in national security deliberation is between Eisenhower's decision not to commit U.S. forces to support the French at Din Binh Phu in 1954 and Lyndon Johnson's decisions to escalate the war in Vietnam in 1964 and 1965. Fred Greenstein and John Burke take an in-depth look at Eisenhower's decision making in the 1954 crisis and describe a process in which Eisenhower deliberately sought contrasting arguments about U.S. policy options. After NSC meetings marked by spirited debate and vigorous give-and-take, Eisenhower decided not to commit U.S. forces, because "the Vietnamese could be expected to transfer their hatred of the French to us," and "This war in Indochina would absorb our troops by the divisions!"[9] In contrast, Johnson often dominated policy deliberations and deliberately squelched disagreements with this own preferences. When Eisenhower's predictions about Vietnam came true in the 1960s, it became clear that his deliberate and slow national security policy development process had values not fully appreciated by the Democrats in Congress who severely criticized it in the 1950s.

The forth reason for Eisenhower's reevaluation was the examination of previously unavailable records by scholars. Scholars of the 1960s and 1970s were likely affected by the image of Eisenhower as a president who was not fully engaged in his presidency. Amid photos of Ike on the golf course and his often inarticulate statements at news conferences, scholars might easily come to the conclusion that chief of staff Sherman Adams was running the domestic side of government and John Foster Dulles was in charge of foreign policy. But the reality was much more complex, as careful mining of the archives demonstrated. Fred Greenstein's *Hidden-Hand Presidency* presented a side of Eisenhower not available to the public.[10] His analysis presented an Eisenhower much more engaged in both the politics and policy of his administration than had been evident during Ike's terms in office.

II. Popular Versus Professional Ratings – Discrepancies

It is interesting to compare the rankings of professional scholars with the judgments of public opinion, noting when the two separate types of evaluation converge and when they diverge. Historically, it is difficult to judge presidential popularity, but some judgments can be made, for instance that FDR was vastly popular with a good portion of the population in the 1930s, but he was also quite unpopular with conservatives and Republicans. Thus it is striking that in the later 20th century FDR is accepted as a great president by Republicans and Democrats alike. Even Ronald Reagan, as president, invoked his memory.

But it is only since 1949 that professional polling organizations have been asking comparable questions about presidential approval. The data from these polls give us valid snapshots of public opinion about approval of presidential performance for all of the presidents

from Eisenhower forward. Thus it might be interesting to note some similarities and differences between scholarly rankings and public opinion while the presidents were in office. The following table presents the Gallup Poll approval ratings from Eisenhower to Clinton (as of 1999).

Presidential Approval Ratings, 1953-1999[11]

	Average	High	Low
Kennedy	70%	83%	56%
Eisenhower	65	79	48
Bush	61	89	29
Johnson	55	79	35
Clinton	54	73	37
Reagan	53	65	35
Nixon	49	67	24
Ford	47	71	37
Carter	45	74	28

As noted above, Eisenhower was quite popular with the public as president, though in the 1950s and 1960s his reputation among scholars was not nearly as high. Yet his reputation among scholars change dramatically over the past three decades, with new scholarship and the passage of time.

Before making other comparisons of public opinion with scholarly judgment, we should note that there are important differences between the two types of evaluations. Public opinion polls are conducted on the phone, often with a hired graduate student reading hurriedly from a prepared text so that he or she can complete the required number of interviews within the shortest possible time. Respondents are not given time to reflect on their answers; they may have just been interrupted from dinner or watching television. Thus their answers are not usually deliberate, considered judgments, but rather off-the-cuff responses on the spur of the moment.

In contrast, historians and political scientists who are polled to rate presidents have spent most of their careers thinking and writing about the presidency; they simply know much more about the subject than popular poll respondents. In addition, they have time to reflect on their responses to a survey, often several weeks or months before the forms are due. And of course, their responses are in retrospect and they are able to judge a president in light of events and scholarship subsequent to the presidency. So we should not be surprised that there are differences between presidential approval polls and academic rankings of presidential greatness.

The most striking contrast between popular approval and professional judgment occurs in the evaluation of John Kennedy. Kennedy's approval rating as president averaged 70 percent, yet his historical rating by the experts places him in the average category, ranking around number 13 or 14 (12 in the 1996 Schlesinger poll).

