

The entire graphic is framed by an ornate, dark grey scrollwork border. At the top, a semi-circular scrollwork element arches over the central text. The sides and bottom are composed of vertical panels of repeating scrollwork patterns. The central text is set against a solid olive green background.

THE ROSENBACH 

GALLERY GATEWAY

SUCCESSION

Why Presidential History Matters Now



Please support the Rosenbach!

SUCCESSION: Why Presidential History Matters Now was made possible by object loans from the collection of the late David Rosenbach Sackey, the great-nephew of Philip H. and Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach, and by a financial gift from Renée Sackey made in honor of her late husband David Rosenbach Sackey. The exhibition was on display in Galleries 1 and 2 of the Rosenbach from June 15 – November 26, 2023.

The exhibition was curated by Dr. Alexander Lawrence Ames, Director of Outreach & Engagement, and Judith M. Guston, Curator & Senior Director of Collections.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The exhibitions development team included Jobi Zink, Registrar and Associate Director of Collections; Elizabeth E. Fuller, Librarian; Nancy Loi, Assistant Librarian; Tom Bendel, Facilities Superintendent; Chelsea Sanz, Director of Operations; Ruth Mercedes, Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries DEAI intern; Emily Poteat, Villanova University LePage History Center intern; Matt Gay, mountmaker; Ben Neiditz, exhibition preparator; and Mary Anne Casey of Olivetree Design, exhibition graphic design.

Several labels in the exhibition were written by students in the Rosenbach’s course The Curator’s Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach’s Collections in fall 2022. (Authors are identified at the bottoms of these labels.) For more information about the next offering of this course and other history courses, speak with a Visitor Services Assistant.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Welcome to the Gallery Gateway.....	4
Exhibition Title Graphic	5
<i>Succession: Why Presidential History Matters Now</i>	6
The Character of a President	9
From Campaigner in Chief to Commander in Chief.....	19
Negotiating Constitutional Powers	31
War, Crisis, and Violence.....	44
Man and Myth.....	57
Collecting American History.....	66
Visit the Rosenbach.....	69

WELCOME TO THE GALLERY GATEWAY

WHAT IS A GALLERY GATEWAY?

Welcome to the Gallery Gateway for the Rosenbach's exhibition *Succession: Why Presidential History Matters Now*. This Gallery Gateway provides all of the content presented on-site in the Rosenbach's exhibition galleries via an easily-accessible, easy-to-print online format. The Gallery Gateway is a hybrid of a traditional museum exhibition catalogue and digital exhibitions, which have become popular in recent years. The Gateway presents a large amount of visual and text-based content in a PDF format that makes exhibition content as accessible as possible. The document can be viewed online or downloaded to a personal device for viewing or printing.

The purpose of the Gallery Gateway is to make exhibition content available to those who cannot visit the Rosenbach in person and to create a permanent record of the information shared in the exhibition.

The Rosenbach will make Gallery Gateways for its exhibitions available in its Online Exhibition Portal at rosenbach.org/gallery-gateway. You will also find other special features there, including sound effects for web listening, digital interactives, graphics from the gallery, interviews, and other video content. Check the portal for other features as more Gallery Gateways go live.

HOW TO USE THE GALLERY GATEWAY

View the Artifacts

- Explore photos of the exhibition.

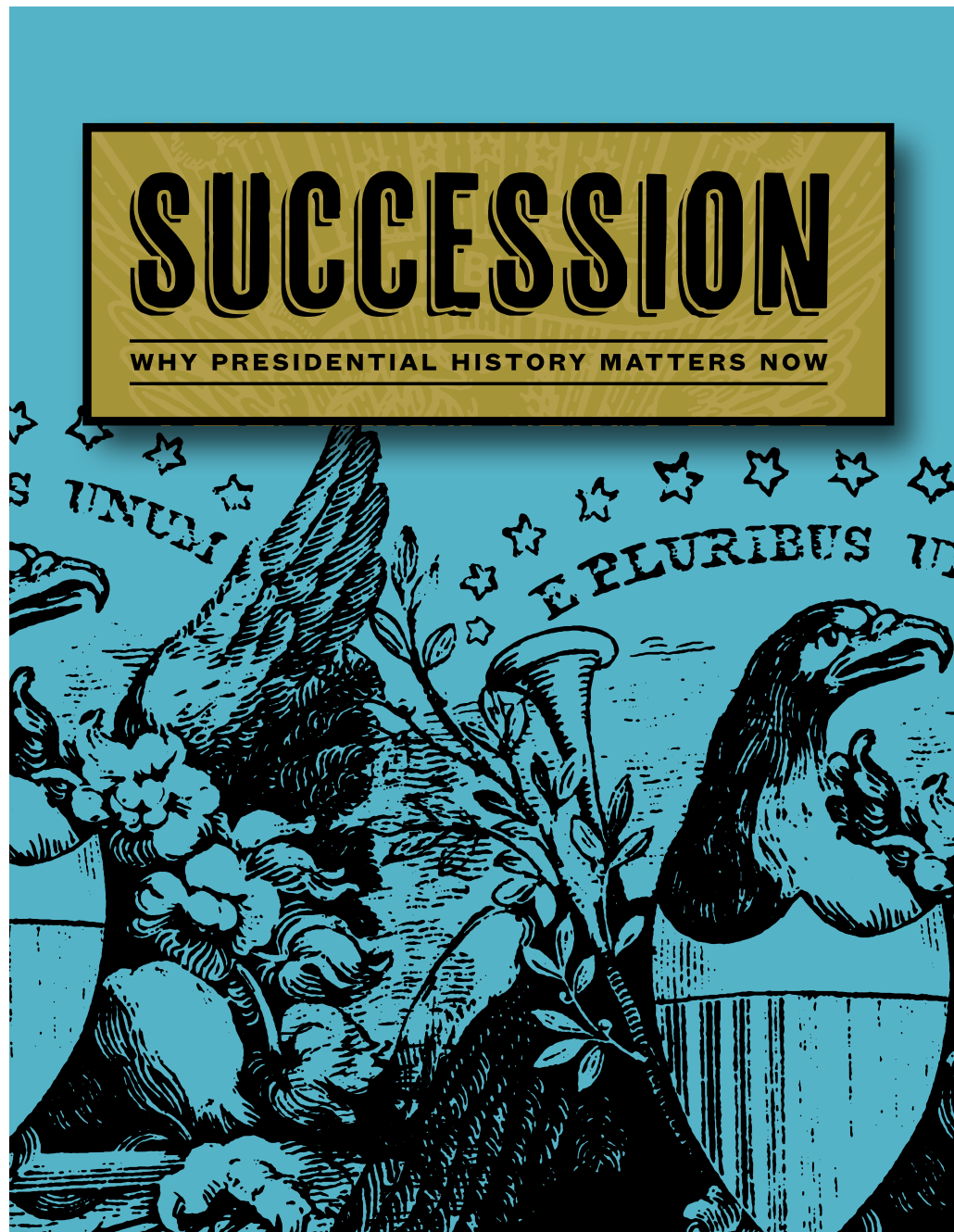
Read the Text

- Engage with the interpretive text that accompanies artifacts on display in the exhibition.

Consider a Visit!

- Discover the Rosenbach through research, tours, and programs.

EXHIBIT
TITLE GRAPHIC





ON VIEW AT THE ROSENBACH FROM JUNE 15–NOVEMBER 26, 2023

In the 21st century, the office of the presidency of the United States looms large over the national imagination and global affairs. The holder of the office exercises influence over the lives of all Americans—and many abroad.

Was it always so? What do we gain from the presidency's prominent place in our national life and civic identity? What price do we pay?

This exhibition features rare books, manuscripts, and objects from the holdings of the Rosenbach Museum & Library, as well as the private collection of David Rosenbach Sackey, great-nephew of museum founders Dr. A.S.W. and Philip Rosenbach. These objects invite you to ask what qualities make for a successful national leader. Good character? A willingness to put patriotism before political gain? Respect for constitutional order? Love of peace? Regard for human life? Due attention to the ceremonies of the office?

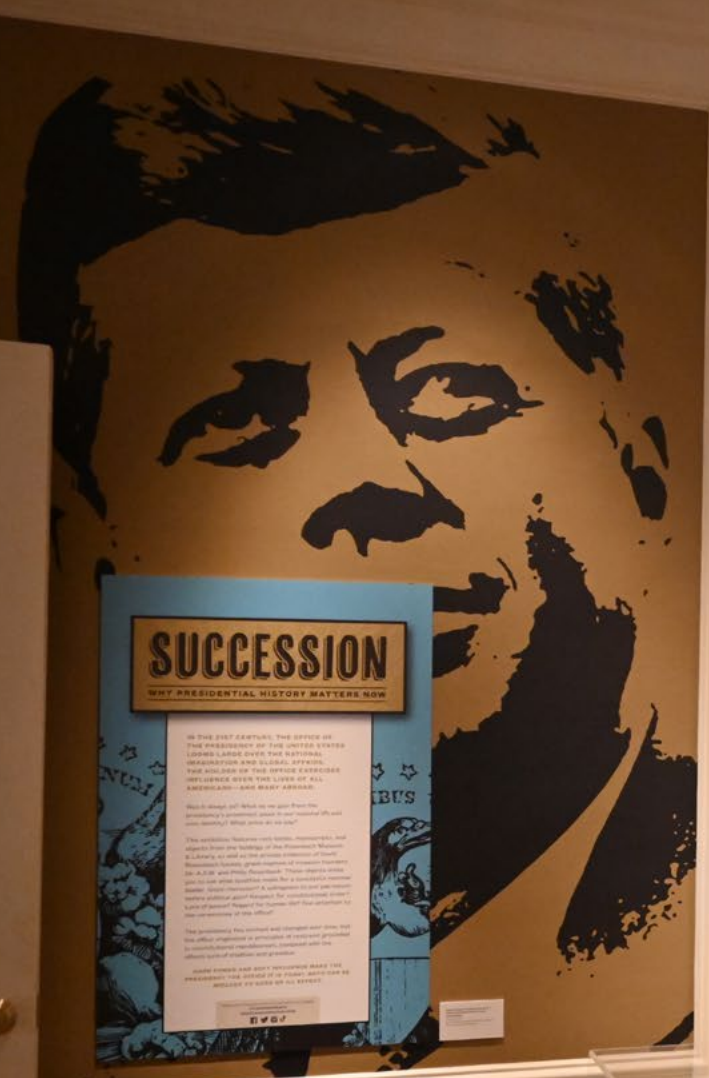
The presidency has evolved and changed over time, but the office originated in principles of restraint grounded in constitutional republicanism, combined with the office's aura of tradition and grandeur.

Hard power and soft influence make the presidency the office it is today. Both can be wielded to good or ill effect.

Share your thoughts about the exhibition with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition!



1



SUCCESSION
 WHY PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY MATTERS NOW

IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES LOVES LARGE OVER THE NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS AND GLOBAL AFFAIRS. THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE EXPRESSES INSIGHTS INTO THE LIVES OF ALL AMERICANS—AND MANY ABROAD.

How is it that we have seen from the presidency a government whose role in our lives is so central? What makes it so?

The president interacts with nations, communities, and citizens from the halls of the White House to the family, as well as the private citizens of the world. His or her actions, decisions, and choices have a profound impact on the lives of all Americans. The president's role is not just a job, but a responsibility that shapes the future of the nation.

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THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE MATTERS NOW BECAUSE THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE IS SO CENTRAL TO OUR LIVES. THE HISTORY OF THE OFFICE MATTERS NOW BECAUSE THE PRESIDENT'S ROLE IS SO CENTRAL TO OUR LIVES.

BY 1967



THE CHARACTER OF A PRESIDENT
 WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF?

THE CHARACTER OF A PRESIDENT IS A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN DETERMINING THE SUCCESS OF HIS OR HER ADMINISTRATION. THE CHARACTER OF A PRESIDENT IS A CRUCIAL FACTOR IN DETERMINING THE SUCCESS OF HIS OR HER ADMINISTRATION.

