

The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden

Appropriately marking the first presidency of the new millennium, the Museum publicly inaugurated an expansive historical exhibition on November 15, 2000. The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden breaks ground in its focus, scope, and execution. According to Museum Director Dr. Spencer Crew, “In many ways, this show provides a model for shows that follow.”

**Theodore Roosevelt
Rough Rider doll**



During this landmark year, the Museum team—led by Project Curators Spencer Crew, Lonnie Bunch, and Harry Rubenstein—scripted, designed, selected and collected objects, created audio-visual materials, constructed, and installed the 10,000-square-foot exhibition. The challenge has been to present the Presidency in a way that is both historic and personally relevant.

To enhance the visitor experience even before visiting the exhibition, a new Museum entry area was designed to greet visitors in the second-floor Flag Hall. It introduces *The American Presidency* and *The Star-Spangled Banner Conservation Lab and Exhibition* as two cornerstones of the Museum. On a large projection screen, a brief presentation frames these exhibitions as they relate to the question of American Identity. The exploration of what it means to be an American resounds in the objects and graphics of these exhibitions. An additional presentation provides a general introduction to the Museum as a whole.

Thematically, *The American Presidency* examines the office of the presidency and its relationship to the American public, revealing the ways in which the presidency influences American life. The exhibition's title exemplifies both the glory of the office and the incredible burden of its responsibility. This theme carries through in 11 thoughtfully-crafted sections, each with multimedia presentations on how the president communicates and is portrayed through news and popular culture vehicles and how the public receives the messages.

A vast majority of the objects on display in the exhibition come from the Museum's political collections, and for the first time, pieces that may have been exhibited individually will be shown together. Important new items that were collected for the exhibition include a ballot box (to remind visitors



of their roles as citizens) and a current national budget. Campaign items from the Museum's collections date from the 1870s. To update the story, curators visited this year's New Hampshire and Iowa primaries and Republican, Democratic, and Reform Party conventions to obtain the latest in campaign buttons, posters, and hats.

In creating the exhibition, the team sought to ensure that while visitors view a rich and unique collection, both visitors and other audiences can gain a better understanding of what it means to be president of the United States. As an outreach initiative, an in-depth Web site helps to interpret the office of the presidency while it highlights the objects featured in the exhibition. On the site, users can follow links to reach related Smithsonian sites and a host of outside organizations. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum is planning a year of public programming with speakers and special guests, scholarly discussions, films, and more. Educational curricula and materials are being made



available nationwide via the Web. These outreach efforts enable the Museum to share with all people *The American Presidency: A Glorious Burden*.



The presidency shapes America, just as America shapes the presidency.

—Lonnie G. Bunch,
Associate Director for
Curatorial Affairs

Top: A campaign stop for Harry S. Truman
Center: Tin plate commemorating William H. Taft's inauguration
Bottom: President John F. Kennedy in the Oval Office