

COMBING *Through the* WHITE HOUSE

SILHOUETTE QUIZ

Dive into history with our exciting matching game! Match the hair silhouettes to the names and descriptions of important figures who have occupied the White House. Discover fascinating stories about U.S. presidents and first families, and explore how hair has influenced their public and private lives, all presented with meticulous detail and engaging visuals. Can you match each silhouette to its rightful owner?



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1. BARACK OBAMA

Hair Like Mine—the 2009 photo of five-year-old Jacob Philadelphia in the Oval Office patting the head of President Barack Obama (44th president, 2009-17) just to see if the president’s hair was like his—is one of the most famous White House photos in recent years. In the opinion of many, the photo inspired legions of African American kids to think that they, too, could aspire to great accomplishments in their lives.

2. HILLARY CLINTON

“If I want to knock a story off the front page,” joked Hillary Clinton (First Lady, 1993-2001), “I just change my hairstyle.” And she did, often, throwing red meat to the newshounds hot on her trail for the hidden meaning behind every phase of her “hair-volution,” from scrunchie and headband to bouffant and bob. Whatever style she sported, though, one message seemed clear: the hallmark of the Clinton brand would be far from the frills of more glamorous First Ladies such as Jackie Kennedy and Melania Trump. The “Hillary look” was instead summarized by the “3 P’s”: pantsuits, practicality, and power hair.

3. ANDREW JACKSON

Historians long believed that Andrew Jackson (7th president, 1829-37) died of mercury and lead poisoning, from bullets in his body due to the many duels he fought and from the medications he took for an array of ailments. Two samples of his hair—one from 1815 and another from 1839—were tested in 1999, and while the hair reflected “significantly elevated” levels of both substances, they were not, according to the American Medical Association, toxic. Instead, Jackson died after suffering for years from an assortment of maladies, including dropsy, heart disease, kidney failure, and chronic tuberculosis. In other words, though the president may have lived a most unnatural life, he died a natural death.

4. JOHN F. KENNEDY

John F. Kennedy (35th president, 1961-63) was obsessed with his appearance, including his hair. He was forever smoothing his locks, retrieving and repositioning any tendril of hair that might dare to go rogue. Interestingly, First Lady Jackie Kennedy contributed to

this effort to maintain her husband’s perfect Ivy League coif, even after his death. In 1964, when the US Mint released a special Kennedy half-dollar to memorialize the slain president, Jackie was unhappy with the coin’s depiction of her husband’s profile. She thought the hair above his ear was too heavily accented, and so the coin was redesign and re-released with less pronounced waves beneath the president’s famed side part. Consequently, given its limited release, the first version of the coin, which became known as the “Accented Hair” Kennedy half-dollar, skyrocketed in value. Especially fine specimens of the coin have sold at auction for up to \$20,000.

5. ZACHARY TAYLOR

Taylor (12th president, 1849-50) died on July 9, 1850, after only 16 months in office. He died from gastroenteritis stemming from eating cherries and apples and drinking water and milk that were contaminated by D.C.’s horrible water system; the poor medical treatment he received from his doctors only hastened his death. But in 1990, college professor Clara Rising made the shocking claim that Taylor could have been murdered, poisoned with arsenic by slavery-loving Southern sympathizers. Even more shocking, she gained permission to have the president’s body disinterred for analysis of his death. Upon opening the coffin, it was immediately clear that the comma of hair seen hanging over the president’s forehead in so many of his portraits was now gone, but that hair from other areas of the president’s body was of sufficient quantity for scientific testing. The results? The level of arsenic in Taylor’s body was hundreds of times *lower* than the quantity needed to kill him. The president had indeed died from gastroenteritis, as scholars and medical examiners had long believed. Abraham Lincoln’s status as the first president assassinated in American history remains secure.

6. BARBARA BUSH

Tragedy likely spurred the signature white hair and matronly look of Barbara Bush (First Lady, 1989-93), one of the most body-shamed figures in White House history. Her hair began to turn white when she was merely 28, in the wake of the death of her three-year-old daughter. Although she always denied a tie between the tragedy and her sudden hair color change, her

family did not, and recent scientific research supports a tie between stress and the stem cells affecting the color of our hair.

