

## AMERICA'S DUMPIEST PRESIDENTS

When I say “America’s ‘sexiest’ presidents,” I’m sure the preexisting list you’ve undoubtedly already made springs to mind. And, of course, we all know who the frontrunners are because we’re all on the same page about this concept. Though to be fair, since this is definitely a thing every single one of us has thought about and done, there’s bound to be *some* variety from one Top 5 list to the next. Perhaps I’m partial to a Roosevelt served straight up, for three terms, with a dash of adversity, where you prefer to take yours on some rocks, in South Dakota.<sup>1</sup> If you like your presidents progressive, a Lincoln/Obama double header is just what the doctor (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) ordered. If you’re into “daddy stuff,” a Founding Father energy like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson might be more your weird speed. But regardless of the specific rubric you’ve certainly already created for sexualizing former commanders-in-chief, when Saturday night rolls around and it inevitably comes time to dish your list with close friends, it’s safe to say that there are some names that consistently come up, and some that never do. So who are these dark horses no one is betting on? Are we all missing out on the chance to fantasize about some of US history’s lesser-known and even lesser-liked presidents? Again, we’ve all definitely asked these questions of ourselves and of others. But now, bless my soul, I’m here to answer them. So pour yourself a glass of red, white, or, if you have a safe-for-consumption blue-coloured drink that you prefer, that’s on

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1 | For those keeping score, this is the best, only, and also worst Mount Rushmore joke I will ever make (maybe).

theme as well—and swipe your way through some of what I like to call “America’s diamonds-in-the-dumps” (or just “dumps”).

## WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

**Served:** 1 Month (March 4 1841–April 4 1841)

**Nicknames:** “Old Granny,” “Old Tippecanoe,”<sup>2</sup> “Pneumonia Willy,” “Who?”

**Sign:** Aquarius

**Likes:** White supremacy, hard cider, enemas

**Dislikes:** “Injuns,” acknowledging when it’s raining and/or cold out

If you like your presidents to be as long-winded as they are shortsighted as they are drunk as they are racist, look no further than WHH. Among little else,<sup>3</sup> Harrison is known for having both the longest inaugural address in presidential history (clocking in at almost two hours) *and* the shortest tenure ever as president (clocking in at 30 days, 12 hours, and 30 minutes). Prior to his entire almost-a-month in office, Harrison combined his racially charged military career with time spent drinking, aging, campaigning against Indian Rights, and securing stolen land for white settlers. And, despite literally all of this information, he managed to bluster his way into the White House thanks to his brilliantly masterminded, entirely self-run, “Hey everyone, look at me! I drink alcoholic cider and grew up in a log cabin<sup>4</sup> and I’m not even that old<sup>5</sup> and look how many Indians I can kill and John Tyler is also here!” presidential campaign. But worried that people might *still* suspect him of being

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2 | This one comes from his famously uninspiring campaign slogan, “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too,” in reference to his successful slaughter of several Native Americans in the Battle of Tippecanoe, and to his running mate John Tyler’s accomplishment of also being on the ballot while having the last name “Tyler.”

3 | That’s not entirely fair. In an effort to seem more “folksy,” he did make the bizarre campaign decision to distribute log-cabin-shaped cider bottles with his face on them courtesy of the E.C. Booz distillery, inadvertently originating the word “booze.” So I guess that’s a pretty good runner-up legacy if your main thing is “dying instantly.”

4 | More technically, a 1,000-acre, slave-owning plantation in Virginia (but basically a log cabin).

5 | 68, but an 1841 “68,” so a modern-day “170.”

frail and old and also stupid (bulletproof campaign platform notwithstanding), he decided the best way to prove to everyone that he wasn't an ancient, uneducated, booze-soaked blowhard was to use his inaugural address to tell them so, forever. And to *really* show off his vigor and intelligence, he opted to deliver his Martin-Scorsese-director's-cut-length speech outdoors, without a hat or overcoat, in the rain, in March. This moment of political shrewdness, of course, promptly resulted in a case of pneumonia that would promptly cut his presidency short when it promptly killed him thirty days later.<sup>6</sup>

**Fun fact:** Turns out dumpiness runs in the family, with Harrison's grandson Benjamin eventually being elected 23rd President of the United States. Known as the "human iceberg," he was declared to be an even less effectual president than his grandpa, who literally spent his entire one-month presidency in bed getting enemas.

**Words to live by:** Wondering just how longwinded Big Willy could be? Look no further than this very real *single* sentence from his inaugural address:

However strong may be my present purpose to realize the expectations of a magnanimous and confiding people, I too well understand the dangerous temptations to which I shall be exposed from the magnitude of the power which it has been the pleasure of the people to commit to my hands not to place my chief confidence upon the aid of that Almighty Power which has hitherto protected me and enabled me to bring to favorable issues other important but still greatly inferior trusts heretofore confided to me by my country.

