

The Presidential Timeline of the 20th Century

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When we review President Lyndon B. Johnson's densely packed, 11-page appointments diary for August 4, 1964, we learn of both the attack on U.S. boats in the Gulf of Tonkin and the discovery of the bodies of three slain civil rights workers in Mississippi. In a recorded telephone conversation from that same day, we can hear Johnson trying to persuade a congressional delegation to pass the Poverty Bill when the White House operator breaks in, announcing Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, who tells the president about the attack near Vietnam. We can hear FBI officials tell Johnson about the discovery of the missing men, and Johnson asking that the announcement be held off until he had notified the families. At the end of the day, we can hear Lady Bird calling her husband “just to tell [him], I love you.”

The human experience of presidential leadership—how events are never neatly laid out in particular order, how decisions have to be made in different contexts, and how domestic events, political choices, foreign affairs, and family relationships all interact—is made vivid when students explore “The Presidential Timeline of the 20th Century.”

“The Presidential Timeline of the 20th Century” (presidentialtimeline.org) is a newly unveiled website jointly created by the Learning Technology Center of The University of Texas at Austin and The National Archives’ 12 presidential libraries. This web-based resource provides access to the continually growing store of digitized assets from the libraries’ collections. The site reminds us that history is not simply the set of narratives we

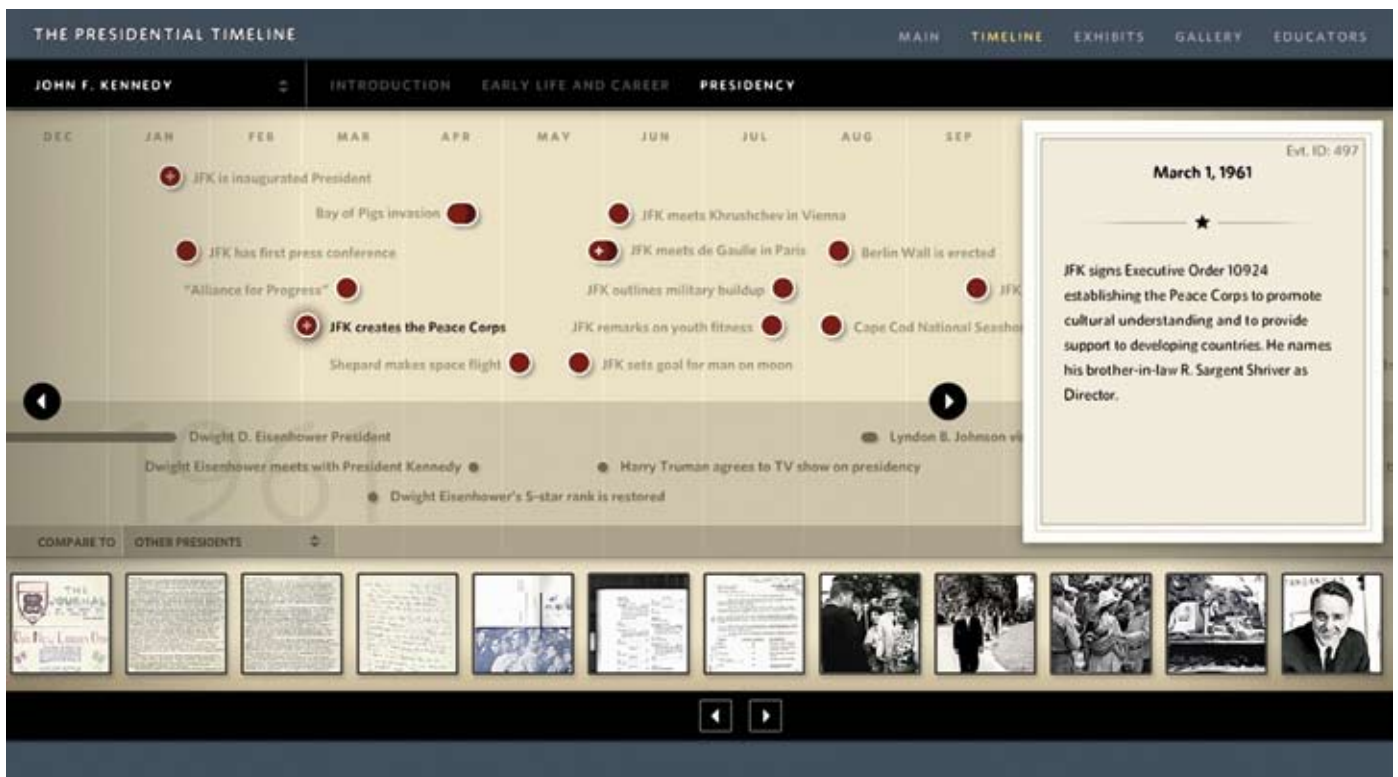
read in history books, but the experience of creating these stories from the essential evidence contained in primary sources such as Johnson’s diary and telephone conversations. The goal of this project is to make primary and secondary source materials readily and freely available to students, educators, and adult learners throughout the world via a single unified and intuitive interface.