It is also striking that Kennedy is often ranked as one of our greatest presidents in popular

polls, a rank he never approaches in the professionals' judgment.[12] When Gallup asked a national sample of adults to name the greatest and worst presidents in February of 2000 they found:

Gallup Poll Popular Rankings of Presidents, 2000[13]

Greatest		Worst	
Kennedy	22%	Nixon	24%
Lincoln	18	Clinton	20
FDR	12	Carter	10
Reagan	11	Reagan	8
Washington	5	Bush	3
Clinton	13		
Bush	3		

That Kennedy at 22 percent (up from 12 percent in 1999) was ranked higher than Lincoln and 17 points higher than Washington should give us some pause. In addition Clinton's choice as the greatest president, by 13 percent of respondents is exceeded by his ranking as the worst by 20 percent. What are we to make of Bush's being chosen by 3 percent as best and 3 percent as worst? The likelihood is that these poll rankings, with only one choice available for the best and worst presidents, do not reflect careful deliberation and overemphasize recent presidents.

Kennedy's enduring popularity, however, is striking. His assassination surely has played an important role in his popular reputation. He became a martyred hero whose soaring rhetoric inspired many in the United States and abroad. He was particularly eloquent about foreign policy (which may have played some role in U.S. overreaching in world affairs) and civil rights (which he was not able to match with policy victories). In addition, recent revelations about his reckless sexual behavior have not seemed to affect his popularity.

Another way to compare professional judgment with popular opinion is to look at retrospective popular polls, that is when citizens are asked whether they approve of presidents in retrospect. The Gallup organization did this several times in the early 1990s, and came up with the following results:

Popular Approval of presidential performance in 1990[14]

Kennedy	84
FDR	75%
Eisenhower	70
Truman	68
Bush	56 (at end of presidency)
Ford	55
Carter	50
Reagan48	

Johnson	40
Nixon	32

Popular Approval-disapproval of Recent Previous Presidents (Jan. 30, 1998)[15]

	Approve	Disapprove
JFK	77%	17%
Bush	74	24
Reagan	69	29
Carter	65	29
Nixon	32	61

Again, Kennedy tops the list of modern presidents, even outranking the hero that brought the country through the Great Depression and World War II. At the time this poll was taken, a week after the Monica Lewinsky revelations and his state of the union address, Clinton's approval stood at 69 percent.

Thus the validity of public opinion polling on presidential greatness is shaky and scholarly opinions do change. This raises the question of how the rankings of recent presidents may change in the future.

III. Handicapping Contemporary Presidents in the Historical Sweepstakes

By definition, It is difficult to evaluate contemporary presidents from an historical perspective. Enough time has not passed to get a perspective; new evidence may become available; and future events may affect our evaluations. In addition, current political feelings run high because the issues dealt with by these presidents are still at stake. Once the currency of issues has passed and they can no longer be won or lost, it is easier to come to a consensus. Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate on how current presidents may be evaluated in the future. It is probable that there will be some shifting, reevaluation, and revisionism. As Oscar Wilde said, "The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it."[16]

Certainly Richard Nixon spent the years after his presidency consciously pursuing a campaign to change his image and perceived legacy through writing a series of books and acting as an elder statesman. His efforts were partially successful to the extent that Bill Clinton gave a surprisingly positive talk at his funeral in 1994 saying, "May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close."[17] This was several years before Clinton himself would want that sort of balance to be brought to the evaluation of his own presidency. Although Nixon has been in the failure category of most of the professional evaluations, he moved up to the 25th position in the C-SPAN survey of 2000. As Watergate recedes in popular memory and new scandals occur, Nixon's policy role may be weighed more heavily by future scholars.