7. JOE BIDEN

Donald Trump was not the only candidate harmed by that political buzz saw called hair during the contentious election of 2020: so was the eventual winner of the contest, Joe Biden (46th president, 2021 -). Videos of Biden getting uncomfortably close to women, ostensibly sniffing their hair, became a common meme on social media among Biden's detractors, especially during the politically charged period when the #MeToo movement, demanding greater respect for women, was frequently making headlines.

8. WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

When the curly mustachioed William Howard Taft (27th president, 1909–13) left office, he brought an end to the hairy phase in the history of presidential facial hair, which had begun in 1861 with Abraham Lincoln, the first bearded president. Taking a razor to this hairy phase was the Progressive Era (1890–1920) and its spate of public-health reforms, all rising in response to the country's rapid industrialization and urbanization. To control the spread of disease, reformers called for shorter hemlines for women, so their garments would no longer drag along the dirty streets; bans on spitting and laws requiring spittoons in public spaces; and clean-shaven men, so infectious diseases like tuberculosis could not hide and fester in their beards. For the last 111 years, only clean-shaven men have been elected to the presidency.

9. GROVER CLEVELAND

In 1893, Grover Cleveland (22nd and 24th president; 1885–89, 1893–97; the only president to serve two nonconsecutive terms) was diagnosed with oral cancer, and he quickly needed surgery. But the president, like presidents and their handlers today, was reluctant to release this medical news, for fear of undermining faith in his leadership, so the public was told the president was taking a fishing trip on a friend's yacht. The president did indeed go boating, but his secret surgery occurred on the moving boat instead. It was an incredible feat, in

which doctors gave him a topical anesthetic of cocaine and then removed the tumor through his mouth along with several teeth and part of his jaw. And the key to keeping the public in the dark about the operation—in addition to discrediting a journalist who caught on to the true story—was hair: by no means could the surgeons remove the president's large, walrus-like, signature mustache, because hair was critical to the cover-up.

10. THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Theodore Roosevelt (26th president, 1901–09) was one of three presidents who received hair rings as gifts from John Hay, personal secretary to Abraham Lincoln and later Secretary of State to Theodore Roosevelt. Reflecting the hair-collecting craze of the Victorian Era (when hair was commonly collected as a tangible keepsake of people we loved, admired, and missed), Hay gave two congratulatory gold rings containing hair from George Washington to Rutherford B. Hayes and William McKinley upon their elections to the presidency. To Roosevelt he gave a gold ring containing hair from Abraham Lincoln, whom Roosevelt idolized. Roosevelt was honored to wear the ring at his Inauguration on March 4, 1905.

11. MARTIN VAN BUREN

For the first half century in American history, presidents were typically clean-shaven, like our wigless but powder-haired first president, George Washington. True, there were some hairy exceptions to this clean-shaven period in White House history—especially after the Founders died, their children gained power, and the country pushed farther into the rough-and-tumble frontier beyond the Appalachian Mountains. But these exceptions were subtle, falling short of complete beards and mustaches, as demonstrated by the bushy side-whiskers of Martin Van Buren (8th president, 1837–41). Another two decades would pass before the first fully bearded president—Abraham Lincoln—took office in 1861.

12. LYNDON JOHNSON

When Lyndon B. Johnson (36th president, 1963–69) died in 1973, pictures of the late president showed

him with grey hair that was nearly shoulder-length, shocking the public who hadn't seen a picture of him in years. Many wondered about the reason for the mullet-like long locks, especially on someone whose career had been decimated by long-haired, antiwar, hippy protesters. There's good reason to believe that Johnson did this, consciously or subconsciously, as a protest against the buzz-cut Republican "yes-men" of the Nixon administration who succeeded him in office—men whose haircuts emulated those of the young draftees they sent to war, and men who would soon embroil the country in a Vietnam on the home front, in a quagmire called Watergate.

13. RONALD REAGAN

Ronald Reagan (40th president, 1981–89) was a revered figure in the 1980s, especially to conservatives. His hair, however, has proved much less popular among collectors on the auction circuit. Three dark strands from his famed pompadour, perhaps still slick with the president's go-to product, Brylcreem, were auctioned off for a mere \$358.50 in 2006.

