



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Presidential Places
William Clinton's Childhood Home**

Presidential Places

George Washington	Birthplace
Andrew Jackson	Home and Grave
Abraham Lincoln	Home, Museum, and Tomb
Herbert Hoover	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
Harry Truman	Birthplace, Home, and Museum/Library
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Childhood Home and Museum
Ronald Reagan	Museum and Grave
Richard Nixon	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
George H.W. Bush	Museum/Library
William Clinton	Childhood Home
William Clinton	Museum/Library
George W. Bush	Museum/Library

Reflections on Visits to Presidential Places: Government Graft

Pending:

George Washington	Mount Vernon
Thomas Jefferson	Monticello
James Madison	Montpelier

And others as I travel America

Presidential Places

Hundreds of books, movies, and television programs are available about the homes, libraries, museums, birth, and burial places of America's Presidents. I cannot hope to replicate these works, nor do I wish to. My hope is that the essays in the *Presidential Places* series offer different and humorous perspectives about several of America's revered historical places.

Many of the places we visit in this series are called *libraries*. They are unique places containing historical information about America in general and specifically about an American president during his time in office.

Here is one definition of such a library: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept."

Here is an alternate and more accurate definition: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept away from the public."

Here is another definition of a presidential library, "A library, whose contents are forbidden to be examined by people who paid admission to enter the library and examine its contents in the first place. Therefore, Disneyland-like exhibits are created to placate the crowd."

A fourth definition: "Thinly disguised attempt to bolster the public image of a former President."

These definitions are acceptable to those who flock to presidential places. After all, presidential places are crowded places. The visitors must be curious about White House dinner menus, presidential pins, catchy campaign slogans, first-ladies' gowns, and other artifacts of American politics. Because these places vary in how they are named, I use the words *museum* and *library* interchangeably. It appears most of the places have buildings and rooms that serve both as museums and libraries.

In each of these places I visited, I had my fill of political drivel. But of more importance, I witnessed a deep sense of pride the site creators have about these places. And time and again, I beheld the thankfulness and patriotism of American citizens who were aware, while knowing America's faults, that the country offered a better way of life than many other nations. Even with tongue in cheek, I carried away a sense of American citizens' reverence for America and for America's Presidents' contributions to this legacy.

It is my goal in *Presidential Places* to provide you with some lesser-known and humorous aspects of Americana as well as a sense of the pride and patriotism of the sites' creators and visitors.

Unless otherwise noted, the cover page depicting the face of a U.S. President is sourced from Google.

William Clinton: Childhood Home

A few years ago, while driving through Arkansas, Holly and I noticed a sign informing us we were close to Bill Clinton's childhood home in Hope, Arkansas. Thus alerted, we took a side journey to his home, where I snapped the photo in Figure 1.



One of the house guides, who had lived in Hope all her life, provided many stories about young Clinton, his mom, and stepdad. Regardless of your views on Clinton, and on his sexual behavior in the Oval Office, he overcame huge obstacles to become President. The differences of entitlements between say, the Bush family and Clinton are like night and day. Anyway, the stories from the guides made the trip worthwhile. Go there and you will see what I mean. They were the antithesis of typical museum guides: homey and earthy, just like Bubba Bill.



Figure 2. Socks and Buddy.

In a small museum on the site, I came across two photos of Socks and Buddy, as seen in Figure 2.

In deference to Socks, who did not get along with Buddy, these pictures were taken at different settings. According to the Hope site personnel, Socks' photo was snapped on the East Lawn of the White House. Buddy's portrait was made in New York after the Clintons left the White House.

Unfortunately, Buddy is now the former buddy of our former President. He was let-out of the Clintons' New York residence and met an untimely death on New York's streets, merrily chasing cars. But like his master, Buddy liked chasing things. Thus, we can be sure he died a happy chaser of coveted treasures.

Class Distinctions Overcome

As mentioned, the guides at this house were different from guides at other presidential places. They knew the Clinton family personally. As they walked us through the home, scenes shown in Figure 3, we were made aware that Bill lived in a loving place, with much support coming from his mother and grandparents. But not from his stepfather, who abused Bill's mother.

It struck me that these guides showed genuine affection for Bill Clinton, as well as the abode in which they were in charge. Holly and I were the only members of this tour. They spoke to us as if we were fellow citizens of Hope, who happened to come by to say hello and catch up on old times. It was a warm and rewarding visit through a part of America to which this writer could relate.



Figure 3. Scenes from Bill's home.

When I walked through the kitchen in this house, I was transported back to the kitchen of my childhood home, to past times of small single sinks, tiny stoves, “ice boxes,” and a hand-made dining table and chairs.

The scale of privilege slides both ways. Bill had his own bedroom, as seen in the right photo in Figure 3. As well as his private desk, from which he could write future presidential-like wisdoms.

At Bill's childhood age, I shared a small bedroom with three brothers. The room was so small that mother installed two sets of bunk beds to accommodate her sleeping brood. No desk. No chairs. I read while sitting on the floor. Nonetheless, I was ever so thankful. Unlike my bottom-of-the-pecking-order while sharing the two smaller double beds, I no longer had to play tug-of-war with my older and stronger brothers for mattress space and quilt possession and a paucity of pillows.

Small wonder Bill Clinton became president. He had his own bedroom, bed, and desk. The fruits of material leverage widen the gap of opportunity between those who possess the fruits and those who do not. Just ask the Kennedys and the Bushes.

But do these fruits of a past life make a future life more fruitful? Look at America's presidents. How many began their early lives with their own bedroom, bed, and desk? And not just these material accouterments, but the *symbolism* they represent of placing their owners onto the inside track of life's race to the tape of success. The answer is: until recently, very few, a subject that will be explored in this series.

Ambition and tenacity, along with intelligence, can carry a person across great divides of class and wealth distinction. In order to achieve success, those who must start in the slow lane of life learn early to be rigorous and tenacious. If they stay true to their roots, they can catch up with their more-privileged contestants.

As children, we learn of Abraham Lincoln's quest for knowledge; of his reading with light from a fireplace; of his largely educating himself, including the consumption of dry law books. His approach to life is remindful of an old saying: “The only army that cannot be conquered is the army of knowledge.”

Clinton had the luck of the draw with his native DNA-endowed intelligence. Regardless of our opinion of the man, to his credit, he exploited his intelligence to the fullest. He balanced the budget...as a Democrat. That's enough for citizens to perhaps overlook his peccadilloes in the Oval Office. He did little harm to America about this admittedly woeful insult to his wife... perhaps with the absence of a dry-cleaning bill which would have been a small contribution to the economy.

Museum

A small museum next to Bill's first White House had a souvenir store. Great, I could feed my addiction to worthless trinkets. I purchased many of them, but a photo of my favorite is shown below: a puzzle. The Clintons posed for the photo in Figure 4 early in President Clinton's first term. Notice his hair is still somewhat brown. Rumor has it that with each Oval Office tryst, his hair turned increasingly white, a variation on the Dorian Grey syndrome. Today, the President's hair is white as the shirt he is wearing for the puzzle.



Figure 4. An old-fashioned couple.

I've taken liberty with President Bill Clinton's past. I've made some fun of him, and had some jokes at his expense. All in all, I admire the man. He is truly an exceptional, funky individual. His childhood home in Hope, Arkansas, reflects parts of his homey ways...belying his intelligence and social skills.