The Timeline itself is deployed within a dynamic and visually engaging Flash-based interface that provides access to timelines of each modern president’s life before, during, and after his time in office. These timelines, in turn, provide direct access to assets (primary and secondary resources), exhibits, and educational activities associated with specific events.

At the time of its initial release in February 2007, the Timeline was populated with over 600 individual assets ranging from videos of significant presidential addresses and audio recordings of telephone calls, to photographs and handwritten internal White House memos. In addition to individual assets, the Timeline is populated by “curated exhibits.” These consist of a series of five to ten screens that tell the story of a Timeline event, illustrated with selected individual assets.

Scrolling through the Timeline causes any digitized assets associated with the selected event to appear at the bottom of the screen, along with explanatory notes about the event or the context of an asset. Other thematic timelines can be selected to appear under the main Timeline: the president’s approval ratings; events in other presidents’ lives; or events in the civil rights movement. Because the Timeline is an ongoing project, other thematic timelines and assets will be added, as well as assets from new presidential libraries as they enter the National Archives system. Eventually, earlier presidents will also appear on the Timeline.

The experience of working with archi-



val material differs profoundly from the experience of reading history in a book. The written narrative is usually thematically arranged, for example, with the civil rights movement in one section and the Vietnam War in another. But a student working with the Timeline would discover their overlap. Both the primary resources and educational activities provided by the Presidential Timeline are intended to enhance students' skills and enthusiasm for history and social studies. A continually growing set of educational activities will build upon the assets and events that populate the Presidential Timeline. A leading team of educators, including K-12 teachers, university professors, archivists, and education specialists from the presidential libraries, have collaborated in the design of several activity classes, as well as in the development of individual activities that focus on significant events from the lives of each of the represented presidents. The educational activities and resources are designed to foster historical thinking in students. Teachers may use the primary resources and educational activities to engage students in the analysis of docu-

ments, to conduct individual or group research projects, or to tell a story of an event from different perspectives. The activities are designed to help students deepen their understanding of historical events by

- addressing particular questions related to a historical event using both primary and secondary sources, such as government documents, newspaper and magazine articles, maps, letters, photographs, audio recordings, films, videos, graphs, and paintings;
- analyzing the materials for reliability, using such strategies as the time and place rule (i.e., the closer a source and its creator are to an event, the better the material is as a reliable source);
- evaluating, comparing, and cross-checking each piece of evidence to develop a more complex understanding of the event;
- synthesizing the results of their research and presenting their findings in a coherent and logical manner.

The goal of the educational activities is not for students simply to study about history, but to engage in real historical research. Activities are structured in such a way as to require collaborative decision making among students. Most activities can lead to the creation of a wide variety of technology—and non-technology—based student intellectual products that meet a broad range of state and national standards. A central theme underlying many of these activities is a focus on major historical decision points faced by each presidential administration.

One class of activity developed by the education team is being referred to as “Kids as Curators”—though as the vision for these activities evolved, the name became less and less descriptive of the broad range of outcomes possible. The foundation for a “Kids as Curators” activity is a selected set of assets, all of which relate to a specific historical event. The learner is presented with the assets and with a degree of scaffolding, or supportive materials appropriate to the learner. This scaffolding may range from the very comprehensive and detailed (for




THE PRESIDENTIAL TIMELINE

MAIN | **TIMELINE** | EXHIBITS | GALLERY | EDUCATORS

PING PONG DIPLOMACY: NIXON'S TRIP TO CHINA

CLOSE EXHIBIT

Wheels Down: Nixon in China



Chairman Mao Tse-tung
Prime Minister Chou En-lai
Wang Hsi-jung, Dep. of the Foreign Ministry
Tang Wen-sheng, Nat. Sec. Secy.

