

Past presidents

Site looks at former Oval Office occupants as glass half full

Saturday marked the one-year anniversary of the inauguration of the 45th president of the United States. Despite sometimes bitter partisan divides and occasional allegations of foul play, this country has been using elections to peacefully transfer political power for 220 years.

The end of the first year of a president's term is a natural point to look back and assess his performance. But, because of the tribal nature of political parties, it's almost impossible to get an objective assessment



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InSites

from contemporary sources. Each side will cherry pick, exaggerate and even lie to paint their guy as successful or their opponent as a failure.

To get a more objective assessment of a president's performance you need the distance of time and the context of history. Google, besides being the world's premier search platform, has a collec-

tion of websites on art, culture, travel and more. American Democracy (google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/project/american-democracy) is a Google site that features information on all the former presidents of the United States.

The site starts with a portrait gallery of former presidents. Clicking on an image brings you to a page with a short biography, links to more articles and a gallery of images and memorabilia.

Below the portrait gallery is a collection of features on presidential life. One looks at pets in the White House, another at the Secret Service and a third at first ladies. A link takes you to several more articles. These are mostly fluff pieces that accentuate the positive and gloss over any warts.

Next on the site are virtual tours of presidential homes and other significant locations. Google street-view technology is used so you can wander from room to room and look in all directions.

After the tours are sections on the history of the presidency, significant moments, campaigns, elections, artworks and

artifacts. These are collections of stories and images about major events during the terms of the various presidents. Gettysburg, women's suffrage, Pearl Harbor and D-Day are among the serious topics covered. Campaign memorabilia, presidential board games and stamps are some of the lighter subjects.

The site is nicely designed with strong imagery, good typography and easy navigation. It looks at the terms of former presidents as if the glass is half full. Scandals and failures are mentioned, but not dwelled upon.

Maybe that's a good way to look at the presidency. We've only had a few really good presidents. Most have been adequate caretakers who have made good and bad decisions. None have been so terrible that they brought down the country. Yet.

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