Lyndon Johnson's legacyhas been heavily colored by the Vietnam War, which still evokes strong feelings three decades after its end. Johnson's domestic policies, particularly the

Great Society and War on Poverty programs, also remain controversial. Newt Gingrich and the 104th Congress undertook a major effort to reverse, abolish, or cut back many of the social programs of Johnson's administration. That they were ultimately unsuccessful, is an important indication of public acceptance of many of these programs as part of American government.[18] As the Vietnam war recedes in memory, and if the Cold War does not resume, and if U.S. relations with Vietnam continue to improve; Johnson's reputation may benefit.[19]

Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush have found themselves in the low average category of most scholarly evaluations. They each have potential for rising in the rankings, though their failures to win reelection (election in Ford's case) will not help them. Ford may have the toughest time because of his short period in office and his difficulties facing a Democratic Congress. Though his presidency lacked major historical events, he will be remembered as a reassuring president of admirable character who was able help the country get over the Watergate trauma. His pardon of Nixon, which was hugely unpopular at the time, may eventually come to be seen as a wise decision.

Jimmy Carter as ex-president is universally admired. His Carter Center in Georgia has undertaken numerous good works throughout the world in dealing with debilitating diseases in the third world and mediating civil wars. Carter himself has been active in diplomacy and has personally spent time helping to construct homes for the poor through the "Habitat for Humanity" program. These good works may help his overall image, but they are unlikely to affect professional evaluations of his presidency. Carter has been hurt in evaluations of his presidency because of the capture of U.S. hostages in Iran and the inflationary economy of the 1970s. One might argue that he did not cause these problems and that there was no obvious remedy for them that he did not attempt, but that does not help the fact that they occurred during his presidency and that he could not solve them. (Though he did appoint Paul Volcker to chair the Federal Reserve Board, which did deal with the inflation problem.) Carter also made a number of mistakes early in his term that colored professional evaluations of his performance.[20] Carter's stock may rise, but he will probably stay in the average category.

George Bush was hurt by his failure to be reelected which was generally blamed on his inability to project sufficient concern to the public about dealing with the economic slowdown in 1991 and 1992. Though one might argue that the public overreacted to the economy and that no strong measure were needed. Bush was also hurt by "the vision thing" and his seeming lack of a major policy agenda to achieve. But of course he was facing a Democratic Congress and his approach to public policy was not activist. The press and scholars may be biased in favor of presidents who are seen to be ambitious and attempt active policy change.[21]

But it seems that Bush may have a reasonably good chance for improvement in his historical ranking. In domestic policy he finally confronted the savings and loan debacle that had been created and ignored during the Reagan administration. The costs to the budget and the economy were significant, but the Bush administration dealt with the problem successfully. Ironically, Bush may have suffered politically most for what was one of his most courageous political acts - the breaking of his "no new taxes" pledge in 1990. The deficit reduction package that he negotiated with the Democratic 102nd Congress reduced the deficit by about $500 billion over five years and established spending caps in the budget. Along with Clinton's 1993 deficit

reduction package this must be given partial credit for the huge economic expansion of the late 1990s. In foreign policy Bush handled the demise of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany within NATO with great subtlety and restraint, and he successfully conducted the allied war against Saddam Hussein.[22]

Ronald Reagan has ranked in the average range in the few surveys of professionals since his presidency. Reagan, as Johnson, is a polarizing figure, with many seeing him as a truly great president and many seeing him as too detached in personal style and too harsh on the poor in his domestic policies. The future state of the economy will affect his evaluation. If the economic boom of the 1990s is able to erase much of the national debt accumulated since the $1 trillion per four year term from 1981 to 1998, it will help Reagan's reputation. If the overhang of the national debt turns out to hurt the economy, it will hurt him. Similarly, the future of U.S. relations with Russia may affect our evaluation of how Reagan dealt with the Soviet Union, and new historical documents may reveal more about Reagan's role in the end of the Cold War.

Bill Clinton is a special case, even discounting his proximity in historical time. His impeachment and his behavior that led up to it will be major factors in any evaluation of his presidency. The question is, how will the rest of his presidency be weighed against the historic repudiation of a president by the House of Representatives? Clinton will undoubtedly benefit from the historic economic boom of the late 1990s. Future scholars will argue how much credit Clinton should get for the healthy economy. In foreign policy Clinton did not formulate a vision for a "new world order" after the Cold War, but then no one else has either. Evaluation of Clinton's foreign policy will depend upon the future state of affairs in current trouble spots. Clinton's peace negotiation efforts in the Middle East and Ireland may be seen as futile attempts in intractable situations or as turning points on the way to peace. Similarly, his interventions in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq will be judged based on how these situations turn out more than on the apparent wisdom of the actions when they were taken.

