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Contact:

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Siena College Poll

FDR America's Greatest President

Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Washington, and Jefferson Round Out Top Five
Andrew Johnson, Buchanan, Harding, Bring Up the Rear

LOUDONVILLE, NY – After twenty years and four expert surveys, the list of America's Greatest Presidents remains remarkably consistent – and so does the list of our least regarded leaders, according to the latest Survey of U.S. Presidents conducted by the Siena Research Institute (SRI), at Siena College.

The SRI Survey of U.S. Presidents is conducted during the second year of the first term of a new president. SRI began surveying expert opinion on the presidency in 1982 during the first term of Ronald Reagan, and continued during the terms of George H. Bush, Bill Clinton and now George W. Bush. The SRI survey is based on the responses of over 200 history and political science experts from American colleges and universities. Previous SRI surveys of U.S. Presidents have been reported in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (a refereed journal published by the Center for the Study of the Presidency), the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and national news networks.

Results of Siena Research Institute Presidential Ranking Survey				
Top Ten Presidents by Survey Year				
Rank	1982	1990	1994	2002
1	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt	F. Roosevelt
2	Jefferson	Lincoln	Lincoln	Lincoln
3	Lincoln	Jefferson	T. Roosevelt	T. Roosevelt
4	Washington	Washington	Washington	Washington
5	T. Roosevelt	T. Roosevelt	Jefferson	Jefferson
6	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson	Wilson
7	Truman	Truman	Truman	Truman
8	Kennedy	Madison	Eisenhower	Monroe
9	Madison	Jackson	Madison	Madison
10	J. Adams	Kennedy	Kennedy	Eisenhower

“American college and university professors clearly regard FDR, Lincoln, Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and Jefferson as remarkable leaders,” says Tom Kelly, Siena College professor of History and American Studies emeritus and survey co-director. “FDR’s margin over the others is probably due to the fact that whereas Lincoln confronted the crisis of the Civil War, FDR faced the crisis of both the great Depression and that of World War II. It is very likely that

Jefferson’s decline from third to fifth place is due to the impact of the Sally Hemings affair – the charges that he fathered children with one of his slaves which, in recent years, has been increasingly accepted as true.”

Similarly, the bottom ranks show great consistency. For the first three surveys, Pierce, Grant, Buchanan, A. Johnson, and Harding filled out the final five slots, in the same order; in this year’s survey, Fillmore served as a spoiler, elevating Grant off the list.

“The bottom three have always – and properly – been Harding, Buchanan and Andrew Johnson,” explains Kelly. “It is particularly interesting that Buchanan, Lincoln’s predecessor, and Andrew Johnson, Lincoln’s successor, represent the nadir of American presidents. Buchanan, on the eve of the Civil War, brought the Republic into peril, and Andrew Johnson’s racism played a role in the failure of Reconstruction. Harding represented only corruption in American politics.”

Results of Siena Research Institute Presidential Ranking Survey			
Bottom Five Rankings in Survey Year			
1982	1990	1994	2002
35) Pierce	36) Pierce	37) Pierce	38) Fillmore
36) Grant	37) Grant	38) Grant	39) Pierce
37) Buchanan	38) Buchanan	39) Buchanan	40) Harding
38) A. Johnson	39) A. Johnson	40) A. Johnson	41) Buchanan
39) Harding	40) Harding	41) Harding	42) A. Johnson

The ongoing SRI studies are intended to provide a means of “tracking” the opinion of scholars regarding presidents, their successes and failures over an extended period of time. Survey co-directors Thomas Kelly and Douglas Lonnstrom also point out that, in addition to demonstrating the stability of the presidential rankings, the survey illustrates changes in opinion, particularly for recent presidents, as the passage of time provides new information or greater objectivity. For example, President Carter went from 33rd in 1982 to 24th in 1990 and 25th in the last two surveys. President George H. Bush went from 18th in 1990 to 31st in 1994 and 22nd in 2002.

In addition to looking at overall rankings, it is also interesting to note how a president fares in each of the twenty categories that make up the questionnaire. President Clinton, with overall ranks of 16 (1994) and 18 (2002), was ranked in the top ten of all U.S. presidents in *Handling of the economy* (2nd), *Ability to compromise* (3rd), *Communications ability* (8th), and in *Intelligence* (9th). He ranked in the bottom five in *Avoidance of crucial mistakes* (38th) and *Integrity* (41st), just above President Nixon’s rock bottom 42nd.

“From a statistical standpoint, this survey has great validity,” says Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom, Siena College professor of statistics and SRI director. “First, there is amazing consistency across the twenty years of the study, and second, the experts clearly were very selective in rating the presidents in each category.”

Following this news release are tables revealing the list of twenty categories in which each president was judged and overall results from each of the four surveys.

For additional information about the survey, including background, variations and interpretations of the rankings, contact Professor Tom Kelly at 518-372-7890 or Dr. Douglas Lonnstrom at 518-783-2362 (office) or 518-456-6073 (home).

Attachments (2):

- The Twenty Categories
- Rankings by Survey Year

Respondents were asked to score all American presidents on a scale of 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) for the following categories:

- 1) Background (family, education, experience)
- 2) Party Leadership
- 3) Communication Ability (speak, write)
- 4) Relationship with Congress
- 5) Court Appointments
- 6) Handling of U.S. Economy
- 7) Luck
- 8) Ability to Compromise
- 9) Willingness to take Risks
- 10) Executive Appointments
- 11) Overall Ability
- 12) Imagination
- 13) Domestic Accomplishments
- 14) Integrity
- 15) Executive Ability
- 16) Foreign Policy Accomplishments
- 17) Leadership Ability
- 18) Intelligence
- 19) Avoid Crucial Mistakes
- 20) Your Present Overall View

Results of Siena Research Institute Presidential Ranking Survey				
	Rank in Survey Year			
President	1982	1990	1994	2002
Washington	04	04	04	04
J. Adams	10	14	12	12
Jefferson	02	03	05	05
Madison	09	08	09	09
Monroe	15	11	15	08
J.Q. Adams	17	16	17	17
Jackson	13	09	11	13
Van Buren	21	21	22	24
W. Harrison	26	35	28	36
Tyler	34	33	34	37
Polk	12	13	14	11
Taylor	29	34	33	34
Fillmore	32	32	35	38
Pierce	35	36	37	39
Buchanan	37	38	39	41
Lincoln	03	02	02	02
A. Johnson	38	39	40	42
Grant	36	37	38	35
Hayes	22	23	24	27
Garfield	25	30	26	33
Arthur	24	26	27	30
Cleveland	18	17	19	20
B. Harrison	31	29	30	32
McKinley	19	19	18	19
T. Roosevelt	05	05	03	03
Taft	20	20	21	21
Wilson	06	06	06	06
Harding	39	40	41	40
Coolidge	30	31	36	29
Hoover	27	28	29	31
F. Roosevelt	01	01	01	01
Truman	07	07	07	07
Eisenhower	11	12	08	10
Kennedy	08	10	10	14
L. Johnson	14	15	13	15
Nixon	28	25	23	26
Ford	23	27	32	28
Carter	33	24	25	25
Reagan	16	22	20	16
G. H. Bush	-	18	31	22
Clinton	-	-	16	18
G.W. Bush	-	-	-	23