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BY 1967



THE CHARACTER OF A PRESIDENT

WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF?

Since the presidency of George Washington, Americans have looked to the president for moral leadership and cultural identity—not simply for governmental administration.

Objects from the collections of the Rosenbach Museum & Library displayed in this section of the exhibition highlight questions about presidential intellect, character, and the choice all voters face in deciding who best might lead the nation. *A Candid View of the Presidential Question* offers the in-depth analysis of candidates (in this case John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson) that today one might expect to find covered in a documentary or news report.

In a letter from John Adams to John Trumbull written during the American Revolution, Adams draws on his knowledge of republics in the ancient world, and he wisely notes that only internal “Corruption and Division” could lead to America’s downfall.

Letters written by Thomas Jefferson reflect some of the great achievements of the Revolutionary era—the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. They also showcase Jefferson’s own shortcomings and the great dilemmas of the era—namely unequal access to republican citizenship as seen in his description of the first U.S. Census, and Jefferson’s own association with enslavement.

From the founding to the present, the legacies of most presidents combine policy vision, political finesse, and the consequences of leaders’ human shortcomings.

What is the most important ethic or value for a president to hold?

Of all the presidents, who do you think was the most ethical? Why?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.

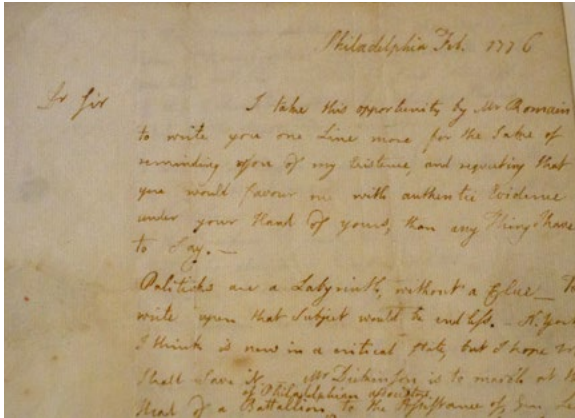


Photo by Rasheena Wilson

1. John Adams (1735–1826), autograph letter signed to John Trumbull

Philadelphia, February 1776

AMs 1052/19.1

In this handwritten letter, complete with wax seal and docket notes (identification used for storage), John Adams describes the chaotic state of politics and the possible rise of an American republic.

John Adams's assertions about "Politicks" in 1776 ring true for the present. One of the greatest risks to our nation today derives not from outside forces but from factions within. In Adams's typical acerbic tone, he reflects on the threat not only from the "Crowned Skulls, and numbskulls of Europe," but from internal discord:

"... you will find no Instance of a Republic conquered by a Monarchy, by Arms, nor any other Way but by Corruption and Division. If therefore the Colonies can be Secured against Corruption and Division... they may hope to defend themselves."

During the 1770s, John Adams was a leader in the American Revolution, a diplomat in Europe, and served as a delegate to the Continental Congress. John Trumbull (1750–1831) was a poet, political satirist, and judge, and a supporter of Adams's Federalist party.

This object label was written by Therese Tiger, a tour guide at the Rosenbach, as part of the requirements for the course "The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach's Collections" in fall 2022.



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

2. George Washington (1732–1799), Address to the Continental Congress: manuscript

23 December 1783

AMs 1150/27

Civic virtue and personal restraint are two of the highlights of the republican form of government. In the early United States, no public figure was more strongly associated with those traits than George Washington. At the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington's resignation as Commander and Chief of the Continental Army symbolized a curbing of personal power and ambition for the sake of national stability. The act of retiring "from the great theatre of action," as Washington put it in his speech, was itself revolutionary, and his actions found high praise at home and abroad for their consistency with republican ideals.

Washington delivered his voluntary resignation at noon, December 23, 1783, to seated members of the 4th Continental Congress at the Maryland State House. His speech was brief and cordial, paying homage to those who worked with him and pledging to continue his work for the common goal of a successful independent nation.

This contemporary manuscript copy of Washington's resignation speech also includes the response from the 4th Continental Congress, delivered to the assembled body by Thomas Mifflin, President of Congress. This manuscript transcribes both speeches, intertwined on the front and back of the page. Congress's response to the resignation expresses the admiration many felt toward Washington, as well as gratitude for his leadership in creating their new nation.

This label was written by Stephanie Desjardins as part of coursework for the fall 2022 offering of The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach's Collections.



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

3. Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1754–1784), *Poems on various subjects, religious and moral*

London: Printed for A. Bell, bookseller, Aldgate; and sold by Messrs. Cox and Berry, King-Street, Boston, 1773

A 773p

Phillis Wheatley was born in West Africa and brought to colonial Boston when she was only 7. She was enslaved by the Wheatley family for domestic work. Phillis learned English, Latin, and (possibly) Greek. Her early promise in composing poetry led to her first publication in the Newport Mercury newspaper in 1767. Unable to publish a book in the American colonies, she traveled to London in 1773, where she met the Countess of Huntingdon, who assisted her in publishing this volume of poems, the first by an African American woman. She was freed soon after its publication.

In December 1775, Wheatley wrote a letter to General George Washington, enclosing her poem “To His Excellency George Washington,” in which she said,

*“One century scarce perform’d its destined round/
When Gallic powers
Columbia’s fury found; And so may you, whoever dares disgrace /
The land of
freedom’s heaven-defended race! ... Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy
side, / Thy ev’ry action let the Goddess guide. / A crown, a mansion, and a
throne that shine, / With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! Be thine.”*

Washington found Wheatley talented and invited her to visit with him in March 1776 at his Cambridge, Massachusetts, headquarters. George Washington enslaved people on his properties from age 11 until his death. Can Wheatley’s poem be read as pure praise for him, or as a challenge to fulfill the new nation’s promise of freedom for all?

4. Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Autograph letter signed to David Humphreys

Paris, 18 March 1789

AMs 1059/14.5

Lists of enslaved persons: autograph manuscript

Monticello, [ca. 1811]

AMs 459/10

Lists of enslaved persons: autograph manuscript

Monticello, [ca. 1811]

AMs 460/4

The main author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was serving the government abroad during the Constitutional Convention and the period during which the Bill of Rights was debated and approved.

David Humphreys, Jefferson’s friend and the recipient of the letter shown here, had recently written to tell him about the progress of the Bill of Rights. Jefferson responds here, outlining a bill of rights that he would like to see appended to the new Constitution. He includes the right of thinking, publishing, speaking, or writing; the right of free commerce; the right of personal freedom; and trials by jury. He notes that it is dangerous not to define the circumstances for a government to keep a standing army. And he states his opposition to the perpetual re-eligibility for office of a sitting president. How do his suggestions differ from our current Bill of Rights?

The other documents you see here are lists in Jefferson’s hand that show family relationships and birth years for 75 enslaved people at his Tomahawk and Bear Creek plantations with textile allotments to them. The textiles appear to be yardage for making their own bedding and clothing.

Look carefully for partial fingerprints left by Jefferson after getting ink on his finger. Remember that these documents were written using quill pens and inkwells. The fingerprints also remind us that the writer is human and flawed, rather than the superficial icon we often create of famous historical figures.

These pages reflect the challenging story of one of our nation’s founders, who espoused equality for all in the Declaration of Independence (and even wrote scathingly against slavery in his first draft, a copy of which is in this case) yet took no measures to free the people he himself enslaved. In fact, 41 of the 56 signers of the Declaration—from both the North and South—enslaved people. In his letter here, Jefferson encouraged additional freedoms be added to the U.S. Constitution in a Bill of Rights. For whom were these rights intended?

How does reading these documents together make you feel?

5. Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), autograph letter signed to David Humphreys

Philadelphia, 23 August 1791

AMs 1059/14.6

The daily realities of American life have often fallen far short of the grand, stated ideals of the republic—or at least the logical conclusions of American philosophies of equality.

Grand ideals and contradictory realities appear in the Rosenbach's holdings of letters and other papers of Thomas Jefferson and others. In this letter written during his tenure as Secretary of State during the Washington administration, Jefferson reports to David Humphreys, then U.S. Minister to Portugal, on the results of the first United States Census, which found that, "making a very small allowance for omissions, we are upwards of four millions." The most notable omissions of this and other early U.S. censuses is who the government considered American citizens, and who it did not.

The first U.S. Census asked the name of the (white, male) householder, as well as names of all other persons who resided in the household, divided among five classifications: free white men who were at least 16 years old, free white boys (under 16 years old); free white women, all other free persons, and enslaved persons. The Census count reflected the exclusionary politics of the era, namely the fact that Indigenous residents were not counted until the 1870 Census, and the enslaved counted as three-fifths of a person—an infamous decision reached at the 1787 Constitutional Convention known historically as the Three-Fifths Compromise, which gave states with significant populations of enslaved people greater proportional representation in Congress.

6. United States, Declaration of Independence: manuscript copy [ca. 1794]

AMs 1084/7

The Rosenbach's American history collections include a manuscript copy of the Declaration of Independence, showing both Thomas Jefferson's original wording and the parts of that draft finally adopted by the Continental Congress. "Manuscript" merely means handwritten, and this hand is not Jefferson's. Jefferson made several copies in his own hand and sent one of them to his fellow signer Richard Henry Lee. The Rosenbach's manuscript was copied by an unknown person from Lee's copy, as attested by the accompanying, unsigned note.

Despite questions about who penned this copy, its contents and that of the enclosed letter are known to historians from the originals. Jefferson highlighted parts of his original draft excised by members of the committee, who edited the text. His brash confidence in his original draft's superiority suggests he also felt strongly about the detrimental impact of slavery on the new nation.

How do we reconcile that sensibility with his concurrent behavior? How do you think he did?