One of Clinton's roles has been, as a "new Democrat" to try to adjust the Democratic party to a more conservative era; he thus placed himself in a more conservative position than his co-partisans in Congress on economic policy, free trade, and a number of social issues, including welfare reform. Whether this is seen as positive or negative depends on the relative success of the Democratic party in the future. One policy victory that Clinton did achieve was to rein in the ambitions of the 104th Congress which attempted to cut back or eliminate many of the Great Society and New Deal programs. Clinton was able to position himself as protector of "Medicare, Medicaid, education, and the environment," thwart the more extreme ambitions of the House Republicans in 1995, and get himself reelected in 1996.

Nevertheless, even if many of the policy outcomes break his way in the future, it is unlikely that Clinton will approach "near great" status because of his failure to fulfill the important presidential role of exemplar of character. Clinton has lamented that Kennedy was able to get away with many more sexual liaisons than he did and not suffer opprobrium. But he forgot Kennedy's maxim that life is not fair. One factor that is important for presidents is to judge the tenor of the times, and in his personal behavior Clinton made serious miscalculations and his subsequent lying had disastrous consequences.[23] The press and aides allowed Kennedy to get away with many sexual affairs. Bill Clinton should have known that the rules had changed

in the intervening three decades.

Conclusion

After immersing oneself in the minutia of public opinion and scholarly polls to rate the 42 presidents of the United States, it is easy to be overcome by the "so what" question. That is, ranking one president ahead of or behind another can seem trivial, and even trying to put presidents in the "right" category is in part arbitrary. Nor does ranking presidents according to greatness easily take into account the differing opportunities of different presidents. The three greatest presidents have led us through major wars. Other presidents may have ended up in higher categories if they had faced greater emergencies (or failed to prevent them). Stephen Skoronek and David Crockett have called our attention to the importance of historical context in evaluating presidents. That is, not all presidents have the same opportunities to achieve great things.[24]

In an important sense, the rankings tell us more about the ranker than the president ranked. But that is appropriate and useful. The history of the United states (or any polity) should be about adapting ourselves to new circumstances and deciding how our old values and principles ought to be adapted to meet new realities. Thus in evaluating presidents or in revising our understanding of our history we are actively engaged in changing our values and adjusting to the future. This is as necessary as it is inevitable.

But as I argued in the introduction, the value of ranking presidents lies not in the outcome of arriving at a "valid" ranking of presidents. The value rather lies in our deliberation about the reasons why we ought to rank some presidents higher than others. Our reasons and weighting of the criteria change as time passes. This is appropriate and necessary for our evolution as a polity. In different eras different values and issues come to the fore; this is not a sign of inconsistency but of adapting to new realities. It matters much less how we rank a president than that we deliberate about which important values we ought to use to understand our past and shape our future.

ENDNOTES

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[1] Todd S. Purdum, "Combing the Century For a President to Honor," *The New York Times*,

[2] Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

[3] These include the Schlesinger, Sr. Poll (1948) [N=55 "experts"], Schlesinger, Sr. (1962) [N=75]; Maranell (1970) [N=571]; U.S. Historical Society (1977) [N=85]; Chicago Tribute (1982) [N=49]; Murray-Blessing (1982) [N=846]; Porter (1982) [N=41]; Schlesinger, Jr. (1996) [N=32]; and C-SPAN (2000) [N=58]. The rankings along with citations can be found in: James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 233-235; and Robert K.

Murray and Tim H. Blessing, *Greatness in the White House* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 16-17. The 1996 Schlesinger poll is in the New York Times Magazine (15 December 1996), pp. 46-51. The C-SPAN poll is from www.americanpresidents.org (24 February 2000); it was also reported in *Washingtonian Magazine* (April 2000), pp. 53-55. Note that the C-SPAN poll ranked presidents by compiling their scores on ten separate leadership categories rather than by asking respondents to make an overall judgment about presidential greatness. This may explain in part why Nixon, who was quite a skillful president, despite his character failings, was ranked number 25, much higher than in most other expert polls.

[4] See Arthur B. Murphy, "Evaluating the Presidents of the United States," in David C. Kozak and Kenneth N. Ciboski, eds. *The American Presidency* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1985), pp. 438-448.

[5] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Vicissitudes of Presidential Reputations," in Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1986), p. 373.