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6 | While this cause of death is a delightfully ironic ouroboros of dumpiness, it's worth mentioning that some newer research suggests that pneumonia was not actually responsible for his demise. Rather, it may have been the result of the fetid marsh water next to the White House which caused a fatal gastrointestinal issue after it spread throughout his body thanks to the frequent enemas he insisted his physician give him (presumably as a medically incorrect way to cure the pneumonia he definitely still got from delivering an 8,445-word speech while wet). So... that's also pretty dumpy.

**Probable dream date:** An evening of verbally shaming Native Americans for hours in a blizzard with no pants on while your dad's slaves bring you hard cider in a novelty mug with your face on it (also, John Tyler is there).

## MILLARD FILLMORE

**Served:** 3 years (1850–1853)

**Nicknames:** “The ‘Accidental’ President,” “The American Louis Philippe,” “Mill the Pill,” “Milly Filly Puddin’ Pie”

**Sign:** Pisces

**Likes:** Losing elections, quietly accepting slavery, soup

**Dislikes:** Getting reelected, being on the right side of history, Masons

The true Eeyore of presidents, Fillmore embodies dumpiness in a way only a personality-less coat hanger who never actually got elected president can. Fillmore's road to the White House started on the same barely audible low note it would eventually end on when he died while eating soup in 1874. After losing an election for governor of New York, Fillmore attempted to run for president as a candidate for the Anti-Masonic party. It did not work out.<sup>8</sup> Not one to be dissuaded by consistent, abject failure, he then lobbied to become the vice presidential candidate on the Whig ticket with Henry Clay. He was declined. Finally, in 1849, Fillmore got his shot when he was selected to run as Zachary Taylor's VP.<sup>9</sup> The two men did not meet at any point during the campaign, which Fillmore was not invited to participate in. Upon finally meeting Fillmore after the election, Taylor immediately decided to exclude him from all councils of power. Thankfully, a year later, Taylor drank some bad milk and died (somehow), leaving the country in the hands of a man who

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7 | Which is a pretty sick burn if you know who Louis-Phillipe is... I'm guessing.

8 | If you haven't heard of the Anti-Masonic party, that's because it was almost immediately dissolved for being a bad idea and absorbed by the Whigs instead.

9 | And only because, as a southern military hero, Taylor needed to temper his image with a pliable Northern running mate so he could keep the Union together while still very much enjoying slavery.

had hitherto barely participated in the administration, presumably thanks to his complete lack of convictions or personality. Fittingly, Fillmore kicked off his technical presidency by accidentally exacerbating tensions that would directly set the stage for the Civil War. In an effort to ease relations between pro and anti-slavery factions, he hurriedly passed the controversial Compromise of 1850, which might have worked had it not included one of history's more obviously bad ideas: the Fugitive Slave Act. While it wasn't all his fault, it was enough of his fault that in 1852, when it came time for him to run for his own full term as president, his own party voted him out of the job while he was still in office, nominating Winfield Scott as the Whig candidate instead. Never one to learn from his mistakes at all, Fillmore agreed to run again in 1856, this time accepting the third party nomination of an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, anti-Mason, Protestants-only faction literally nicknamed the "Know-Nothing Party." Naturally, he lost in a landslide, carrying a full ten states less than even the other guy who also lost. While that was the end of what I guess can technically be described as a presidential career, turns out you can keep being on the wrong side of history even after you've left the White House. Which is why Fillmore spent the next decade opposing all the policies of Abraham Lincoln during the same Civil War that he accidentally helped cause. He then died of a stroke in 1874; his last words were "The nourishment is palatable," and again, they were about soup.

**Fun facts:** None.

**Words to live by:** If you search the internet for Millard Fillmore quotes, this is literally one of the only ones you will find:

God knows I detest slavery but it is an existing evil, and we must endure it and give it such protection as is guaranteed by the Constitution.

It's... not great.

**WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT****Served:** 1 full term (1909–1913)**Nicknames:** “Big Lub,” “Big Bill,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Fat-T,” “The Visual Representation of What a Walrus Would Look Like in Human Form”**Sign:** Virgo**Likes:** Possums, breakfast meats, Theodore Roosevelt (sometimes)**Dislikes:** Staying awake, bathing without incident, Theodore Roosevelt (sometimes)

