

Presidents' Body Counts:

The Twelve Worst and Four Best American Presidents

Based on How Many Lived or Died Because of Their Actions

by Al Carroll

About the Author

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His other books are *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veteran Traditions from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War* and *Survivors: Family Histories of Colonialism, Genocide, and War*. His next books will be *Ira Hayes: The Meaning of His Life in Native Memory and White Stereotypes*, an alternate history work *Confederate Tyranny*, and *A People's History of Texas*. He is a longtime activist and researcher for NewAgeFraud.org.

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Introduction:

How to Judge a President,
or the Presidency If Human Life Matters

Politics and history are far too important to leave to professionals. All people have the right to control their own fates, to not die before their time from unneeded wars or other preventable deaths, and to not be asked to approve of atrocities done in their name, often in secret. They should be able to seek out knowledge of such matters and not see control of their lives handed off to elites.

But one does not see such a belief when looking at the attitudes of many political leaders, presidential scholars, and political commentators. Too often politicians and analysts think of average people as chess pieces. This book seeks to make the chess pieces into people yet again and put the lives and welfare of all human beings front and center in politics. Far too many presidents and their admirers reflexively defend presidential power. There are too many imitators of Bismark among them, and not enough imitators of Gandhi in his later years.

By that I do not mean the often empty, rote, and shallow admiration so many pose towards Gandhi's best known disciple, Martin Luther King. I mean imitators of both men's goals and views. I am not speaking of strict pacifism, which neither man believed. Both admitted the moral and practical necessity and worth of soldiers and police.

I am speaking of something far broader. For both Gandhi and King sought system-wide social change taking the moral high ground. Both men were moralists, but ultimately pragmatic ones who sought how best to practically see that morality put into place and either legally structured, or to see immoral legal structures ended. Both sought to turn the other cheek when necessary to change the enemy's mind and also motivate the public by exposing the brutal nature of unjust systems. Both also extended these views and tactics from centers of power to the most remote village within their nations onto the farthest battlefields outside it. Though both were opposed to most (but not all) wars, both

planned their campaigns in as much detail as the best generals. This book is one moralist's argument for humanitarianism as the highest concern one should have to judge a president and for politics in general, and that presidents that were evil should be correctly remembered as such and nothing else. The just noble presidents, though fewer, should be equally remembered. One must fight with every living breath any ideology, system, policy, or official that is proudly amoral or contemptuous of human lives.

In the 1990s there emerged a bizarre urban legend, one without the tiniest bit of evidence to back it, yet believed by tens of millions of Americans. Though this politically motivated conspiracy theory emerged before most average Americans discovered and regularly used the internet as they do today, one can currently find many sites repeating this ludicrous myth.

The Clinton Body Count claims that Bill and Hillary Clinton killed dozens of people to get Bill elected president, and then the two continued to kill many to stay president or cover up alleged scandals even while in office. Conspiracy theorists argue the Clintons were involved in drug dealing, organized crime, grand larceny, bribery, ties to radical groups, and assorted alleged sexual misdeeds from adultery to prostitution to lesbianism, even rape. And of course, the Clintons supposedly either murdered or ordered the murder of fifty or more people in tandem with their lust and greed.

Obviously the purpose of this conspiracy theory is to smear the Clintons, to change their image from political opposition one disagrees with to purely downright evil people who murder, rape, and steal with impunity. Body Count proponents sought (and still seek) nothing less than to turn the Clintons into demonic figures. It takes quite a bit of blindly ideological zeal to want to do so, for Bill Clinton was mostly too mediocre a president to waste such anger on. As will be discussed later, the worst thing Clinton did is rarely the source of anger for those who hate him.

This book is nothing like the incredibly ludicrous Clinton Body Count, though I will be happy if some of the curiosity factor related to that conspiracy theory rubs off on this book. Instead what I propose to do is to judge presidents by the most nonpartisan and reliable standard: who did the most

harm and/or good to the greatest number of people, measured especially by the number of deaths they either caused or avoided, along with their intent.

Judging the good that an individual does is far more difficult than weighing their evil or injury. For presidents, one must judge such amorphous measures as how they led or at least worked with public reform movements, how many were helped or harmed by a legislative measure and just how much did that president play a role in its being passed, how issues of war and peace were carried out, and how much attention they devoted to being farsighted on issues that with 20/20 hindsight now seem so important.