President Nixon
Henry A. Kissinger
for National Security
Winston Lord, Nat. Sec. Secy.

6:45	7:06		
Guam Time	China Time		
7:11	8:55		

The President and the First Lady entered from the residence to Guam International Airport.

The President and the First Lady flew by the "Spide" from Guam International Airport, Guam to Wang Shanghai, People's Republic of China (PRC). For passengers, see APPENDIX "A."

From February 17-28, 1972, President Nixon visited the PRC and traveled to Peking, Hangchow, and Shanghai. When he first arrived in Peking, President Nixon shook Prime Minister Chou En-lai's hand, a symbolic gesture that President Nixon understood was important to the Chinese. In 1954, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had refused to shake Chou's hand while at the Geneva Conference.

After landing in Peking, President Nixon participated in ceremonial arrival activities, including reviewing Chinese troops.

PREVIOUS

1 2 3 4 5 6

NEXT

7.9

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

DAILY DIARY (Worksheet)

The President began his day at (place) White House

Day Tues

Date 8-4-64

Entry No.	Time	Telephone		Activity (include visited by)*	Expenditure Code
		f or t	LD		
8:01	f	f		Cartha D. DeLoach - Asst Director, FBI (b.8) who gave the President news of the funding of the bodies of the three Mississippi Civil rights workers. President took the call in the Cabinet Room	
8:19				To the office w/ Secretary McNamara, Secretary Rusk, Mr George Bundy - until 8:25	
8:30				In lounge w/ Mr Geo Bundy	
8:35	t			Mrs Johnson (nr)	
8:36	f			G. Reedy (b.8)	
8:38	t			Cong Geo Mahone (b.8)	
8:41				Bill Meyer (pe)	
8:44	t			Walter Jenkins (pe)	
8:45	t			Lee White (b.8)	
8:47	f			mf - "Senator Goldwater had the message that you're trying to get him, but he's on a boat, and the radio circuit fades in and out. There is not a good connection." The President replied, "Find out from her if she can tell me.. tell her it's very important that I talk and ask her if there is a definite time of when I can talk to him."	
8:55	f			mf - "Lee White is here." Reply: "Tell him to come on in."	
8:56				In lounge w/ Lee White and Mr Geo Bundy - Bundy out @ 9:00 and Bill Meyer	
9:02	t			Larry O'Brien (b.9)	
9:06	f			mf - "At 9:00 the operator reported that Senator Goldwater was going to land to talk from a regular telephone.. that's 25 minutes from now." Reply: "Okay.. thank you."	
9:13	t			Mr George Bundy (pe)	
9:15	f			Secretary Robert McNamara (b.9)	



example, a description of the event along with links to a variety of online resources containing additional information) to the bare presentation of historical materials, as if the assets were discovered in a box in the attic of a house that was being torn down, with no clue to what they relate to—thereby placing the onus of historical reconstruction in the hands of the learner. These differing degrees of scaffolding will enable a single activity to support a broad range of learners, from those in the upper elementary grades to high school and beyond, and including regular, honors, and advanced placement classes.

Once the learner has the assets in hand, it will be his or her responsibility to tell the story of the associated event or some aspect of it. Impressively, this activity type enables students to go beyond the primary source documents to tell their stories in almost limitless ways. Students could use readily available and simple digital video editing software to create

news stories or short documentary films, integrating the digital assets in a manner similar to the work of director Ken Burns. They could generate magazine-style articles using page-layout software. They could create PowerPoint slide shows and presentations.

One of the most intriguing possibilities emerged from the original Kids as Curators vision. Users of the Timeline can download high-resolution images of any of the assets, print them, and mount them—as in a physical exhibit. The student would then create the placards and generate the text that describes each of the mounted assets. Finally, the student would generate a script and record an audio tour of the exhibit; this could be transferred to a portable MP3 player and listened to while touring the physical exhibit.

No matter what intellectual product the student may choose to develop, any activity of this kind would support a

broad range of learning objectives and state standards, not only standards in the social studies, but those in other disciplines as well, such as language and literacy or technology. 🌐

Note about the Featured Documents:

The photograph is of President Lyndon B. Johnson delivering his Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin, August 4, 1964. The President's Daily Diary Entry is page 9 of 11 pages for August 4, 1964. Images of all 11 pages are available online from the National Archives in the Archival Research Catalog, ARC Identifier 192446. Both the photograph and the diary are in the holdings of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Texas.

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