As the only president listed to actually serve a full term for which he was lawfully elected, Taft rates relatively low on the political dumpiness scale.<sup>10</sup> But don't discount him and his droopy-ass moustache just yet. As far as his presidential career goes, Taft is chiefly remembered for two things: living in Teddy Roosevelt's figurative shadow (politics-wise), and simultaneously casting the biggest literal shadow in presidential history (girth-wise). At five-foot-eleven, he was roughly 330 pounds during his stay in the White House, making him the most corpulent candidate to ever hold office. Now, we (meaning me) are not in the habit of fat-shaming anyone, and Taft's weight alone does not a dumpy president make. His insane diet, however, is enough to up his dump into the stratosphere. At a time when lard was a sandwich spread and Bernaise sauce was just “healthy gravy,” White House physicians *still* felt that Taft's eating habits fell somewhere between “ill-advised” and “medically bonkers.”<sup>11</sup> His mostly steak diet may have also contributed to his habit of frequently and unapologetically just falling asleep—usually during conversations, but also at White House

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10 | He's considered by many to be a middle-ranked president of reasonably good standing, and his subsequent and much more substantial career as Chief Justice would turn out to be an illustrious and important one... but back to the dumpy stuff.

11 | Once, on a trip to Savannah, Georgia, the president's hosts were advised to prepare him a light meal of potted partridge, grilled partridge, broiled venison, a second kind of venison, waffles with butter and syrup, hominy, hot rolls, bacon... and a grapefruit. For breakfast. Presumably (definitely), he ate two other full meals that day.

functions, funerals, church services, and sometimes at his desk. Given that he was often directly compared to his cartoonishly robust and wildly popular predecessor, Teddy Roosevelt, as a sloppy, moustachioed snooze balloon, Taft often felt overshadowed. Not that he didn't try (and fail) to establish his own unique "brand." Certainly you've heard of the Teddy Bear, a toy popularized (and immortalized) during Roosevelt's presidency. And how about the Billy Possum? No? Yes, well, this alternative toy option was inspired by Taft's one-time decision to request and then eat an eighteen-pound roasted opossum at a state dinner. When this didn't kill him instantly, toy manufacturers decided that unseating the Teddy Bear with an obviously derivative and much less fun stuffed opossum, called the "Billy Possum," was a plan too stupid to fail. But it did. Almost immediately. And the Teddy Bear vs Billy Possum narrative was unfortunately a common theme. After serving out the rest of McKinley's term and one of his own, Roosevelt made the decision to step aside and endorse his pal Taft for prez (allegedly puppeteering his campaign and early presidency every step of the way). Regretting that decision, Roosevelt eventually distanced himself from his politically and physically much softer friend,<sup>12</sup> eventually returning from his sabbatical just in time for the next election. He then proceeded to run, without warning, as a third-party candidate,<sup>13</sup> only to wind up splitting the vote and effectively end Taft's presidency as swiftly as he orchestrated it in the first place. This, of course, completes the circle of Taft's two-pronged dumpiness—when he wasn't growing his moustache, consuming animals whole, or falling asleep at work, he *was* busy being president... but only when Teddy Roosevelt, and the wild horse he tamed with his bare eye contact and then rode in on, said he could.

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12 | By embarking on the standard year-long big-game hunting expedition in the African Savanna that I guess you take if you're an actual real-life cartoon.

13 | He named it the "Bull Moose Party," by the way, just in case you couldn't tell that he was very outdoorsy.

**Fun facts:** In addition to his other monikers, for many years sweet, sleepy Willy was also known, quite simply, as “the president who got stuck in the White House bathtub and then needed six White House attendants to pry him out.” While that story may be somewhat apocryphal, we do know he eventually had a tub installed that all four workmen were able to fully climb into and sit down in all at the same time.

**Ideal evening:** For a tubby tub-lover like Taft, the perfect end to a perfect day of consuming large game would probably include taking a snooze in a hotel bathtub... perhaps causing it to break and overflow, soaking the dinner guests a floor below with his used, meat-sweat-infused bath water. Just kidding, that absolutely happened in June of 1915.

## WARREN G. HARDING

**Served:** 2 years (1921–1923)

**Nicknames:** “Wobbly Warren,” “Winnie,” “President Pervert,” “Gross”

**Sign:** Scorpio

**Likes:** Erotic poetry, sex with his friends’ wives, anthropomorphizing his genitals

**Dislikes:** Sex with his own wife, refusing bribes, immigrants

While some presidents are forgotten for not accomplishing anything while in office, others are remembered for being sexual deviants who also didn’t accomplish anything while in office. So if your turn-ons include a corrupt presidency cut short by a heart attack and preceded by a history of political fraud and sexual misconduct, look no harder than at Warren G. Harding. While he may have been an awful, unethical commander-in-chief who literally described himself, *while* president, as “Not fit for this office and who should never have been here,” Harding is probably best remembered for nicknaming his penis “Jerry”— a legacy that is historically preserved today thanks to the 1,000-plus pages of erotic correspondence he exchanged with his best friend’s wife during their fifteen-year-long affair. Worried their affair would be discovered, and unwilling to *not* use government statio-