Judging harm can be hazy as well. Judging outright evil is far easier. The most obvious evil is how many innocents died, or to be more blunt and less euphemistic, how many were killed or even murdered or massacred because of presidential orders. Those historians, journalists, commentators, activists, or politicians who insist on judging a president on such sideshow pabulum and superficiality as “inspiring confidence, “leadership,” or “presidential caliber” are frankly not much better than celebrity tabloid writers.

Such cheerleaders for the presidency have become far too enamored of their subjects. Like the celebrity journalist who seriously argues the artistic merits of a star's haircut, an author who judges a president for how they made the general public feel deserves little credibility. And ones who make excuses for, again, actions that must be rightly labeled evil, based so on the party or ideology of a president, deserve to be called party hacks and hypocrites. If two presidents of opposite party or belief carry out the same evil, they are both evil. One cannot in good conscience be an apologist for great evil, or even “minor” evil.

For American presidents do commit evil all the time. If one knows anything in depth about American history one cannot deny that, and only the most willfully blind shall. There are many Americans who frankly do not know the Evil That American Presidents Often Do, and this book is for them. The ignorant, unless remaining so by choice, are blameless. Most Americans were never taught

in public schools most of what is in this book.

Most journalists do a terrible job on the subject, denying the frequent evil of those in the White House for two reasons. One reason is because media elites are multi millionaires working for multi billionaires. It would defy their class interests to admit the evil of powerful institutions. The top anchors (in the UK they are more accurately described as what they are, news readers) work for businesses that are profit machines first and foremost. Delivering truthful information is a secondary concern. Two, most media reporting on the presidency become close to people in those administrations, become their friends, often business partners, occasionally even marriage partners. The media and the White House are in an incestuous relationship, and it should be no surprise that journalists make excuses for their de facto family.

In universities we can and usually are more honest about the system we live under, and for that reason partisan hacks deliberately lie and label universities as “liberal.” Only those utterly ignorant of higher education, or choosing to be blatant liars, could claim so. Those actually in academia know there are no shortages of critically thinking conservatives in universities, from business schools to military and religious institutes to law schools to agricultural and mechanical universities. (For example, in my own research interests I often find writings from US military officers that are extremely critical of government policy.) The biggest problem interfering with academic freedom today is not ideology but enormous corporate influence, the distortion and pressures applied by moneyed interests. The fields of political science, economics, and yes, journalism, are all dominated by conservatives. The history profession was openly conservative for most of its time as a profession. Up until the civil rights era, much of the supposedly liberal social sciences were also afflicted by scientific racism.

Today, most historians are neither liberal nor conservative. I, like many other scholars, regard such labels as reductionist, oversimplified, and downright anal retentive in trying to make every person and belief fit into such narrow categories. Most historians, myself included, would want to write you an essay to describe all the subtleties of their beliefs and are not deeply tied to either party or the binary

division into liberal and conservative ideology.

Insisting everyone and everything be divided into liberal or conservative is not only inaccurate. It limits debate, ignoring two things: most Americans are neither liberal nor conservative; and there is a wide range of opinion both outside of and within those two labels. America actually has a more limited range of political belief systems than most other nations. Most other nations have, for example, socialist or labor parties. (Any who try to label Democrats as “socialists” only prove how gullible they are in swallowing propaganda, or their ignorance of what the word socialist means.) Most other nations also usually have major parties to the right of the Republican Party, even its social and religious conservative wing. This work is politically neither liberal nor conservative. But I am constrained to point out when those of either ideology are destructive amoral hypocrites, and especially when presidents are either blinded by ideology, or rise above it to achieve good things.

Whether left, right, or the almost mythical political center, **what all good and insightful historians and other scholars and analysts share is being non-dogmatic**, going where the evidence takes you and being willing to test their beliefs and change one's opinions based on the results. I have no doubt some of the narrower minded critics reading this work will immediately try to pigeon hole this avowedly nonpartisan and non-ideological work as the opposite of whatever their own belief is. This work, and my own worldview, are shaped primarily by two beliefs; American Indian traditions that puts the needs of one's people first and sees warfare as inherently unnatural and destructive, and harmful to the human spirit, even while warriors who sacrifice themselves must be deeply honored; and the Catholic humanitarian tradition of social justice that seeks to save lives as well as souls.