[6] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1957), p. xi.

[7] Gallup Poll data as reported in the *Washington Post* (17 August 1992), p. A11.

[8] Alan Brinkley, "Work Hard, Trust in God, Have No Fear," *New York Times Book Review* (21 June 1992), p. 1. Interestingly, Eisenhower said that Truman offered to help him run for the presidency in 1948. Truman, however, denied that he made any such offer. See Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (NY: Doubleday, 1948), p. 444; and Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: an oral biography of Harry S. Truman* (NY: Berkley Publishing Corp., 1973), pp. 338-339.

[9] Fred I. Greenstein and John P. Burke, "Dynamics of Presidential Reality Testing: Evidence from Two Vietnam Decisions," *Political Science Quarterly* (Winter 1989-1990), pp. 557-580; and John P. Burke and Fred I, Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality* (NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990); the quotes are from Greenstein and Burke, pp. 564-565.

[10] Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (NY: Basic Books, 1982).

[11] The Gallup Organization, "Overall Presidential Approval Ratings 1953-1999," www.gallup.com (25 May 2000), p. 8.

[12] See Michael Beschloss, "Seven Ways to Win Friends," *The New Yorker* (20 January 1995), p. 44.

[13] The Gallup Organization, Mark Gillespie, "JFK Ranked as Greatest U.S. President," www.gallup.com (25 May 2000). The sample for the poll was 1,050, but the rankings were based on a subsample of 509 respondents.

[14] Gallup poll reported by Adam Clymer, "Presidents Ask a Place in Posterity; Posterity Keeps Rearranging Them," *The New York Times* (24 January 1993), p. E3.

[15] The Gallup Organization, David W. Moore, "Public Generally Tolerant of Presidential Extramarital Affairs," www.gallup.com (25 May 2000).

[16]Quoted by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986, p. 374.

[17] Quoted in Anthony Summers, *The Arrogance of Power* (NY: Viking, 2000), p. x.

[18] For an analysis of Clinton's confrontation with the 104th Congress, see James P. Pfiffner, "President Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the 104th Congress," in Nelson W. Polsby and Raymond Wolfinger, eds., *On Parties* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, 1999), pp. 135-170.

[19] Some sort of reevaluation may have begun, at least on the Democratic side. John Kenneth Galbraith had been a friend of Johnson's but opposed his reelection because of the war, and the two men never spoke again. But Galbraith concluded in 1999 that Johnson's reputation had to be balanced. He called Johnson "the most effective political activist of our time," and that he would place Johnson "next only to Franklin D. Roosevelt as a force for a civilized and civilizing social policy essential for human well-being and for the peaceful co-existence between the economically favored (or financially fortunate) and the poor."R.W. Apple Jr., "A Vietnam War Critic Now Has Praise for Johnson," *The New York Times* (27 November 1999), p. A10. Even George McGovern, the anti-war presidential candidate in 1972, had words of praise for Johnson in retrospect. "But despite his involvement with the war, Johnson used his remarkable political skills to build the most far-reaching progressive domestic program since the New Deal." George McGovern, "Discovering Greatness in Lyndon Johnson, *The New York Times* (12 April 1999), p. wk17.

[20] See James P. Pfiffner, *The Strategic Presidency: Hitting the Ground Running* , 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

[21] See Mark J. Rozell, "The Press and the Presidency," in James P. Pfiffner and Roger H. Davidson, eds., *Understanding the Presidency* (NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000), pp. 109-120.

[22] See the argument by Jonathan Rauch, "Father Superior: Our greatest modern president," The New Republic (22 May 2000), pp. 22-25

[23] It is interesting to note that in public opinion rankings of Clinton that the percentage of those who ranked him as outstanding or above average changed little between 1997 and 2000 (36 % and 37% respectively). But the percentage of those who ranked him average fell from 47% to 34%, with the difference lowering their ranking to below average or poor (from 16% in 1997 to 28% in 2000). The Gallup Organization, Mark Gillespie, "JFK Ranked as Greatest U.S. President," www.gallup.com (25 May 2000).

[24] See Stephen Skoronek, *The Politics Presidents Make* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) and David Crockett, "The President as Opposition Leader," *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 30 No. 2 (June 2000), pp. 245-274.