

Forum

Leaders

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There is an obsolete meaning of the word "president" that reads "... a presiding deity, patron, or genius. . ." February, the month of Presidents, was once a time of gentle recall, of tales of our early leaders, their lives, their deeds, their characters. We learned of Washington's courage, patience, and honor; how his inexhaustible responsibility persisted through the dark winter of our Revolution, perhaps the only integrating force throughout those years of scattered warfare. And when he accepted the mantle of Presidency of this new republic, he did indeed become a "presiding deity".

In the month of Presidents we talked and thought about Abraham Lincoln. Somehow his image was clearer, for we had those early photographs of the sad, strong giant. It was the image of frontiersman, visionary, compassionate facilitator. And if that part of the obsolete definition of the word "president" that reads "... genius" refers to the presiding genius of spirit of the place or time favored by 18th century writers, we sense that President Lincoln did indeed embody the genius of his time and place.

This month of Presidents offers us the opportunity of seeing and listening to Presidential candidates daily. The phenomenon of constant exposure to those who would be President is in stark contrast to those singular, remote images of earlier times. The very process of this constant community and communication alters our concept of the Presidency, from the distant, somber hero to approachable universal Everyman. Somewhere in the quantities of images we hope to find the qualities of leadership.

So February becomes a time to think about leaders and their characters, historically and presently, nationally and locally. My list of preferred qualities starts with the ability to read, analyze, interpret, and solve problems successfully. Next comes an instinctive awareness of fellow humans' needs and abilities, and a willingness to encourage their expression. Energy that sustains, enthusiasm that energizes, and a sense of humor that gives perspective are all important.

Sometimes, too, there is an air of inevitable timeliness about leaders, for their experiences and goals have merged with fate to place them directly in line for the mantle of responsibility. But others accept the job because it needs doing — and that is called good citizenship.

Presiding geniuses and deities are not common today. But there are still those who share their energies, experiences, perspectives, and goals for the common good. Hats off!