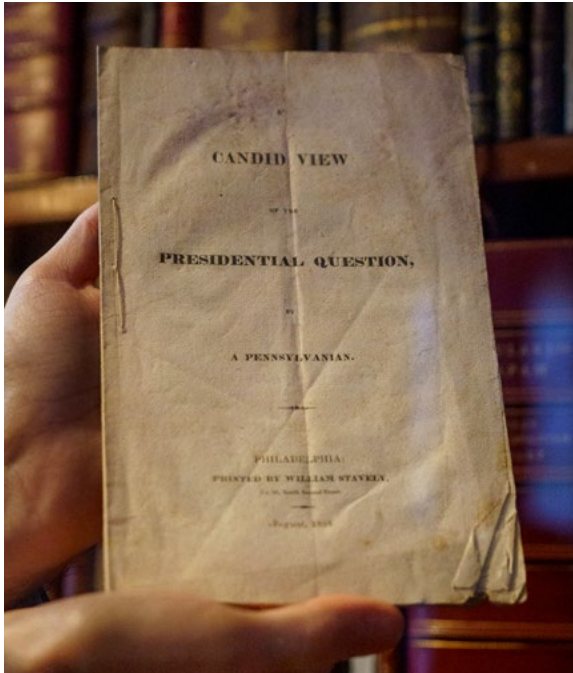


Photo by Rasheena Wilson

7. John K. Kane (1795–1858), *A candid view of the presidential question*

Philadelphia: Printed by W. Stavely, 1828

A828c

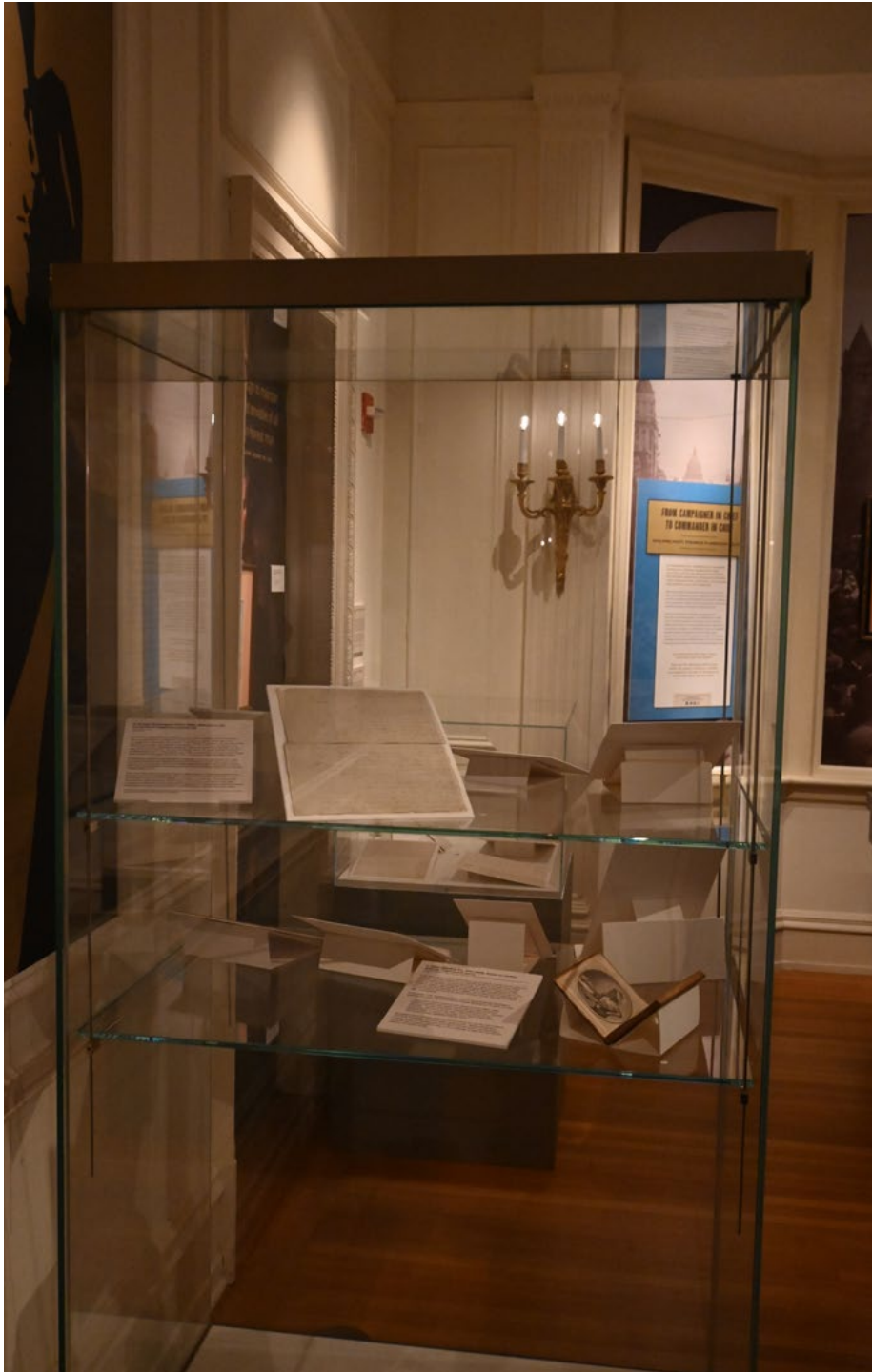
What kinds of temperament, wisdom, experiences, and abilities should Americans expect of their president? John K. Kane, a prominent Pennsylvania attorney and judge, offered strong sentiments on this question in the 1828 publication seen here. Kane, who served as Pennsylvania's Attorney General and then as a federal judge in Philadelphia, explained in the pamphlet what he as an American citizen wished for the executive office:

“WHO OUGHT TO BE OUR NEXT PRESIDENT?”

Political zealots will answer this question at once, by a reference to the decision of some party tribunal: but the candid and reflecting will find it necessary to consider many things before they decide. I am merely a citizen, pledged to the dogmas of no partisan leader, with nothing to hope from either candidate. ... I am interested in the perpetuation of our free institutions, for I have children; I am anxious that our government should give repose at home, and protection abroad to all who support it, for I am an American by birth and in principle.”

Kane wrote this tract at a time of increasing party turmoil in American politics. The 1828 election witnessed General Andrew Jackson and incumbent president John Q. Adams battle for the high office, with the famous populist general eventually emerging as the victor. Kane's opinion on the election? “I care little for Mr. Adams or General Jackson, compared with my country and the cause of truth.”

What qualities do you seek in a U.S. president? Do you think a lot of U.S. voters today would share Kane's feeling of revering the office and the nation more than presidential candidates themselves?



FROM CAMPAIGNER IN CHIEF TO COMMANDER IN CHIEF

EVOLVING PARTY DYNAMICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

IN THE MODERN ERA, PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES ARE STANDARD BEARERS FOR THEIR POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEARNED POLITICIANS WHO BECAME CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERS OF STATE UPON THEIR INAUGURATION, IN ADDITION TO FULFILLING THE DUTIES OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

Helping political elites with the ceremonial duties of the office of the presidency was for a challenge in the early 19th century, as obscure, untrained politicians sought the nomination of the president — usually in a rural or frontier area of the president's party — at home and around the world.

Thanks to the inclusion of the newly role of American presidential politics. In 1800 when the first American presidential election, James Madison successfully claims that the party's political party was in early American years through the party's role in the nation to be more active, more prominent, and more visible to the public. In fact, the party's role in the nation was to be more active, more prominent, and more visible to the public. In fact, the party's role in the nation was to be more active, more prominent, and more visible to the public.

CAN PRESIDENTS EVER TRULY LEAD
ELECTORAL POLITICS BEYOND?

WHAT DO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE SAY
FROM THE LENGTHY FINANCIAL EXPENSE
AND BOMBASTIC NATURE OF PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTIONS? WHAT DO THEY LOSE?



AMERICAN
INTELLIGENCE

FROM CAMPAIGNER IN CHIEF TO COMMANDER IN CHIEF

EVOLVING PARTY DYNAMICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

In the modern era, presidents of the United States are standard-bearers for their political parties and seasoned politicians who become ceremonial heads of state upon their inaugurations, in addition to fulfilling the duties of the chief executive.

Balancing political roles with the ceremonial duties of the office of the presidency can be a challenge. In the early 21st century, we observe polarized politics eroding the mystique of the presidency—which is, in fact, an important part of the president’s power, at home and around the world.

Objects in this section showcase the messy side of American presidential politics. In an 1805 letter to artist John Trumbull, John Adams sarcastically claims that four political parties exist in every American state, ranging from reactionary to radical. In an 1850 letter, former presidential candidate Henry Clay declines to run for office again, saying that he is too old for another campaign. We also see campaign memorabilia of William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt and witness each of them aboard campaign trains.

Can presidents ever truly leave electoral politics behind?

What do the American people gain from the length, financial expense, and bombastic nature of presidential elections?

What do they lose?

Share your thoughts with [@TheRosenbach](#) [#SuccessionExhibition](#).

8. John Adams (1735–1826), autograph letter signed to John Trumbull

Quincy, Mass., 18 November–4 December 1805

AMs 1052/19.7

Politics have always been messy. Though we often envision the Founding Fathers as staid, formal and unshakeable figures, in reality they jostled for power and position just as politicians do today—and reflected on their triumphs and travails with their friends.

John Adams, the second President of the United States and a pivotal figure in the American Revolution and creation of the new nation, records many riveting details about the personalities, achievements, and challenges of early American political leaders in letters he exchanged with his friend, the poet and judge John Trumbull. Several of the letters are on display throughout the exhibition.

In this letter, written several years after the end of his presidential term in 1801, Adams recalls various schemes to deprive George Washington of power years before and reflects on some of the ups and downs of his own storied career. Most notably, Adams notes that he regretted having spent a decade of his career as a diplomat in Europe, during which time new political forces began working in the United States, with which Adams was somewhat out of touch. In the letter, Adams jokingly identifies four political parties present in the American states: Tories and Federalists (representing a more conservative, coastal worldview) as well as “Democratical Republicans” and Jacobins (the former being Jeffersonians, the latter being more radical, hence the use of a term from the French Revolution).

What spectrum of political ideology is reflected in the major American political parties of 2023?

9. Martin Van Buren (1782–1862), autograph letter signed to Mr. Martin

Lindenwald, Kinderhook, New York, 23 April 1852
Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Unknown printmaker, after painting by Alonzo Chappel (1827–1887), portrait of Martin Van Buren

19th century
IL2023.1.16
Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Part of the intrigue of presidential politics has always been how candidates' early political careers—and their allegiance or opposition to other politicians and causes—molded their own campaigns and terms in office. Few presidents have been perceived as completely free of such political entanglements.

Martin Van Buren had what we might now see as a typical start to a political career, rising from law school and legal practice to county politics in his home state, to statewide political offices, and to the U.S. Senate. From there, he became governor of New York and then Secretary of State to President Andrew Jackson, with whom he was closely allied. He was Jackson's running mate in 1832.

Van Buren was elected president in 1836, retaining most of Jackson's cabinet. He continued Jackson's oppressive (by modern standards) policies towards Indigenous people, including confinement in internment camps and forced relocations. His claims during the famed U.S. v. *Amistad* case (1841), that rebelling African captives aboard the *Amistad* should be treated as property, were rejected by the Supreme Court, which determined that the Africans had been seized illegally and were therefore free. The attorney representing the Africans was former U.S. president, John Quincy Adams, then 73.

Van Buren's evolving politics affected the course of his career. He opposed the admission of Texas as a slave state, fearing regional tensions and prioritizing union. He lost his re-election bid in 1840 and failed to gain candidacy in 1844. He grew more opposed to slavery in his later years, running again for president in 1848 as the candidate of the new, anti-western slavery Free Soil Party, and later opposed his own Democratic Party, supporting the policies of Republican Abraham Lincoln's presidency.

Van Buren's letter seen here was written after his presidency to an acquaintance who had lent him a book.

10. Millard Fillmore (1800–1874), printed letter of marque for John Chadwick with autograph signature, framed with two undated prints

Washington, D.C., 14 January 1852

IL2023.1.23

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Eight vice presidents acceded to the presidency due to the deaths in office of the presidents they served. Can you name them? A list is at the bottom of this label.*

A member of the Whig party (and the last president to be neither a Democrat nor Republican), Millard Fillmore rose from poverty to the vice presidency and then to the presidency as the successor to Zachary Taylor, who died in office.

During his vice presidency, as president of the Senate, he saw battles over the Compromise of 1850, a bill proposed by Senator Henry Clay. The western lands annexed after the Mexican-American War (1846–1848, known by Mexicans as the American Intervention in Mexico) could have upended the balance in the U.S. Senate between “free” and “slave” states that had been in place since 1820’s Missouri Compromise. Before President Taylor’s death, Fillmore indicated that if there was a tie vote in the Senate on Clay’s bill, he would vote in favor, a position that Taylor didn’t support. With Taylor’s death, politics and policies shifted, allowing enslavement in some of the new western lands and putting federal power behind the Fugitive Slave Act.

Fillmore’s Whig Party fell apart, and he ran for his first unsuccessful presidential election on the new Know Nothing ticket. He held fast to his political leanings, opposing Lincoln’s policies during the Civil War and later supporting Andrew Johnson during Reconstruction.

The document shown here is a letter of marque, historically given to “privateers,” private ship owners that governments engaged to capture their enemy’s merchant ships. Privateers would then ask a court to grant them ownership of the vessel and its contents as payment. This document is multilingual so it could be used as the government’s permission to cross international borders.