Both spiritual traditions and peoples look at the actions of those in power instinctively with suspicion, believing one must serve spirit, not the insane fat takers of the white man's world, and not Mammon, Moloch, or Babylon. The office of president is too often seen by many American commentators as part of a civic religion, as something one must not question any more than a fundamentalist dares not question their own faith.

Many other Americans instead treat government as something distant which they are not a part of, instead of the democracy they share responsibility for. They retreat into lazy cynicism, turning sometimes their very lives over to others for disposal. By disdaining politics, they are much more vulnerable to politicians' will.

For amoral power brokers in Washington and Wall Street, both the unquestioning patriot and the indifferent cynic suit their purposes well, allowing the power hungry to pursue that power without having to really consult or answer to the public. Government and business elites often look at the public as a nuisance, objects to manipulate, flocks to fleece, or fodder for their wars. Too many elites live in or want to run a world that is amoral, one where they dare not admit to the public the brutality of their everyday business.

And for US presidents, clearly many of them committed evil. This includes in all major parties and across all political ideologies. Were these presidents judged by the standards we reserve for America's putative enemies, some of these presidents should have faced war crimes trials and been executed once convicted. For those presidents still living, the fact that we have not put several on trial for war crimes says much about the inadequacies of our theoretically republican government, and about many Americans' double standards.

Some categories are for callous indifference or deaths caused by incompetence. For them, the remedy is far easier. Those presidents deserve every bit of condemnation that can be heaped upon them, but no legal punishment. For those presidents who were men of honor, courage, and skill who enabled many to live who would have perished by war or hardship, they deserve as much praise as the worst ones deserve scorn. Even presidents who unintentionally saved lives, or who did the right thing for the wrong reasons, deserve recognition. Both praise and criticism must be nonpartisan. The list of condemnation includes both Nixon and Andrew Johnson, Reagan and Clinton. The list of praiseworthy includes Jefferson, Lincoln, and Carter. Those who did both good and evil include Lyndon Johnson, both Bushes, and FDR.

Surprisingly, some of those frequently listed by scholars as the worst presidents, like Grant, come out much better. Admired figures like Washington come across as mere caretakers. Many presidents were just there, a presence at most. Few people know most of the presidents between the end of Reconstruction and the Spanish-American War, or between the world wars, for good reason.

The methodology used in this book is simple: Did a president commit actions that knowingly led directly to the deaths of innocents? If yes, then that president belongs in a category for the degree of evil they carried out, the number of mass deaths. The categories are ranked in order of how many were killed as a result and how culpable a president is for these deaths, from outright genocide to the smaller numbers of deaths that occur during periods of mass incarceration of dissidents. Each president within that category is further ranked by the number of deaths, the most prolific killers at the top.

Each section begins with a definition of the category. This is followed by several brief summaries of the facts before going into a detailed discussion:

What: A quick summary of the atrocities done.

The Body Count: How many deaths, based on the best credible estimates.

Who Also Gets the Blame: Discussion of who besides the president is guilty of causing these atrocities, or who is often blamed.

For all sections from Section Eight on, events or presidents are listed chronologically, not ranked by the number of deaths. For these two parts, Section Eight: The Good Records of Presidents and Section Nine: What If? Who Would Have Been Far Better at Saving Lives as President?, the summaries are only a slightly bit different:

What: A quick summary of the events likely to lead to many lives saved.

The Number of Lives Saved: The most credible estimates, generally based on the events that presidents could have avoided.

Who Also Gets the Credit: Others, public officials, leaders, or social movements, that also

played a part in saving many lives.

As you may have already noticed, the most important facts are often in bold. Presidents are listed in order of the worst of all first, in terms of numbers of atrocities and degree of blame and evil. Best presidents are listed chronologically.

This is a book for the general public, not academia. Thus, footnotes are absent. But noting my sources is very important, since no doubt partisans of parties or ideologies will go into denial. Or there may be those wishing to know more about a topic. Sources for every entry will be listed in a future supplement, as well as further discussion of some side issues.

It is my hope this book stirs discussion and will be used as a source in classrooms, at both the university and high school levels. Students, show this book to the bored coaches who “teach” history to you at most high schools by dull quizzes, chapter summaries, and tedious pointless memorization. Let your classes become debating sessions.

