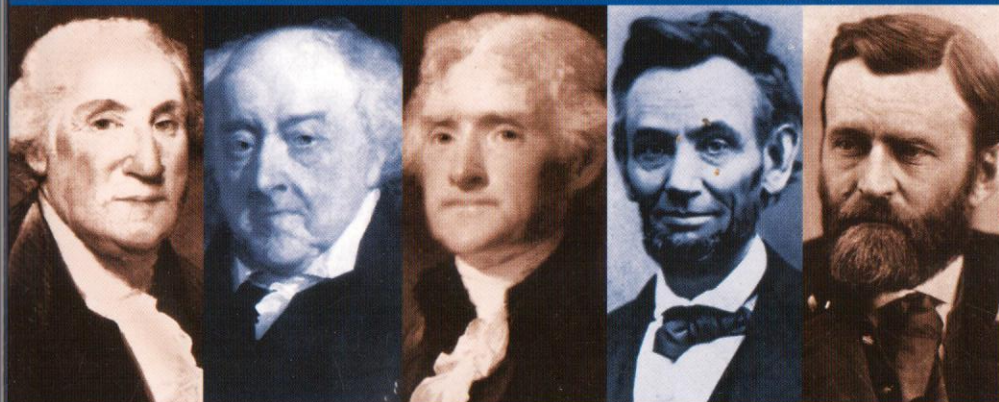


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WIT AND WISDOM
OF THE
AMERICAN
PRESIDENTS

A Book of Quotations

Edited by Joslyn Pine



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A Book of Quotations

Edited by
JOSLYN T. PINE



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DEDICATION

To my parents, in loving memory

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Note

"If men were angels," remarked James Madison in the 51st Federalist Paper, "no government would be necessary." This notion at least partially expressed the sentiments of the Founding Fathers as they sought to shape the government of the young nation at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787. Yet it is just as true to say that they were equally mistrustful of too much authority. Their ultimate solution, therefore, was to achieve a balance by defining a strong central authority that was limited in its ability to abuse power.

While constitutional provisions for the legislative branch are described in meticulous detail, the American Constitution is rather vague and ambiguous on the subject of presidential powers. Some, of course, are enumerated, such as the role of commander in chief of the armed forces, the authority to grant pardons and reprieves, the veto power over legislation, as well as the ability to make treaties with the consent of the Senate, and to appoint judges and ambassadors.

In fact, as our history has unfolded, this lack of precise definition for the executive branch has been fortuitous. It has allowed the presidency to evolve through both historical circumstance and in accordance with the special gifts of the individual at the helm. Those presidents held in highest esteem by historians, such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, filled the office when far-reaching powers were demanded in order for the nation to survive times of crisis. Many others, while not so critically challenged by the turmoil of events, still managed to distinguish themselves as the movers and shakers of their times.

Here, history is indeed biography as we reflect on the story of America as also the story of her presidents. Their own words mark the great themes in American history as well as mark them as remarkable men.

Are these quotes, in fact, in "their own words"? In earlier decades of the nation's history, speeches were generally more widely read in newspapers than delivered aloud to live audiences. Inevitably, this shaped their form and content. There existed then informal relationships among presidents and their colleagues, who were sometimes called

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"I know only two tunes," said Ulysses S. Grant. "One of them is 'Yankee Doodle' and the other isn't." Jimmy Carter observed: "Whatever starts in California unfortunately has an inclination to spread." And Warren Harding complained: "The White House is a prison. I can't get away from the men who dog my footsteps. I am in jail."

This entertaining, handy little book includes over 400 other memorable quotes, expressed by America's chief executives over the past two centuries, among them Chester Arthur's blunt "I may be President of the United States, but my private life is nobody's damn business," Calvin Coolidge's terse "The chief business of America is business," Dwight Eisenhower's "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from a cornfield," and George Herbert Walker Bush's "Read my lips, no new taxes."

From George Washington to Barack Obama, these presidential declarations will not only provide public speakers and students of American history with a wealth of useful material, they'll also delight general readers.

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