***PRESIDENTS WHO DIED IN OFFICE:** William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy



*Did you know that the Rosenbach holds significant collections related to the history of Mexico? Listen to an episode of the Rosenbach Podcast in which the Consul of Mexico in Philadelphia discusses this area of our collection, and the significance of the U.S./Mexican partnership today. **Click here.***

11. Henry Clay (1777–1852), autograph letter signed to George G. Foster

Washington, D.C., 2 April 1850

AMs 519/10

How old is too old to be President of the United States? Should our stereotypes about old age and professional capacity shift along with increasing longevity and the high quality of modern medical care? These questions seem ripped from the headlines in 2023, as 80-year-old President Joseph R. Biden launches a reelection campaign. However, questions about age and fitness to serve have long figured in American politics. In the letter seen here, Henry Clay, an elder statesman who represented Kentucky in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate—and ran unsuccessfully for president on four separate occasions—demonstrates a grim acceptance that his ambition to the executive office would never be achieved.

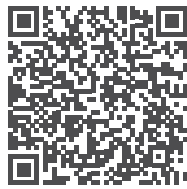
In this letter, Clay, nearly 73 years of age at the time, thanks a man named George G. Foster of New York for the support that Foster’s newspaper had recently offered for another Clay campaign for the presidency. Clay appreciated the sentiment but confided that he felt too old to run for president. He was dead within two years. Of course, much has changed since the 1850s, when average life expectancy for a white person in the United States was 25½ years. In 1860, fewer than 4.5% of white Americans were more than 60 years of age.*

These many years later, Americans are conflicted about age and the presidency. According to a recent Reuters report, 68% of people believe that Joseph R. Biden may be too old to serve as president for another term, and 49% say the same about Donald J. Trump. An eye-popping 86% of Americans say they support an age limit for the presidency of 75 or younger.**



* *“Health History: Health and Longevity Since the Mid-19th Century,”* *Stanford Medicine: Ethnogeriatrics*, 2019.

Click here.



***Steve Holland and Jason Lange, “As Biden turns 80, Americans ask, ‘What’s too old?’”* *November 11, 2022.*

Click here.

12. William McKinley (1843–1901), manuscript notebook used at Albany Law School

Albany, N.Y., 20 December 1866–21 February 1867

AMs 201/27

The issues that dominated national politics in the mid-to-late 1800s remain remarkably resonant in twenty-first century American life, as the presidency of William McKinley demonstrates.

William McKinley served as the twenty-fifth president of the United States from March 4, 1897, until his assassination in September 1901, just six months into his second term. He was born in 1843 at Niles, Ohio and raised as a Methodist, a faith that would influence his political philosophy throughout his life, particularly in his support for African American suffrage. In 1861, after just one year of college, McKinley enlisted with the Twenty-Third Regiment of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry and was the last United States president to serve in the Civil War. Upon returning to civilian life in 1865, McKinley began reading law under the tutelage of Mahoning County Judge Charles E. Gidden. At the judge's suggestion, McKinley enrolled at Albany Law School in 1866 in order to supplement his knowledge of local county law with the traditional subjects that comprise a formal legal education. McKinley studied one term at Albany Law School, returned to Ohio the following year, and was admitted to the Ohio Bar in March 1867.

This manuscript contains McKinley's handwritten notes for the 1866 fall/winter term lectures in the areas of personal property, contract and commercial law delivered by Albany Law School founder Amos Dean L.L.D. The manuscript notes are full page single spaced, margin to margin and total 241 pages. The dates for each lecture are noted in the upper left column of each page and document that McKinley attended the school from December 20, 1866, through February 21, 1867. Except for the prominently placed sketch of an index finger identifying a legal maxim or rule of law appearing throughout the manuscript's pages, the author's notetaking style shows consistent conscientiousness, being absent of margin doodling during each "2.0 hour" lecture.

Read more about McKinley's presidency in labels 13 and 14.

This object label was written by Justin Borkowski, a tour guide at the Rosenbach, as part of the requirements for the course "The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach's Collections" in fall 2022.

13. William McKinley (1843–1901), *Speeches and addresses of William McKinley from his election to Congress to the present time*

New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1893

A893 s

In the early years of McKinley's law practice, he became active in Republican Party politics and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives 1876 serving 7 terms in Congress from 1877–1891 and then elected Ohio governor from 1891–1895. His opponent in that first congressional election Dr. Levi Lamborn, an amateur botanist, had been wearing a scarlet carnation in his lapel during the debate. After his defeat Lamborn gave McKinley one of his special carnations to wear as a boutonniere. This became McKinley's sartorial trademark throughout his political career. In 1904, Ohio adopted the scarlet carnation as its official state flower.

McKinley's *Speeches and Addresses* was published when he was prominent on the national stage and groundwork was being laid by his mentor, the Ohio political boss Mark Hanna, for McKinley's 1896 nomination as the Republican presidential candidate. The sixty-five addresses underscore McKinley's strong support of high tariffs on imports to protect American manufacturing, his support for pluralism among ethnic groups, and his awareness of the threats to democracy posed by congressional gerrymandering. All these themes resonate in American political discourse today, more than one hundred years later. Indeed, McKinley's speech "Free and Fair Elections," delivered in the House of Representatives on April 18, 1879, is a plea just as urgent today as it was in the late 1800s.

Although McKinley's presidency is most often remembered for the imperialist Spanish-American War, McKinley never abandoned the Republican party values of equality for Black Americans. In recognition of the Black vote during the 1898 campaign McKinley appointed African American Richard T. Greener to the first consular post at Vladivostok, Russia, then considered the gem of the western Pacific. Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard College, was the father of Bell da Costa Greene the personal librarian of J. Pierpont Morgan and later the first director of the Pierpont Morgan Library and Museum. During these years Ms. Greene purchased numerous rare books and manuscripts for the library from Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach.

This object label was written by Justin Borkowski, a tour guide at the Rosenbach, as part of the requirements for the course "The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach's Collections" in fall 2022.

14. William McKinley (1843–1901), autograph letter signed to Rev. Tennis C. Hamlin, framed with undated photograph

Washington, D.C., 3 March 1897

IL2023.1.15

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

In this note, William McKinley responds to an admirer, who had reported to him a special prayer service on the eve of the presidential inauguration. He notes, “Assuring you that it is indeed consoling to me, in assuming my new and grave responsibilities, to know that I shall have the prayers of yourselves and others” Indeed, the stakes were high.

Most U.S. workers had endured a dismal economy beginning in the early 1890s while the nation’s few industrialist millionaires became increasingly wealthy. McKinley ran for office on a protectionist platform, believing that high trade tariffs on imports would aid American domestic industry, jobs, and working conditions. Circumstances during his first term, however, changed his approach, as Congress involved the U.S. in the Spanish-American War. Although the conflict began over Cuba’s fight for independence from Spain, American victory brought with it the annexation of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines—and soon after, the Hawaiian Islands. With increased international presence came expanded trade, benefiting industrialists while signaling an even wider wealth gap and the potential for American imperialism abroad. McKinley won re-election for a second term in 1900.

As labor tensions rose, an anarchist movement grew in Europe, leading to the assassinations of several European leaders. In April 1901, a newspaper run by publisher William Randolph Hearst, a consistent agitator against McKinley, posted an editorial that stated, “If bad institutions and bad men can be got rid of only by killing, then the killing must be done.” That September, McKinley, attending an exposition in Buffalo that celebrated the success of U.S. industry, was shot at close range by an avowed anarchist.

Despite two earlier presidential assassinations, it was not until McKinley’s death that Congress mandated full-time protection for the president by the Secret Service.

The circumstances surrounding McKinley’s assassination—a growing wealth gap, divisions over the nation’s role in the world, and communication industries that foment violence among fringe groups who are ready to enact it—seem uniquely resonant today, but history suggests that such episodes of discord have consistently roiled American presidential politics.

15. Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), autograph signature framed with undated photograph and campaign button

Undated

IL2023.1.18

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

These mementoes representing Theodore Roosevelt include a signature, a campaign pin showing his face, and a photograph of the candidate campaigning from a train. In 1910, Roosevelt was the first president to fly on an airplane. Campaigning, however, still reached more people when done by train.

As a child, Theodore Roosevelt was home-schooled, was exposed by his wealthy parents to international travel, and was likely the only future president to build a museum in his home. Despite his deep interest in the natural world, he chose to attend law school and enter politics. A native of New York City, Roosevelt invested in a cattle ranch in the Dakota territory in 1883, splitting his time between the ranch and the city. These bifurcated interests defined his path in government.

Serving in the New York State Assembly and the U.S. Civil Service Commission, Roosevelt began a lifelong fight against corruption. As McKinley's Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he made waves through a unilateral decision to send naval vessels to Havana Harbor in the prelude to the Spanish-American War. The war convinced him to resign his office and form a cavalry regiment known as the "Rough Riders," which gained fame in battle. He won New York's gubernatorial race in 1898, focusing his policy on economic reform, labor relations, and land conservation.

In 1901, as vice president, he assumed the presidency upon William McKinley's assassination. He created the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor and settled the Coal Strike of 1902. He fought corruption in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the General Land Office, and the Postal Service, all while tempering U.S. expansionism and increasing diplomacy in Asia. Re-elected in 1904, he distinguished his second term with the formation of the U.S. Forest Service and the creation of National Forests, National Parks, National Monuments, and reserves for wildlife, protecting these areas through executive action.

Opting against a third term, he supported William Howard Taft's candidacy. He engaged in scientific expeditions and supported the growth of New York's Museum of Natural History and the Smithsonian Institution. Breaking with President Taft on issues of labor and corruption, he started the new Progressive Party and ran for president in 1912. He survived an attempted assassination—making a 90-minute speech prior to seeking medical care for a gunshot wound—but lost the election to Woodrow Wilson despite securing more votes than Taft.

Roosevelt's later achievements included his support for the League of Nations, which, in the wake of the First World War, was the first international organization dedicated to world peace.

16. William Howard Taft (1857–1930), autograph note signed, framed with undated campaign pin and photograph

New Haven, Conn., 11 April 1921

IL2023.1.31

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

The campaign memorabilia displayed here includes a signed note, a campaign button, and an image of Taft campaigning in “whistle-stop” fashion. This efficient campaign strategy began in the 19th century when trains were the prevalent form of transportation, linking the country’s small towns and enabling candidates to make many brief stops to address citizens who gathered along the tracks.

William Howard Taft’s father was President U.S. Grant’s Attorney General and Secretary of War. Following in his father’s footsteps, Taft spent his early career practicing law and was appointed to important positions in the nation’s legal infrastructure. In 1900, President McKinley appointed him to a committee to organize governance of the newly annexed Philippines, and he became governor there, serving until 1904 when his political mentor, President Theodore Roosevelt, appointed him Secretary of War.

Taft won the presidency in 1908 but lost re-election in 1912 to Democrat Woodrow Wilson in a three-way race with Theodore Roosevelt, whose policy leanings caused a break with Taft. Responding to Taft’s policies, Roosevelt suggested in his campaign that the U.S. stood “at Armageddon.”

As president, Taft focused on an interventionist policy in Latin America. Conflict with Congress over trade tariffs, the main support for the federal government, continued. This disagreement led to the ratification of the 16th Amendment to the Constitution, which created the income tax. His administration supported substantial antitrust legislation and aimed at reversals of Roosevelt’s groundbreaking land conservation efforts. Barring Black Americans from federal appointments, particularly in the south, he split from the traditions of the Republican Party. He appointed six justices to the Supreme Court during his single term.

After his failed bid for re-election, Taft returned to Yale, his undergraduate alma mater, and taught at the Law School there from 1913–1921, during which time the note shown here was written. He supported presidential candidate Warren Harding in 1920, and Harding appointed him to the Supreme Court, a position he’d turned down several times previously. With the death of the Court’s Chief Justice in May 1921, Taft gained the position he most ardently wanted. He resigned in February 1930 due to failing health and died that March.

Whatever one thinks about his positions and his embattled time in office, Taft held a range of federal offices under four different presidents, influencing the direction of the nation during more than 30 years of public service.





NEGOTIATING CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS
EXPLORING CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS WITH
THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

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...