For every political or history junkie, show this book to the overly partisan of both parties and watch them squirm about the choices they made voting. For the motivated voter, quote this book to politicians at town hall meetings, and let no congressmen ever blindly support a president in the name of vague and illusory “national security.” For those presidents who committed these atrocities long ago, the least we owe their victims is to be honest. To have our schools, federal buildings, airports, cities, and states named after butchers is appalling, as is a genocidal president appearing on our currency.

Enjoy the honest look, and use the ammunition I give you against dogmatists of every political stripe, not just the ones you are not part of. The final conclusions include suggestions for how to choose presidents looking beyond partisanship. Be as willing to use the facts presented herein to critique your own party or ideology. Not doing so makes you as willfully blind as the ones you criticize.

Section One:

Presidents' Roles in Genocide

The term genocide was first coined and defined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 to describe the Holocaust, though there were many genocides before that. Lemkin's definition is pretty straight forward, listing the following elements:

Attempted or Successful Destruction of a Nation, People, Culture, or Religious Group in Whole or in Part. The last phrase is very important. The genocidal do not have to exterminate an entire people to be guilty of genocide. One could also be guilty of genocide by deliberately seeking to wipe out a part of a people to make it easier to control the rest. Thus Hitler's orders to wipe out about one tenth of the Polish population constituted genocide against all Poles. All three US presidents in this section did not try to kill every last person of each group. But Nixon, Reagan, and Jackson did deliberately cause deaths of such a huge percentage of these groups, and planned the killings knowing full well the results, that what they did constitutes genocide.

Mass Murder of Non-Combatants. Killing many soldiers is not genocide. By the same token, just because one side kills many soldiers in combat does not mean that also killing many civilians with the intent of wiping out all or a part of them is not genocide. Pointing to the fact that American Indians, Jews, Black slaves, or any other group fought back against genocide does not mean genocide did not happen. All three US presidents listed in this section approved the killings of these Cambodians, Guatemalans, and members of the Five Tribes, knowing full well these were virtually all civilians.

Mass Rape or Rape as a War Tactic. Individual soldiers raping is not genocide. A policy in place ordering the use of mass rapes to intimidate a people, as Columbus did by rewarding his soldiers with Native women to rape, or Serbian soldiers and militias did against Bosnian Muslims, clearly is practicing an element of genocide.

Starvation or Disease as a War Tactic. Famine and disease that often follows from war is not

genocide. Deliberately using them to break the enemy is. Thus the deliberate mass killing of buffalo by the US military to starve out American Indian tribes was an act of genocide, as was the use of diseased bodies by Hernan Cortes to contaminate Aztec water supplies. No doubt to the surprise of many, the US government never used diseased blankets to wipe out Natives. British General Lord Amherst did, as did American fur trappers to wipe out much of the Mandan tribe.

Forced Sterilization. This must be a policy attempting to wipe out or diminish a group.

Forced Adoption. Again, this must be a policy attempting to wipe out or diminish a group.

Assault on or Disruption of Culture, Language, or Religion. This must be part of an attempt to weaken a group and make it easier to conquer. Thus US government assimilation efforts aimed at immigrants are not genocide. But assimilation efforts at Indian boarding schools run by both the Canadian and US governments were cultural genocide.

Some versions of the definition of genocide insist the group under assault must be racial, ethnic, religious, or national. Such a definition would leave out Stalin's mass killing of at least twenty million Soviet peasants and dissidents. It would also leave out Mao's mass killing of tens of millions of Chinese dissidents.

Even the Holocaust would be affected. The millions of political prisoners, handicapped, gays, and criminals executed by the Nazis side by side in the same death camps as Jews, Romany, Poles, and Jehovah's Witnesses suddenly become a separate class of victims. Clearly this is unconscionable, and not what Lemkin or any other human rights activist wants.

For there is an enormous industry of genocide denial. The Holocaust, thankfully, has been recognized as such an egregious crime that only the most blind, ignorant, lunatic, or clearly bigoted would deny it happened or try to diminish the scope of the massive tragedy. But other genocides are not exempt. Hundreds of "scholars" and thousands of commentators, journalists, and government officials spend a great deal of effort denying certain genocides happened. The personalities doing so can be as horrific as the actual officials ordering the mass killings to as banal and ignorant as film and cultural

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