nery, he would often write to his paramour, Carrie Phillips, in “code”—the “code” literally being to just refer to his genitals as “Jerry” and then to describe in not at all encoded detail all the things “Jerry” wanted to do to her. He would also frequently still use his own name in the letters, making it seem like he and his random friend “Jerry” were just hoping to have sex with her together. Clever boy. Whether he felt the need to “encode” the letters to avoid detection by his wife and Phillips’ husband, or whether, as a politician already embroiled in several bribery scandals, he didn’t want his penis to be associated with a woman who was absolutely on a government watchlist for being a German sympathizer (she was), is hard to say. What we can say is that long before his naughty letters were finally released to the public in 2014, history generally regarded him as one of the worst presidents of all time, best remembered for an administration rife with corruption, and for fathering the illegitimate child of a *different* mistress whom he refused to acknowledge or provide for in his will. He died in his bed of a heart attack while forcing his wife, Florence, to read him an article about what a great guy he was in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

**Fun fact:** Warren G. Harding lost the entire White House China collection in a game of poker. Presumably, he later blamed the incident on “Jerry.”

**Words to live by:** How about this very real poem that he wrote to Carrie Philips on January 28, 1912:

I love your poise  
 Of perfect thighs  
 When they hold me  
 In paradise...  
 I love the rose  
 Your garden grows  
 Love seashell pink

That over it glows  
 I love to suck  
 Your breath away  
 I love to cling—There long to stay...  
 I love you garb'd  
 But naked more  
 Love your beauty  
 To thus adore...  
 I love you when  
 You open eyes  
 And mouth and arms  
 And cradling thighs...  
 If I had you today, I'd kiss and  
 Fondle you into my arms<sup>14</sup>  
 And hold you there until you said,  
 'Warren, oh, Warren,' in a  
 benediction of blissful joy...  
 I rather like that encore  
 discovered in Montreal.<sup>15</sup>  
 Did you?

I guess the “Jerry” code only works if he’s directly referencing his erection. Like he does in this Christmas Eve note from 1918:

Jerry sends Christmas greetings! He would come too, if I might:  
 would he be welcomed cordially?

INTO YOUR MOUTH. Or how 'bout this one he sent on official U.S.  
 Senate Stationery:

Wish I could take you to Mount Jerry. Wonderful spot.

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14 | Because there is nothing a woman wants more than to be fondled *into* someone's arms.

15 |... what?

GET IT? MOUNT JERRY IS HIS DICK AND HE WANTS HER TO CLIMB IT I GUESS. And of course, who could forget this deliciously “encoded” missive from 1913:

Wouldn't you like to get sopping wet out on Superior—not the lake—for the joy of fevered fondling and melting kisses? Wouldn't you like to make the suspected occupant of the next room jealous of the joys he could not know?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY “WET,” WARREN? I CAN'T TELL WHAT YOU MEAN.

### **GERALD R. FORD JR.**

**Served:** 3 years (1974–1977)

**Nickname:** “Jerry”

**Sign:** Cancer

**Likes:** Collecting stamps, smiling blankly, falling down

**Dislikes:** Getting elected, getting reelected, when you duff a shot on the back nine only to have Bob (Hope) chip in for an eagle on the 18th

When it comes to dumpy POTUSes, no one puts the “useless” in POTUSeless like Gerald Ford. At 895 days, he holds the record for shortest presidency of anyone who didn't die in office. And if that doesn't wow you, he is also the only individual in U.S. history to have held the office of both president and vice president without ever having being elected to *either* one. After Spiro T. Agnew committed tax evasion and was forced to resign in disgrace as Nixon's VP, the Nixon administration decided to replace him with Ford, who had developed a reputation for honesty and openness. A few years later, Ford would replace Nixon when he was also forced to resign in disgrace for his involvement in the Watergate scandal. Now, if getting jobs because someone more qualified than you resigned in disgrace doesn't get your Ford motor running, I don't know what will. How about this, though: that reputation for openness and honesty that helped Ford become vice president without getting elected? Yes, well, he destroyed that almost instantly when

he made the unbelievably unpopular decision to give Nixon a full pardon as one of his first acts upon becoming the president (again, without having been elected). Ford spent the rest of his extremely short presidency driving the economy into a recession and tripping while trying to exit Air Force One.<sup>16</sup> A former football star and teen model, Ford would spend a lot of his post-presidency falling down while skiing, falling down while walking his dogs, and playing celebrity golf with Bob Hope. But although he was widely considered to be as uninspiring as he was stunningly (almost upsettingly) klutzy, he *was* considered to be one of history's friendliest presidents. So that's... nice? I mean, he seemed nice. Wrong. Consistently. But nice!

**Words to live by:** Ford's delightful dumpiness is perhaps best summarized by this awesome, very tragic joke he once made about his own presidency:

I am a Ford, not a Lincoln.

Unfortunately, *that* was the cleverest thing he ever said.

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16 | Google it. It's awesome.