

Margaret Chase Smith Library 2016 Essay Contest

THIRD-PLACE ESSAY

Qualities of the Ideal President

by Liana Dudley Holland

Each year the Margaret Chase Smith Library sponsors an essay contest for high school seniors. As it was a presidential election year, the 2016 essay prompt asked students to reflect on their ideal candidate for president. We are pleased to feature here the top three 2016 prize-winning essays.

This November, for the fifty-eighth time in the life of our country, the citizens of America must make a choice. Like the many generations before us, we must choose who shall lead and represent this nation for the next four years. Standing together, we must study our beliefs and the beliefs of the presidential candidates, we must weigh our needs against our desires, we must decide where we will stand strong as individuals and where we will compromise for the good of all. Some of the things we must consider are the basic qualities that constitute the ideal president. As one who has studied past presidents extensively, it is clear that the most fundamental elements a president must have are integrity and honesty, the ability to unite and reassure the people in times of hardship, a steadfast devotion to world peace, and an eye that can perceive the consequences of every action. Building from these criteria, we must choose our forty-fifth president.

The key role of the president is to reflect and represent the people, to serve as the figurehead of a nation, both to the citizens of the nation and to the outside world. It is a popular belief in society today that what others think does not matter; while it is true we cannot allow others to hold us back, it does not give anyone free license to offend, disrespect, or otherwise abuse whomsoever they wish. The reputation of the country can be directly correlated to the reputation of its leader. It is imperative to the function of the United States as a world power that we maintain a good rapport

with other countries. It is therefore essential that the presidents of our country conduct themselves with honesty and integrity. This is well exemplified in the life and presidency of John Adams, a member of the Federalist party and a “man of principle,” who believed that “honesty, sincerity, and openness... [were] essential marks of a good mind (McCullough 2001: 42).” Throughout his life, Adams presented himself to others with an unbending sense of morality and courtesy, and should be viewed as an example to us all.

While it is critical that a president be a credit to the ideals of her country, she must also have the ability to unite and reassure the people in times of hardship. Without the clear surety of a leader they trust the people, like sheep under the watch of an incompetent shepherd, will panic and plunge into chaos. When Franklin D. Roosevelt came to office during the height of the Great Depression, he saw the plight of his fellow citizens and took action immediately. Just days after his inauguration on March 4, 1933, Roosevelt declared a “bank holiday” to delay the run on banks that was quickly dissolving the Federal Reserve. In an attempt to balance this grim and desperate act, the president made a radio broadcast to reassure the people that the bank holiday was a decision made out of confidence, not of confusion. “My friends,” he began, dropping all formalities, “I want to talk for a few minutes with the people of the United States about banking” (Latson 2015). Roosevelt went on to explain his

reasoning behind the holiday in simple terms the average citizen could understand. Throughout the Depression he would make 30 more broadcasts, addressing the people in a concise, consoling manner, as though he were an old friend seated comfortably in their own kitchens. This was how Roosevelt guided the nation through one of the most difficult periods in its history.

The quest for world peace has been in the hearts and minds of many around the world for centuries. But the idea has been repeatedly spoiled by selfish individuals, cruel leaders, and frantic populations. Many of the wars that have torn the world apart were needless. Yet many people believe that the search for global amity is a vain one. This belief is far from correct, as proved by the actions of John F. Kennedy throughout his presidency. President Kennedy was a devout believer in the movement towards world peace and encouraged his people to do the same. He founded the Peace Corps for men and women to assist developing countries, supported the civil rights movement, and sought to strengthen relations with Latin America. In an address at the American University in June of 1963, Kennedy said, "What kind of peace am I talking about? What kind of peace do we seek? Not Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living...not merely peace in our time but peace for all time." It is this conviction that we should seek when choosing our next president in November.

There is a story told among those in business called "The Three Stonecutters." In the story, a traveler comes across three stonecutters and, curious, asks the first one what he is doing. "Can't you see?" the man replies, "I'm cutting a stone." The second one, when asked the same

question answers, "I am being the best stonecutter in the whole county." Still not satisfied, the traveler asks the third man what he is doing, to which he replies, "I am building a cathedral." The moral of this story is simple: true leaders have a vision for their work and know that they do it for a purpose, a greater good. This is a quality inherent to all commanders, and it is particularly clear in President Obama, who has worked hard over his two terms in office to reform the US healthcare system. President Obama began the program with a vision, not expecting it to be perfect at the start. Just as the founders of our country foresaw greatness in the small, fledgling country that they had set free, so the best leaders will always see beyond their constituents.

It is said that if one wishes to know the mind of a person, we must listen to her words. It is also said that actions speak louder than words. In the coming presidential election, we, the people of America, must listen carefully to both the candidates' words and actions, using our minds and our hearts to choose what we feel is right for our country. As a democratic republic, we have the obligation as well as the right to vote for the man or woman who will define us for the next four years. It is not a casual choice: the world can change drastically in four years, nations can be raised or razed, and we must choose wisely. We must watch the manner in which they present themselves to the public, know the values by which they live their lives; we must listen to their opinions and their hopes for all lands and all people, not just our own. And when the time comes to cast our votes, we must not have doubt. 🐉

REFERENCES

- Latson, Jennifer. 2015. "How FDR's Radio Voice Solved a Banking Crisis." *Time Magazine* (12 March).
- McCullough, David G. 2001. *John Adams*. Simon & Schuster, New York.



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