NEGOTIATING CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS

BALANCING PRESIDENTIAL PRIORITIES WITH
CONSTITUTIONAL PROHIBITIONS

Presidents enter office with agendas they hope to enact. Yet every president runs up against the constitutional limits of executive power.

The American president is often described as the most powerful person in the world, and indeed in modern times the authority of the office has only become more wide-ranging. However, unlike kings and emperors of times past, American presidents wield power that is limited by constitutional constraints.

The genius of the United States Constitution is its balance of powers, which preserves the stability of the republic by dividing governing authority among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. From the era of the founding through the present, presidents have had to negotiate their aims within the realities of a system of shared power.

In this section, we see artifacts representing presidents' wielding constitutional power, and coming to terms with the limits of that power. John Marshall's letter to James Madison describes states' differing opinions over how to choose electors to cast votes for president in the Electoral College—revealing that, from 1788 through 2021, questions about the procedures of presidential elections have elicited discussion. George Washington's letter to James Madison regarding the power of the veto shows the care that many Founders took to understand and enact their constitutional authority.

What are the advantages of a powerful sole executive? What are the risks?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.

17. John Marshall (1755–1835), attributed author, draft of letter possibly intended for James Madison

[September 1788]

AMs 522/11

Following the 2020 presidential election, Americans and the world paid greater attention than usual to the process of selecting presidential electors—those individuals charged with casting a state’s electoral votes as part of the Constitutionally-designated process for the selecting of an American president via the Electoral College. The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was directed toward the official counting of the electoral votes submitted by states. Whereas formal tradition had for many years guided the process, the virulent dissatisfaction of supporters of the losing 2020 candidate called into question the process by which electoral ballots were cast, and thus the legitimacy of the entire election.

The Electoral College grants each state a certain number of electors (based the number of representatives it has in Congress), and those electors—not the millions of voters themselves—vote for and elect the president. In this letter, likely written by John Marshall to James Madison in 1788, Marshall critiques the unspecific language of the Constitution regarding how electors are chosen and reflects that more “technical and unequivocal language” would have been useful in spelling out the electoral process.

18. George Washington (1732–1799), autograph letter signed to James Madison

New York, [8 September 1789]

AMs 1058/22

In this letter from President George Washington to Speaker of the House James Madison, the chief executive raises pressing questions about Constitutional principles with a man who had done much to frame the new U.S. form of government.

Washington wrote his letter late at night, before a regular meeting held by the two leaders the next day. In the document, Washington notes that the subject under discussion was vital and could not wait. The president hoped to learn Madison's opinion regarding the appointment of a judge for the Western Territory following the withdrawal of the original nominee. Washington was unhappy and unsure of who else to propose for the position, asking for Madison's opinion before taking any further steps. President Washington also mentions his concerns about including the Senate in certain decision-making processes, as well as issues surrounding pay for members of Congress.

The letter includes annotations written in Madison's own hand, such as "McDougal meant" and an asterisk in sixth sentence, with "Arthur Lee" on bottom of page. These additions were added personally by Madison for his own later reference.

The letter reveals to us a very human President Washington seeking assistance from a trusted advisor. Washington understood his role in this new nation, not as an imperial figure, but as an elected representative of the people who set precedent with nearly every decision he made.

This object label was written by Michael Laskowski as part of coursework for the fall 2022 offering of The Curator's Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach's Collections.

19. Prince L. Hudgins, papers relating to a presidential pardon

Washington, D.C., 29 January 1865 and 28 February 1865

AMs 571/14

While the powers of the American presidency are vast and have been fiercely debated across history, few of the privileges of the office are more politically complex than the pardon. A pardon is an elimination of the service of penalty for a crime. The president possesses authority to issue pardons based on Article II, Section 2, Clause 1 of the United States Constitution, which reads:

“The President ... shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States, except in Cases of impeachment.”

The immense pardon power leaves presidents vulnerable to accusations of political gamesmanship, meaning that, over the years, formal processes of petitioning for a pardon have become the norm.

In this letter, Prince L. Hudgins, a Southern sympathizer from Missouri, writes to Rep. Austin A. King to petition for a pardon. King recommended a pardon, and on February 28, President Abraham Lincoln directed that a pardon be issued. The set of materials here also includes an autograph receipt from King for the pardon and the envelope from the office of the Attorney General of the United States in which the documents were delivered.

Today, most requests for pardons are considered by the Office of the Pardon Attorney within the United States Department of Justice, which makes a nonbinding recommendation regarding a pardon. You will find other examples of pardons featured in this section of the exhibition as well, namely a pardon issued by President Andrew Johnson, and another issued by Ulysses S. Grant.

20. Andrew Johnson (1808–1875), pardon of Squire H. Wallace: manuscript signed

Washington, D.C., 22 October 1867

IL2023.1.26

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885), pardon of James D. Miller: manuscript signed

Washington, D.C., 19 November 1869

IL2023.1.25

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Andrew Johnson is perhaps best remembered for becoming president after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and being the first president to be impeached. His white supremacy has deservedly earned him the scorn of history. How do we understand his actions to preserve the union before and after the Civil War?

Born in poverty and uneducated, Johnson began his professional life as a tailor, moving from North Carolina to Tennessee, where he began his political career in municipal politics as an alderman and then as mayor. As he sought increasingly powerful office on the state and then the federal level, he was a consistent voice in favor of slavery and against abolition. As the nation moved towards the Civil War, he favored union over secession, even once Tennessee had declared for it. President Lincoln appointed Johnson as military governor of Tennessee, but Confederate forces confiscated his land and the people he had enslaved. He was able to negotiate Tennessee's exclusion from Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and Lincoln put him on his ticket as vice president in 1864.

Johnson became president upon Lincoln's 1865 assassination. In open disagreement with the nascent expansion of human rights in this post-Civil War era, he vetoed (and Congress overrode his veto of) the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and opposed passage of the 14th Amendment, which extended citizenship to formerly enslaved people.

Just as Lincoln had planned to carry out reconciliation towards former rebels, Johnson used the pardon to take up that charge. He issued a general amnesty for all Confederate rebels at the end of this effort, but in hopes of punishing more people for the rebellion earlier on, he cited twice the number of exemptions from amnesty previously planned by Lincoln. Those who fell under these exemptions were required to make individual applications for pardon. Reviewing and granting pardons took him between June 1866 and December 1868. The pardon issued to Squire Wallace, seen here, is from that period.

Continued...

In February 1868, the House of Representatives issued 11 articles of impeachment against Johnson mostly based on his attempt to oust Secretary of War Edwin Stanton contrary to an act of Congress. Stanton and Johnson had diverging political leanings. The vote in the Senate fell one short of the number needed to convict. Although Johnson's impeachment stood as an anomaly for over a century, the modern era has had more experience with this method of constitutional accountability. Most historians rank Andrew Johnson's presidency as among the worst.

Ulysses S. Grant, whose presidency followed Johnson's, continued making pardons as part of reconciliation after the Civil War, most notably with the Amnesty Act of 1872, and pardoned others, such as James D. Miller in the example here, using his constitutional right as president. His pardons, commutations of sentence, and rescinded convictions numbered 1,332, including those made under the Amnesty Act. By contrast, Andrew Johnson had pardoned thousands of Confederates, as well as 654 others.



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

21. *Ulysses the great, or, Funny scenes at the White House*

Philadelphia: Attic Publishing Co., 1875

A 875u

The American public has always been suspicious of expanding presidential powers. After all, presidents are temporary leaders of a constitutional republic—not all-powerful monarchs. In this satirical publication, President U.S. Grant becomes the object of ridicule for decision-making abilities inhibited by his drunkenness, and by his daughter’s pending marriage to an Englishman, Algernon Sartoris (the nephew of famed actress Fanny Kemble whose portrait hangs on the first floor of the historic Rosenbach house). The plot of the book is as follows: on the birth of Nellie’s first child, President Grant declares his intention to become an emperor rather than a president, and have the boy inherit his office (thus mimicking the dynastic traditions of Algernon’s native England). The book ends with the narrator’s reflections on his amusement at the scheme, but he declares little faith in Grant’s ability to make it a reality. The tailpiece, or closing illustration, in the book is an image of Grant being kicked off his feet (and out of office) by a giant boot labeled “Vox Populi,” Latin for “the people’s voice.” This comedic narrative underscores Americans’ very serious concern with balance of powers and the notion of a limited chief executive.



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

22. Harry S Truman (1884–1972), autograph letter signed to David Rosenbach Sackey

Independence, Missouri, March 11, 1970

IL2023.1.37

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Harry S Truman, president from 1945–1953, rose from humble origins in Missouri to the office of the presidency under perilous circumstances: the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt near the end of the Second World War. Vice President Truman assumed the mantle of the high office and soon found himself the most powerful man in the world—and, equipped with atomic bombs before any other world power had developed the technology, arguably the most powerful man in the history of humankind, given the destructive force available to the U.S. military with its new weapon. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the United States, Truman exercised his constitutional authority to use atomic weapons against the Empire of Japan in hopes of drawing the war in the Pacific to a close, though debate has raged ever since the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki about the utility and humanity of the act.

Truman engaged the U.S. military in the Korean War, hoping to stand up for democracy but wary of engaging too deeply in the conflict for fear of provoking a direct U.S. war with the Soviet Union. When the legendary military leader General Douglas MacArthur proved resistant to Truman's authority over military decision-making and began undermining the president's orders, Truman removed MacArthur from his post on April 11, 1951, to stave off a more aggressive altercation with the Soviet Union. The dismissal of MacArthur proved deeply unpopular with the American people; Truman's approval ratings sank to 22%, an all-time low record. Yet by means of this bold act, Truman asserted the constitutional authority of the president over military affairs.

23. Hubert H. Humphrey (1911–1978), signature and photograph

Undated

IL2023.1.28

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Do you ever wonder how history might have changed, if just one thing had been different? Imagine if Hubert Humphrey, the “Happy Warrior” from Minneapolis, Minnesota, had won the presidency in 1968 rather than Richard Nixon. How might the United States be different? How might modern impressions of the presidency shift?

Humphrey served as Mayor of Minneapolis and U.S. Senator from Minnesota before his election to the vice presidency on the ticket with Lyndon Baines Johnson, serving in that office from 1965-1969. A notable advocate for Civil Rights, in 1948 Humphrey helped shepherd the party to a position on ending racial segregation. Following President Johnson’s announcement in March 1968 that the embattled incumbent would not seek reelection, Humphrey launched his campaign, clinching the nomination following the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy at a bitterly divided party convention that year, though he ultimately lost the general election to Richard Nixon.

Humphrey remained committed to the Vietnam War in a continuation of the policy of Lyndon Johnson, whereas Nixon ended U.S. military involvement in the war in 1973. However, Nixon’s eventual involvement in the Watergate scandal (a political break-in, its cover-up, and its later investigation, which led to the discovery of a nexus of illegal acts connected to the White House) led to his inglorious resignation from office, and the beginning of a long decline of trust in the executive office.

There is no saying with certainty how the Vietnam War would have ended had Nixon not won election, or how public perceptions of the presidency would differ today if not for Watergate. However, the presidential election of 1968 is a reminder that the fate of world history often hinges on the outcome of American presidential contests.

24. Gerald R. Ford (1913–2006), autograph letter signed to Carl Behnke

Washington D.C., 6 January 1976

IL2023.1.32

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Gerald Ford entered the Oval Office under inauspicious circumstances: the resignation of his predecessor, Richard Nixon, amid the turmoil of the Watergate scandal, in which Nixon's support for the wiretapping of the offices of the Democratic National Committee undermined a presidency notable for many policy successes. Ford served in the executive office from 1974–1977. Ford lost election to a full term in the White House to Democrat Jimmy Carter of Georgia, in large part because of the unpopularity of his decision to issue a full pardon to Richard Nixon for his crimes associated with Watergate on September 8, 1974. The move inflamed political tensions in the nation, with many claiming that Ford and Nixon had hatched a bargain whereby the embattled president would leave office with the assurance of legal immunity, and the other would assume the highest office in the land. A kinder read of the move is to view the decision as an effort on Ford's part to bring what he famously described as "our long national nightmare" to a close.