14. AL GORE

When Al Gore (Vice President, 1993–2001) lost the agonizing presidential election of 2000 to George W. Bush, the demoralized Democratic candidate disappeared from the limelight—and grew a beard. To political pundits of the day, this hairy change in Gore signaled one important thing: his retreat from presidential politics. He was done. It was a sign of how strong the American prejudice remains against presidential facial hair.

15. GEORGE WASHINGTON

Contrary to popular belief, Washington (1st president, 1789–97) did not—like so many leaders in the 18th century—wear a wig. Perukes (as male wigs were called) were widely associated with monarchy and nobility, which Washington, as the commander of America's revolutionary forces, was busy rebelling against, and so on a philosophical level he opposed elaborate wigs as the pompous trappings of an anti-republican social order. White hair, however, remained a fashionable sign of wealth and significance, and so Washington gladly powdered his slicked-back, yanked-tight, reddish-brown locks (which had faded to grayish white by the time of

his presidency)—hence the widespread misconception that Washington donned a white wig.

16. DONALD TRUMP

To Kayleigh McEnany, press secretary to Donald Trump (45th president, 2017–21), the media story most devastating to his presidency involved hair. According to a 2020 story in *The Atlantic*, President Trump canceled his 2018 outdoor speech at a Paris military cemetery on the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI because he had reportedly called the dead Marines buried there "suckers" for getting killed and because the rainy weather that day would have messed up his hair. Trump and his staff denied and denounced the story, based on anonymous sources, but the story stuck with the media nonetheless and was widely circulated, especially by his opponent in the 2020 presidential race, Joe Biden.

17. ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln (16th president, 1861–65) was the most body-shamed president in American history. He grew his now famous beard, becoming the first bearded president in American history, to counter his haggard and homely appearance, but once he did so, he was then widely criticized for his hairiness, frequently compared to an ape and a baboon. But the beard likely contributed to Lincoln's safety as well, especially during his dangerous train trip from his home in Illinois to Washington, DC, for his Inauguration. Pro-slavery fanatics hated him, and many threatened to kill him. But fortunately for Lincoln, few citizens waiting for him at train stations along his journey were on the lookout for a bearded president-to-be. In fact, as Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer has noted, "he [Lincoln] sported such a bushy beard that crowds welcoming him occasionally failed to recognize him."

18. BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Franklin was not an American president, though 21 percent of Americans (according to a 2022 YouGov civics poll) think he was. He did, however, save the presidency, and hair played a role in how he did so. For when he arrived in Paris in 1776, as our minister to France, he refused to wear a powdered wig, which was then diplomatic protocol. Instead, he wore a simple fur hat for cover-

ing his big bald head. The hat sparked a fashion craze in Paris. It became seen as a symbol of America itself – and its exciting New World experiment in freedom – and helped spur the goodwill needed for securing the treaty of alliance with France that sealed Britain’s defeat in the Revolutionary War. Women in Paris even began wearing special wigs designed specifically to resemble Franklin’s famed fur hat. Called the *Coiffure à la Franklin*, it’s arguably the most politically consequential hairstyle in history, because it contributed to the aid that was critical to the survival of that new country called the United States.

19. JACKIE KENNEDY

After John Kennedy took office in 1961, the world and the world’s media just couldn’t get enough of the dynamic new king and queen of America’s “Camelot,” as their glamorous but brief time in the White House (1961-63) would later be christened (at Jackie Kennedy’s insistence). Jackie became one of the most popular First Ladies in American history, noted for her understated elegance and bouffant hairstyle that made her a fashion icon and for the dignity with which she handled the tragic assassination of her husband.

20. FRANKLIN PIERCE

Franklin Pierce (14th president, 1853–57) was arguably the best-looking president—with the best-looking hair—ever. In fact, his hair, often wore tousled or cascading down his forehead, was one of the most commented-on characteristics of the man, living or dead. Mourners passing his open coffin commented on “his mass of curly black hair, somewhat tinged by age, but which was still combed on a deep slant over his wide forehead.”