45 Odd Facts About US Presidents - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep.3)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green; welcome to my salon. This is mental_floss on Youtube.

1. Gerald Ford - birth name Lesley Lynch King, Jr. - was a male model for Cosmopolitan... and that is the first of 45 facts today you're going to learn about US Presidents.

[intro music]

2. To stay fit, Herbert Hoover and his personal physician invented their own sport - Hooverball. Why haven't you seen the highlights on SportsCenter? Well, mostly because Hoover's Presidency was a failure in every regard. Also the game was like a cross between volleyball, tennis, and dodgeball, except much more terrifying, because it was played with a medicine ball.

3. Speaking of Hoover and sports, young Herbert was manager of the football team at Stanford. But he was a little bit Holden Caulfield about the gig: at the first Stanford-Cal game in 1892, for instance, he forgot to bring the game ball.

4. Noted pugilist Teddy Roosevelt said he cut back on boxing in the White House because it was "rather absurd for a president to appear with a black eye or a swollen nose."

5. Equally absurd? Throwing a Swiss minister to the floor during a Judo demonstration, which Teddy also did. At a state luncheon. Even though Switzerland is neutral.

6. Incidentally, during his inauguration Teddy Roosevelt wore a ring that contained an honest-to-God lock of Abraham Lincoln's hair, which becomes slightly less weird when you know that:

7. In 1865, Teddy Roosevelt watched Abraham Lincoln's funeral procession in New York City, and apparently left quite an impression.

8. And speaking of Lincoln's hair, it was amazing. When historians talk about how remarkable Lincoln was as a man, a president, a vampire hunter... but they rarely mention that he could do THIS without product.

9. And he could rock more than one look too. A reporter once described his mop as "Wild Republican hair." I'm guessing Republican hair used to be a lot wilder and crazier before Dwight Eisenhower ruined the whole thing with his baldness.

10. Ulysses S. Grant was once arrested during his term in office on speeding charges. The President was pulled over and fined $20 for exceeding the Washington speed limit... on a horse!

11. But that was hardly the most serious of equine crimes: Franklin Pierce, our most handsome president, was arrested during his first year in office for running over a woman with his horse. A scene I will now recreate with Franklin Pierce being played by a monkey and the old lady being played by Smurfette. Oh come on...That was terrible, Franklin Pierce! Anyway, charges were dropped due to lack of evidence/him being President.

12. Speaking of horses, Bill Clinton is kind of a Brony. When he appeared on Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!, he aced the three questions about My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic.

13. By the way, we learned on a visit to the Clinton Presidential Library that his cat almost had its own Super Nintendo game called Socks the Cat Rocks the Hill.

14. Richard Nixon proposed to his wife, Pat, on their first date. Pro tip: that is not a good idea. Then he obsessively pursued her for two years until she finally said yes. Also not a good idea.

15. But it gets weirder than that, because to spend time with her in the interim, Nixon acted as Pat's chauffeur, driving her on dates with other guys... that's not creepy...

16. But perhaps creepiest of all was Nixon's favorite snack: cottage cheese with ketchup.

17. President Warren G. Harding bet a priceless set of White House china on a poker game — and lost...not the only example of corruption in his administration.

18. In 1988, George H.W. Bush briefly considered naming Clint Eastwood as his running mate. Instead he chose Dan Quayle.

19. Van Buren's entire autobiography fails to mention his wife.

20. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson issued the first Medicare card.

21. The recipient? Harry Truman.

22. And speaking of Truman, for his birthday in 1947, Harry's pals had a bowling alley installed in the White House... but he hadn't bowled since he was 19 years old.

23. He also, contrary to popular belief, never granted clemency to a turkey. Several history sites claim that Truman was the first President to pardon a Thanksgiving Day turkey. But the Truman Library can't find any "documents, speeches, newspaper clippings, photographs, or other contemporary records" tying him to the custom. According to their research, the one time President Truman was given a live turkey for the holidays, his family did what people expected them to do: they ate it.

24. So, who was the first president to give a bird a pass? John F. Kennedy. In 1963, Kennedy announced he wouldn't eat the turkey he'd been given. Instead, he sent it to a farm upstate where it had plenty of space to run and play and gobble and contemplate what its country had done for it.

25. The first president to host an Easter Egg roll on the White House lawn? Rutherford B. Hayes.

26. The first to host a prom? Gerald Ford, for his daughter Susan, who was all like, "Daaaaaad, this is so embarrassing, why can't we have a prom in the Hilton Ballroom like everybody else?!"

27. The first to own a Muzak franchise? Lyndon B. Johnson. Because you can't build a great society without terrible elevator music.

28. Incidentally, before he was president, Grover Cleveland was president.

29. But before that, Grover Cleveland was a hangman. As sheriff of Erie County, he personally carried out two hanging sentences to save his district money - which is probably not what the town meant when they were like, "you need to start closing some of these loopholes." *crickets* Anybody... loopholes? No? Sorry.

30. The great William Faulkner once refused an invitation from President Kennedy's White House. "Why that's a hundred miles away," Faulkner explained. "That's a long way to go just to eat."

31. Upon hearing the news of the notoriously quiet Calvin Coolidge's death, Dorothy Parker reportedly asked, "How can they tell?"

32. In 1933, an assassin shot at Franklin Delano Roosevelt five times while Roosevelt was giving a speech. Five people were hit. None were Roosevelt.

33. And now, let me share with you an excerpt from Ronald Reagan's Diary from October 17, 1984: "Little Drew Barrymore — the child in 'E.T.' — was one of the children [I met]. She's a nice little person."

34. Speaking of Reagan, if you combine the electoral college results of the 1980 and 1984 elections, Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale 1014-62.

35. Also, he nearly took a part in Back to the Future III... in my opinion, the most underrated film in the franchise.

36. Furthermore in 1983, he convinced Mr. T to play Santa. Seriously. I have long argued that we need to imagine Santa more complexly.

37. Harry S. Truman's middle name? Just "S".

38. President Obama's received some weird gifts, including: 50 pairs of boxer briefs from David Beckham;

39. a pair of blinged-out headphones exclusively designed for him by Ludacris;

40. a $50k insurance policy in case he's ever attacked by Australian crocodiles... only Australian crocodiles;

41. and a pet donkey that a town in Colombia tried to send him. Tried being the operative word because Obama did politely decline.

42. But speaking of pets, John and Abigail Adams, this is true, had a dog named Satan.

43. Benjamin Harrison's pet possums were named Mr. Reciprocity and Mr. Protection, which coincidentally are also the names of my guns.

44. And Teddy Roosevelt's kids had some tremendously named guinea pigs: Dr. Johnson, Bishop Doane, Fighting Bob Evans, Father O'Grady...

45. For a better name than all of those, we return to my portrait gallery. By the way, that is my family. Jimmy Carter once wrote a children's book called The Little Baby Snoogle-Fleejer. That's right, Snoogle-Fleejer...

Thanks for watching mental_floss on YouTube, made with the help of all of these nice people. If you have a great question you've always wanted the answer to, submit it in comments and we'll try to answer as many as we can at the end of each video, starting in April.