In 2001, the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation presented Ford with the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award for pardoning the disgraced former president.







WAR, CRISIS, AND VIOLENCE

WHEN PRESIDENTS FACE THEIR
GREATEST TESTS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S LEADERSHIP DURING THE CIVIL WAR WAS A TEST OF HIS ABILITY TO HOLD THE UNION TOGETHER AND BRING ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION. HIS ABILITY TO HOLD THE UNION TOGETHER AND BRING ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION WAS A TEST OF HIS ABILITY TO HOLD THE UNION TOGETHER AND BRING ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION. HIS ABILITY TO HOLD THE UNION TOGETHER AND BRING ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION WAS A TEST OF HIS ABILITY TO HOLD THE UNION TOGETHER AND BRING ABOUT RECONSTRUCTION.

"A house
divided
against
itself"

Can
you
stand!

WAR, CRISIS, AND VIOLENCE

WHEN PRESIDENTS FACE THEIR
GREATEST TESTS

Presidencies are forged not just by the occupants of the office, but by the events and crises the commander in chief faces. Violence and warfare can show a president's true mettle—as well as a president's handle on the mood and will of the nation.

Perhaps no president more ably met his moment with history than Abraham Lincoln, who guided the United States through the Civil War, sought to redress the lasting damage of enslavement, and ultimately paid for his commitment to representative republicanism with his life. Historical objects seen in this section related to Lincoln's life and work include a manuscript excerpt of his famous "House Divided" speech, his 1858 speech to the Republican National Convention, as well as a signed copy of his last address to Congress.

Lyndon Johnson's domestic achievements in Civil Rights and social reform have been overshadowed by his handling of the Vietnam War. Johnson merits inclusion in this section as an example of the perils of military involvement for a president's domestic reputation.

Beyond those featured here, what other presidents' terms in office have been defined by warfare? How did they respond?

What is the correct balance of power between Congress and the White House in undertaking and directing military action?

How has America's military power been wielded for good around the world? What happens when war is used for political gain?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.

25. United States. Passport, for Marinus Willett et al.: manuscript document signed by President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox

11 March 1790

AMs 355/6

This document serves as protection for Alexander McGillivray and other unnamed “Chiefs, Head Men, and Warriors of the Creek Nation” while traveling to create treaties. Note that the passport is issued to Colonel Marinus Willett and other authorized U.S. military escorts, not to the Creek leaders themselves.

Despite its appearance of protective intent, the document reflects the harms imposed on Indigenous populations of the Americas since the earliest European explorers and settlers made first contact. Even after the founding of the United States, presidential policy, with Congressional and popular support, amounted to an ongoing war against Native Americans and led to broken treaties, intentionally inflicted violence and disease, displacement from ancestral lands, and coerced religious conversions of America’s first peoples.

Native Americans were not granted citizenship under the 14th Amendment (1868), waiting until 1924 for that recognition. Even then, voting rights were only sporadically supported until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Recent Supreme Court rulings have weakened the enforcement of that act and attempts at restricting voting of Indigenous populations have increased.

26. Resolutions by Philadelphia Democrats on the inauguration of President James K. Polk: manuscript

Philadelphia, [4 March 1845 and later]

AMs 773/11

The first resolution (unsigned) by the “Democracy of the City and County of Philadelphia,” congratulates Polk and Vice President George M. Dallas on the day of their inauguration. It also expresses approval of the annexation of Texas and the admission of Florida and Iowa to the Union, also calling for full sovereignty over Oregon. The second resolution, commending Polk and Dallas for the positions expressed in their inaugural speeches, is from an unnamed body, signed by John Porter, president, and other officers. Both copies were sent to Vice President Dallas.

As demonstrated by these documents, candidate and then President Polk espoused the territorial expansion of the United States. His single term in office shows his success in this endeavor. Polk initially hoped to achieve his ambitions peacefully. He narrowly avoided war with the British to settle the claims of both nations to the geopolitically essential Oregon territory. A negotiation to divide the continent at the 49th parallel finally settled the dispute and created the northern boundary of the U.S.

The annexation of most of the southwestern and western lands that form the modern U.S. was achieved through the more difficult and dangerous Mexican-American War. Polk was preceded in office by John Tyler, who had begun the effort by formally annexing Texas in the waning hours of his presidency. President Polk began negotiations for a U.S.-Mexico border just as Texas became the 28th state. Mexico disputed Polk’s desired border at the Rio Grande, and Polk sent an army to Texas, hoping Mexico would relent to the threat. At the same time, he offered to purchase New Mexico and California. A protracted war was filled with Polk’s diplomatic and intelligence maneuvers and his distrust of the popular and politically opposed generals who led the war efforts, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott.

At the end of the war, the U.S. forces’ position in Mexico City enabled a negotiation for the Rio Grande border and the \$15 million purchase of the California territory (now California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and parts of Colorado and New Mexico). Except for a small section of Arizona and New Mexico added after Polk’s presidency through 1853’s Gadsden Purchase, President Polk had been responsible for creating the borders of today’s “lower 48” United States.

27. United States. President (Franklin Pierce), Message to the Senate: autograph manuscript signed

August 1, 1854

AMs 779/3

The balance of power between the president and Congress in declaring and administering war has been in ongoing tension over time. Pierce promised a foreign policy that would strengthen U.S. security. Having fought in the Mexican-American War, he continued to focus on the southern border and the lands beyond it in Mexico, Cuba, and Latin America, all in conjunction with Congress.

In this lengthy document, Pierce responds to the Senate's inquiry on his dealings with Spain, reaffirming his earlier opinion that, if negotiations with Spain fail to solve the problem of Cuban seizure of U.S. ships, Congress should authorize him to take action to stop it. He also notes that he has learned of and prevented a planned expedition by private citizens to take Cuba by force, noting that the Constitution reserves this power to Congress. In the end, he made an unsuccessful bid to buy Cuba from Spain, but through the Gadsden Purchase—named after the negotiator of the deal, James Gadsden—Pierce added the last piece of land that created the modern southern border of the U.S.

Franklin Pierce entered office in 1853 during the uneasy domestic peace after the Compromise of 1850. Senator Stephen A. Douglas proposed several train routes to link the states and territories over the recently enlarged holdings of the U.S. In these proposals, he advanced the right of new territories to make their own decisions on slavery. The resulting violent confrontations between northerners and southerners to control Kansas were known as “bleeding Kansas,” and were another step towards the Civil War.

28. James Buchanan (1791–1868), autograph letter signed to Sergeant Smith Prentiss

Lancaster, Pa., 8 October 1842

IL2023.1.38

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

This document is a letter of introduction of Pennsylvania attorney Joseph C. Lassmore to Sergeant Smith Prentiss, an attorney and one-term representative from Mississippi.

The only president from Pennsylvania, James Buchanan was initially elected to the House of Representatives for five terms and then served on the cabinets of Presidents Polk and Pierce. As president, he was stymied by the tensions around slavery—or ignorant of the seriousness of the growing national fracture. He believed that the Dred Scott decision, announced two days after his 1857 inauguration, would finally resolve the issue. In his inaugural address, he hinted at this belief, having been tipped off to the decision by two Supreme Court justices. The decision that Congress had no authority to deprive citizens of their property rights (i.e., the right to enslave) in the territories further inflamed tensions. Buchanan threw more gas on the fire by encouraging the admission of Kansas as a slave state. Members of both parties in Congress rejected this provocative move and Kansas remained a territory.

The split of the Democratic Party between north and south opened a path for Republican Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election despite his absence from southern-state ballots. Buchanan mismanaged the growing secessionist movement, denying states the right to secede while also claiming that the government could not stop them. Trying to stave off the inevitable, he sent troops to reinforce Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay. They were driven back by rebel troops upon their arrival in January 1861. Lincoln was inaugurated that March. On April 12, Confederate troops bombarded the fort and federal troops were forced to surrender. The Civil War, the greatest crisis in American history to date, had begun.

29. Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), “House Divided” speech, published in Republican Party (Ill.), *Proceedings of the Republican state convention, held at Springfield, Illinois, June 16, 1858*

Springfield, Bailhache & Baker, printers [1858]

IL2023.1.36

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Many people who have gone on to the presidency experienced pivot points in their careers that introduced them to broader publics, and revealed their grasp of the gravity of their historical moment. Abraham Lincoln was one such figure. His famous—and, in its initial moment, radical— “House Divided” speech to the Illinois Republican State Convention of June 16, 1858, probably cost him his Senate election that year. It later helped him win the White House.

On that fateful summer evening, more than 1,000 Republican Convention delegates convened in Illinois’s statehouse in Springfield, where they nominated Lincoln as their candidate for the U.S. Senate, running against Democrat Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln delivered his speech at 8:00 p.m. He organized his address around famous words of Christ found in the Gospels, which made the text memorable to his audience. With simple words, Lincoln issued a prophecy of the future sectional conflict in the United States:

*“‘A house divided against itself, cannot stand.’
I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.
I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall —
but I do expect it will cease to be divided.
It will become all one thing or all the other.”*

Many of Lincoln’s supporters found his speech brave but too extreme amid a contentious election. Yet it became a clarion call to Republicans across the North and accurately predicted the dangerous direction of American politics in years to come. It caused a media sensation; many newspapers across the nation quickly began publishing the text. (See a manuscript excerpt of the speech in this section.)

Reflecting years later, Lincoln’s former law partner, William H. Herndon, suggested that the speech introduced Lincoln to the nation as a prophet who transcended mere politics. “Through logic inductively seen,” he said, “Lincoln as a statesman, and political philosopher, announced an eternal truth — not only as broad as America, but covers the world.”

30. Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), excerpt from the “House Divided” speech: autograph manuscript signed

Springfield, Ill., 1860

AMs 1083/14

David Rosenbach Sackey, the collector of the loan objects seen in this exhibition, followed in the footsteps of many earlier American history enthusiasts who requested and collected presidential memorabilia. The excerpt seen here of the famed “House Divided” speech (described elsewhere in this section) was created by Lincoln in response to a request from an admirer, probably identified in the docket note “made for Asher Taylor 1860.” Lincoln wrote a note on the object, confirming the authenticity and origin of the manuscript:

“The foregoing, in pencil, in my own hand, is a copy of an extract of a speech of mine delivered June 16, 1858, which I now state at the request of Mr. E.B. Pease. A. Lincoln Dec. 7, 1860.”

Edward B. Pease was a hardware store owner in Springfield, Illinois, but his relationship to the manuscript is not known.

31. *New York Tribune*, clippings reporting on Abraham Lincoln’s “Cooper Institute speech”

New York, N.Y., 27 February 1860

IL2023.1.11

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Now known more commonly as “the Cooper Union address,” this lengthy speech was made when Lincoln was not yet the Republican nominee for president. It is one of his most important, using legalistic arguments and debate rhetoric to negate the position of Democrats, and specifically Stephen A. Douglas, that the Founders would have permitted the spread of slavery to the territories. He offers Republicans a path forward, noting that if they cannot end slavery where it exists, they must employ their votes to prevent its expansion.

The speech was originally booked for Henry Ward Beecher’s New York church, but was later moved to the Cooper Institute, where Lincoln had a larger audience, including *New York Tribune* publisher Horace Greeley. The clippings shown here are from that influential newspaper.

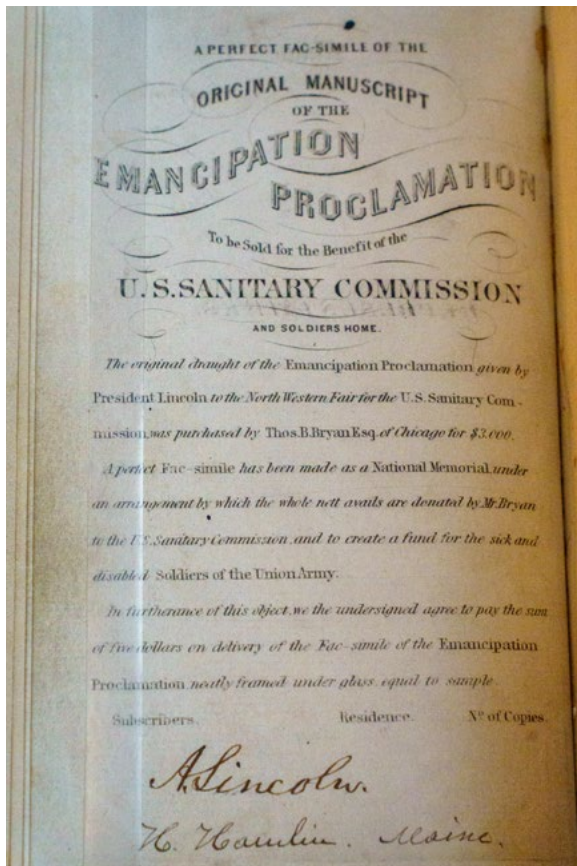


Photo by Rasheena Wilson



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

32. United States Sanitary Commission, Subscription book for facsimiles of the Emancipation Proclamation

Washington, D.C., [October 1863]

AMs 432/28

Less than one year after the ink was dry on the original Emancipation Proclamation, lithographic copies were being sold to raise money for the U.S. Sanitary Commission.

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. In this document, he declared that all slaves in rebel states would become “free”. The definition of freedom would be muddled at best, with misconceptions about the Proclamation’s scope and intent. Perfectly timed in its release, it would free up enslaved black men to help fight secession and to shore up the Union.

Capitalizing on the popularity of this document, Lincoln sold the rights to print lithographs as a way to raise money for the struggling U.S. Sanitary Commission, the forerunner of the American Red Cross. The influx of wounded Union soldiers had created a need for aid and comfort including more medical supplies, food, and clothing. President of the Soldiers’ Home of Chicago and staunch supporter of Abraham Lincoln, Thomas B. Bryan saw an incredible fundraising opportunity. With the original copy of the Proclamation procured for the sum of \$3,000 (around \$96,000 by today’s standards), Bryan commissioned Chicago’s most reputable lithographer, Edward Mendel, to print copies to be sold at the 1863 Northwestern Sanitary fair.

As the fair opened, Bryan greeted government officials, senators, and representatives from across the nation. With this unassuming red leather ledger in hand, Bryan recorded signatures and sales of the important document. Most prominently featured are Abraham Lincoln and Vice President Hannibal Hamlin’s signatures. All cabinet members and members of Congress from every state in the Union, including the future president James A. Garfield, are also recorded here.

This object label was written by Karen Grossman as part of the requirements for the course “The Curator’s Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach’s Collections” in fall 2022.

33. United States. President (Abraham Lincoln), annual message to Congress: manuscript signed

Washington, D.C., 6 December 1864

AMs 225/1

The Constitution (Article II, Section 3, Clause 1) requires that the president periodically “give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union...” and all presidents but two have done this in some fashion. Initially, presidents gave what was called an “annual message,” sometimes in person and sometimes in writing. Lincoln delivered his in writing. This copy comprises 60 leaves written in another hand but signed by Lincoln. He gives thorough details about foreign affairs, the recent election, finances, the geographic expansion of the U.S. and the accompanying growth of the technologies of the railroad and telegraph, and the ongoing Civil War. This was his final address to Congress.

His stirring second inaugural address took place on March 4, 1865, with the end of the Civil War at hand and slavery near an end throughout the nation. He was assassinated on April 15 that same year and is almost universally ranked at the best president in U.S. history.

34. Lyndon B. Johnson (1908–1973), typed letter signed to Mr. Replier

Washington, D.C., 23 February 1965

IL2023.1.27

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Lyndon Baines Johnson, known as LBJ, was elected to the House of Representatives on a New Deal platform in 1938. Elected to the Senate in 1948, he became the youngest Minority Leader in Senate history in 1953 and the youngest majority leader in 1955. Selected as John F. Kennedy's running mate, he was elected vice president in 1960, later gaining the presidency upon Kennedy's assassination in 1963. He won his first presidential campaign in 1964 with a record 61% of the vote. His vision of a "Great Society" for Americans included the fight against poverty, better healthcare and Social Security for the elderly, urban renewal, beautification projects, land conservation, space exploration, and more. His experience in the Senate enabled him to secure passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Despite one of the most successful legislative agendas in presidential history, the growing crisis in Vietnam soon overshadowed LBJ's domestic program. Viewed as a necessary intervention to block the spread of Communism, the war quickly became a quagmire that caused national upheaval and Johnson's decreasing political power. A lasting constitutional conflict was brought about by the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a widely popular Congressional vote that authorized LBJ to do "whatever was necessary" to keep U.S. forces safe after naval attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin. Despite the Constitutional mandate that only Congress can make declarations of war, Johnson used the loosely worded resolution as the "functional equivalent" of such a declaration, expanding executive power by doing so.

In 1973, Congress passed the War Powers Act over President Nixon's veto, requiring that the president give a 48-hour notice to Congress after initiating any military action, formally enacting a possible erosion of Congress's constitutional power. Questions of checks and balances pertaining to war have continued to the present.

35. Barbara Garson, *MacBird!*

Berkeley: Grassy Knoll Press, 1966

MML 0525

Political satire has a long history, and in this 1966 work, American playwright Barbara Garson dramatized the assassination of John F. Kennedy through the lens of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. An antiwar advocate, Garson initially circulated this play underground before adapting it for stage production. *MacBird!* challenged mainstream reverence and respect for Kennedy and the presidency at the time of the assassination, amid the United States' deepening involvement in the Vietnam War.

Garson's play replaces the medieval Scotland of *Macbeth* with the 1960 Democratic National Convention. At the convention, the ambitious politician MacBird joins the ticket of John Ken O'Dunc as O'Dunc's vice presidential candidate. Just as Macbeth assassinates Duncan in Shakespeare's play with the encouragement of Lady Macbeth, so too does MacBird assassinate John Ken O'Dunc under the enticement of Lady MacBird. And, just Macbeth eventually suffers defeat at the hands of Macduff, so too MacBird is eventually vanquished by Robert Ken O'Dunc (the play's stand-in for Robert F. Kennedy).

The play opened in New York just three years after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, causing considerable controversy and discomfort. Critic Robert Brustein described *MacBird!* as "the most explosive play" of the theater movement in the 1960s.



MAN AND MYTH
PRESIDENTS AS ICONS

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY THE MEN WHO LEAD THE NATION. FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR TO THE PRESENT, PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN VIEWED AS HEROES, AS GODS, AS MONUMENTS. BUT WHO ARE THEY REALLY? AND HOW DO THEY BECOME ICONS?

THIS EXHIBIT EXPLORES THE LIVES OF SEVERAL PRESIDENTS, FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND EXAMINES THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN PORTRAYED IN ART, LITERATURE, AND FILM. IT ALSO LOOKS AT THE CHALLENGES THEY HAVE FACED AND THE LEGACIES THEY HAVE LEFT BEHIND.

BY VISITING THIS EXHIBIT, YOU WILL GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEN WHO HAVE SHAPED OUR COUNTRY AND THE WAYS IN WHICH THEY HAVE BECOME PART OF OUR NATIONAL IDENTITY.

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The accomplishments, tribulations, and personalities of many presidents are unfamiliar in the American cultural imagination. Some leaders, however, live on as legends. Washington. Lincoln. Roosevelt. Kennedy. These names evoke associations for many Americans, decades or even centuries after the presidents' terms ended.

Mythmaking is an essential part of national identity formation, and presidents are often cast in central roles in the civic drama. In this section of the exhibition, you will see artifacts connected to some of the nation's mythic leaders. The account book and journal of portrait-miniature artist John Henry Brown (1818–1891) recounts the artist's experience painting young Abraham Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, shortly before Lincoln emerged to national prominence. The drawing of Franklin Delano Roosevelt reminds us that many Americans had a likeness of the president in their homes during the Great Depression and World War II. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy was an asset to her husband John F. Kennedy's public image. Ronald Reagan emerged as a conservative icon in the 1970s and 1980s.

The soft power the presidency—that is, influence the president wields because of the traditions and cultural interest associated with White House life—enhances the constitutional authority of the office.

What president fascinates you the most, from a cultural perspective? Why?

What role does the “soft power” of the presidency play in American life today?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.

36. John Adams (1735–1826), autograph letter signed to John Trumbull

25 April 1790
AMs 1052/19.4

As the many letters of John Adams included in *Succession* suggest, the second President of the United States was a prolific, sharp-witted, and not particularly friendly critic of many of his political contemporaries. He was also a wise observer of political affairs—and, for us today, a valuable source for information about the personalities and issues at work sharpening early American civic life. In this letter, written while he was Vice President under George Washington, Adams discusses the character and talents of Founding Fathers including Washington himself, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, and John Hancock. He also recalls his role in Revolutionary peace negotiations before reflecting on the power of ceremony and ritual in public and private life.

Referencing the works of French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adams explains the power of pageantry and ceremony (both religious and civil) to build a common culture. Adams suggests that, just as the Doge (leader) of Venice and the Roman Catholic Pope value the power of ritual, so too do early Americans—despite their revolutionary leanings.

“Rousseau’s Examples of the Doge and the Pope, are very apposite and very conclusive. They prove incontestibly the Efficacy of Pageantry. They prove with equal force, that this Efficacy may be applied to Evil purposes. But what is there that may not? Religion and Government have both been as ill Used as Pageantry. — Signs do not necessarily imply abuse. They have been applied to good Uses as well as bad. — if Government cannot be had, nor Laws obeyed without, some Parade, as I fully believe, We must have some Parade or no Laws. ...

Is there a Being so low, as not to be offended at the Thought of worshipping God in a Barn or a mean House? Why is Plate, and handsome Vessells, at the Communion Table so much thought of?”



*Do you want to read the rest of John Adams’s letter and learn what he had to say about his colleagues? Scan here to read the text of the letter. **Click here.***

37. John Henry Brown (1818–1891), Journal

1844–1890

AMs 573/14.1

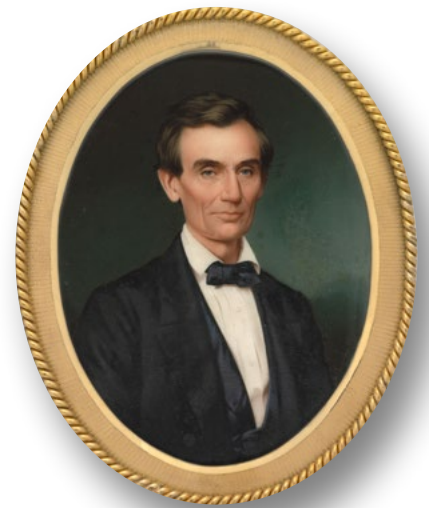
Today, photographs of the president and other elected officials abound in print and digital form—and with the rise of “deepfake” images and videos, citizens must be especially vigilant in identifying visual media that have been edited for partisan political purposes. For better or worse, “optics” matter to a president’s success. In the era before easily accessible photographic reproduction, the painting of portraits—including portrait miniatures, like those you may have seen on display in the first-floor hallway in the Rosenbach’s historic house—were an important way of sharing a likeness.

Philadelphia portrait miniature painter and businessman John Henry Brown received a remarkable commission in August 1860, though he could not have appreciated the full significance of the opportunity at the time. “Judge Read sent for me this morning,” Brown notes. “He wishes me to go to Springfield, Illinois at his own expense, to paint a picture of Abraham Lincoln, the Republican Candidate for President.” Read, a supporter of Lincoln, wanted Brown’s portrait to provide the foundation of a campaign image. Concerns were arising among Lincoln supporters that his physical appearance might prove a distraction, so they wanted the most favorable possible image at their disposal. Brown arrived in Illinois and quickly got to work, as his journal reports:

“Called at Mr. Lincoln’s house to see him. As he was not in I was directed to the Executive Chamber in the State Capitol. I found him there. Handed him my letters from Judge Read. He at once consented to sit for his picture, we walked together from the Executive Chamber to a Daguerian establishment. I had half a dozen Ambrotypes taken of him before I could get one to suit me. I was at once, most favourably impressed with Mr. Lincoln. In the afternoon I unpacked my painting materials.”

Lincoln sat for Brown a total of five times. The result was a stunning portrait—one, in the words of Lincoln’s secretary, “so well executed that when magnified to life size one cannot discover any defects of brush marks on it at all.” Mrs. Lincoln liked it as well, as Brown recorded in his journal. “The picture gives great satisfaction, Mrs. Lincoln speaks of it in the most extravagant terms of approbation.” The portrait miniature is pictured here to the right.

John Henry Brown (1818–1891), portrait of Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), watercolor on ivory, 1860. NPG.75.11.
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution Conserved with funds from the Smithsonian Women’s Committee.



38. Ellen Kean, (1805–1880), autograph letters concerning Abraham Lincoln’s death and funeral, bound in a copy of her Death and funeral of Abraham Lincoln ... with prefatory note by John Drinkwater (London: Privately printed, 1921)

16–18 April and 13–18 May
AMs 437/2

The Death and Funeral of Abraham Lincoln is an account of events surrounding the assassination of one of America’s most beloved leaders, President Abraham Lincoln, in April 1865. Fifty-six years after the assassination, this volume of 27 pages was privately printed in London by John Drinkwater, an English actor, writer, and poet. The volume is handsomely bound in new Levant Moroccan leather with gold lettering and trim on the cover. It is printed on high quality paper and contains portraits of Ellen Kean and Abraham Lincoln. The book has prefatory notes by Drinkwater. Fifty issues were printed, and the Rosenbach has number eight.

Ellen Kean, a well-known English actress, was in New York City touring the United States when the assassination occurred. This book includes within it two original, signed letters written by Kean: one to her daughter in London, and the second to a friend, also in England. The letters describe events associated with Lincoln’s death, the effect of the assassination on Kean’s personal income, the behavior and demeanor of those viewing the funeral cortège as it traveled from Washington D.C. to New York, the funeral in the nation’s capital, the search for the assassin and his conspirators, and Kean’s reflections on the values of the American public. “This assassination business is very inconvenient,” Kean wrote in one of the letters. “England is the only land to live in.”

This object label was written by Beverly Tobin as part of the requirements for the course “The Curator’s Toolkit: Up Close and Personal with the Rosenbach’s Collections” in fall 2022.



Photo by Rasheena Wilson

39. James A. Garfield, (1831–1881), memorial collection

1870–1881

AMs 435/1

Not all presidents linger as large in the American imagination as people like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or John F. Kennedy. Even other presidents who died while in office, including James A. Garfield, lack much of a reputation among modern-day Americans. This memorial album assembled after Garfield's death includes portraits of Garfield, letters and other manuscript memorabilia, as well as a photograph of the monumental, Romanesque-style Garfield Memorial at Lakeview Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio. The volume is a reminder that comparatively few American presidents enjoy iconic status today—but the death of any chief executive while in office is cause for national alarm and memorial.

Garfield did not have much time to establish a presidential legacy. He had served in office for four months when he was shot at a railroad station in Washington, D.C., on July 2, 1881, and was only able to complete one official act in the remaining two and a half months before he died on September 19. Vice President Chester Arthur then ascended to the presidency. Despite his short time as head of state, Garfield had a long and successful career in the military and government, serving as a general in the U.S. Civil War before his election to the Ohio State Senate and, eventually, the U.S. House of Representatives. As a Republican during the Reconstruction period, he held progressive views toward Abolition and, eventually, Black suffrage and Civil Rights.

Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach wrote his thoughts about this object on the pastedown on the inside front cover of the volume: “A most remarkable collection.”

40. John Doctoroff (1893–1970), portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, with signed inscription by Roosevelt

1933

IL2023.1.12

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

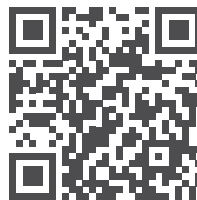
Elected to four terms and occupying high office from 1933–1945, no one has held the presidency longer than Franklin Delano Roosevelt (commonly known as “FDR”). A member of a distinguished old New York family that had already produced one president (Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin’s cousin), FDR became one of 20th-century America’s great champions of the working class. Through his New Deal legislation, Roosevelt helped lift the American economy and the American people’s spirits during the Great Depression, and his deft (but delayed) leadership during the Second World War helped secure an Allied victory.

Roosevelt’s broad interpretation of the nature of federal and executive power, as well as his embrace of government spending to improve the lives of ordinary Americans, changed both the nature of the presidency and how Americans came to view their personal and collective relationship with the federal government. Ninety years after he assumed the presidency, today Roosevelt remains the standard by whom many Democratic presidents measure the transformational impact of their social-welfare legislation. Roosevelt also occupied a prominent place in the national psyche; many Americans had portraits of him on display in their homes, and his death in Warm Springs, Georgia while still in office near the end of World War II cemented his legacy as one of devotion to country and cause.

Despite his iconic status, Roosevelt had his shortcomings, both in his personal life and in his political career. One of the most controversial elements of his legacy among historians and the public today is his response to the Holocaust. Roosevelt took only limited action to address the growing humanitarian crisis prior to the United States’ entering the Second World War, and the government sponsored no substantive or effective efforts to curtail mass killings after declaring war on Germany, despite increasing public pressure as the scale, brutality, and intention of the Nazi genocide of the Jews became widely known. Primarily focused early in his presidency on domestic matters and, later, on the military defeat of the Axis powers, the president could have taken more decisive and meaningful action to save Jewish lives—a point which contemporary critics and modern observers have noted.



To read more about Roosevelt’s reaction to the genocide of Europe’s Jews, read an article from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.
Click here.



To hear about Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach’s efforts to aid Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, listen to episode 11 of the Rosenbach Podcast. **Click here.**

41. John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–1963), typed letter signed to Everett M. Dirksen*

Washington, D.C., 4 January 1963

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (1929–1994), typed letter signed to Marshall

Washington, D.C., 20 December 1962

Issue of *Time: The Weekly News Magazine*

Vol. 76, No. 20A

16 November 1960

Issue of *Life*

6 December 1963

IL2023.1.19

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Few presidential spouses capture the American imagination and linger in the national psyche like Jacqueline Kennedy. In fact, it can be said that Mrs. Kennedy helped create the modern role of First Lady in the era following the Second World War. As the United States took its place as the center of the free world—and as the older Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower vacated the White House—in 1963, the beautiful and socially refined Jacqueline Kennedy brought a sense of cosmopolitan sophistication to the executive mansion. In an era of photo-filled magazines, the Kennedy couple and their two young children captured the image of a young nation on the rise to global power. The first lady became a style icon and image of youthful American motherhood before tragedy struck on November 22, 1963, when her husband the president was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Mrs. Kennedy’s precise planning of the presidential funeral and use of the term “Camelot” to describe her family’s brief time in the White House did much to establish a mystique around the Kennedy years—years rich with both hope and heartbreak.

**Letter possibly signed by a secretary to the president.*

42. Ronald Reagan (1911–2004), photograph and autograph letter signed to Theodore L. Humes

Pacific Palisades, California, 15 June 1965

IL2023.1.13

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

Ronald Wilson Reagan, who served as president from 1981–1989, ushered in a conservative revolution that ended an era of Democratic domination of American public policy launched by Franklin Delano Roosevelt during the Great Depression and Second World War. A film actor who then served as governor of California, during his time in the White House Reagan deregulated the national economy, fought labor unions, took a more confrontational stance toward the Soviet Union than had his predecessors, and pursued aggressive anti-drug policies. Like most presidents, Reagan's legacy is mixed: he oversaw rapid peacetime economic growth yet left the federal government with a substantial budget deficit (a problem still facing the U.S. today). He helped broadcast American democratic ideals abroad but failed to inspire in key domestic challenges, including his tepid response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic that terrorized the Queer community during his term in office. Reagan is rightly remembered today as an acolyte of conservatism whose rhetoric contributed to the end of Soviet Communism, and who shaped political discourse for the rest of the twentieth century.

Theodore Humes (1922–2002), to whom Reagan addressed this letter, was a World War II veteran, attorney, military historian, and Republican political official.



COLLECTING AMERICAN HISTORY
BY J.S. W. BISHOP AND
DAVID HENNINGSEN BAKER

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COLLECTING AMERICAN HISTORY

DR. A.S.W. ROSENBACH AND
DAVID ROSENBACH SACKEY

American history is the largest single collecting area established by the founders of the Rosenbach Museum & Library. Dr. Rosenbach loved to study the history of the Americas, and our collections document five centuries of life in North, Central, and South America, representing the diversity of cultures and peoples who have called the Americas home.

Dr. Rosenbach shared his love for American history with his great-nephew, David Rosenbach Sackey (1938–2017), to whom he presented the George Washington letter seen here as a Bar Mitzvah gift. This gift inspired Mr. Sackey’s lifelong interest in collecting Americana. Likewise, we hope that viewing the Sackey and Rosenbach collections inspires you to continue exploring American history after you leave today.

What do you collect? Did anyone in your family inspire your passion for collecting, or for history?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.

Would you like to learn more about the American history collections at the Rosenbach?



Listen to the Rosenbach Podcast Season 2, “History Behind the Scenes,” at rosenbach.org/podcast.



Search our databases and browse our Collections Guides at rosenbach.org/research/catalogs-databases.



Make a research appointment to visit our reading room and study our American history holdings at rosenbach.org/research/make-an-appointment.

43. George Washington (1732–1799), autograph letter signed to Gouverneur Morris

Mount Vernon, 26 May 1799

IL2023.1.20.

Loan from the David Rosenbach Sackey Collection

What is the most memorable gift you received when you were a child? What made it so special to you? Do you still possess the object, and how did it influence the direction of your life?

David Rosenbach Sackey received a very special gift for his Bar Mitzvah from his great-uncle, Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach: a letter written by George Washington to fellow Founding Father Gouverneur Morris at Mount Vernon on May 26, 1799. In the letter, Washington welcomes Morris home to the United States and invites Morris to visit him and his family at Mount Vernon, “this seat of my retirement,” as Washington calls it. Morris had previously served as the United States’ Minister Plenipotentiary to France and took a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1800. Washington’s warm language—including a greeting from his wife Martha to Morris—makes the letter especially interesting as a window into the personal worlds of famous Founders. The letter clearly meant a great deal to Rosenbach Sackey; he framed the document with a portrait of Washington and a view of Mount Vernon.

It is little wonder that the letter sparked David Rosenbach Sackey’s lifelong interest in American history, and his own focus on collecting memorabilia connected to the American presidents and other leaders. In *Succession: Why Presidential History Matters Now*, the lives, collecting passions, and legacies of A.S.W. Rosenbach and David Rosenbach Sackey intertwine through the artifacts you see all around you.



The presidency embodies the spirit of the American people, and its vibrancy reflects the health of the republic. Just as citizens of the United States have granted the presidency the lofty cultural position it now holds, so too can they reshape its resonance, and hold it to account.

We hope this exhibition helped you to think about the presidency beyond the partisan news cycle that defines modern American political life. After you leave the gallery, we hope Succession helps you ask questions about the nature of leadership and informs your own civic engagement.

Who do you think was the most effective president in American history? Why?

What are the most important skills and values for a public officeholder to possess?

If you were President of the United States, what would be the most important policy decision you would make?

How can you become more involved in U.S. civic life?

Is there a public office for which you might like to run?

Share your thoughts with @TheRosenbach #SuccessionExhibition.



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