Is Donald Trump the worst president

Dan McCaffery - November 2020

Is Donald Trump the worst president in American history?

You hear a lot of people express that opinion these days, with some justification.

But I don't think he is at the bottom of the barrel when it comes to the 45 men who have occupied the Oval Office. The most boorish? Without a doubt. The least qualified? Certainly.

But is he the absolute worst ever? I don't think so. There were a number of men -- more talented than Trump and much smarter -- who did far more damage than the 45th president has done so far.

One of the worst was John Tyler, who was an out-and-out traitor. Historians generally list him as one of the least successful chief executives. But more than that, the man was literally a turncoat. Fifteen years after leaving the White House, he was one of the driving forces behind the state of Virginia's decision to succeed from the Union. Not long after that, this former president of the United States was actually elected to the Congress of the Confederate States of America! I suspect the main reason he isn't considered the worst president ever is that he has almost completely faded from public memory. Almost no one has ever even heard of him.

The guy who usually gets listed by historians as the worst was James Buchanan, the last president before Abraham Lincoln. With the nation on the verge of splitting apart, Buchanan took up a pro-South position. He was unwilling to seek a compromise between the various sections of the country. In other words, he was an Emperor Nero-type character, who fiddled as the nation hurtled towards civil war.

Then we have Andrew Johnson, a rabid white supremacist who badly botched the reconstruction program after the war between the states was over. His breathtaking incompetence would cause problems that would bedevil Americans for generations.

There were other grossly inept presidents, including Franklin Pierce and George W. Bush. Pierce was another one of the nincompoop presidents who did nothing to unify the country in the years leading up to the civil war. And of course Bush was the guy who got the United States into the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (to say nothing of his inept handling of Hurricane Katrina).

As far as I'm concerned, Trump should be ranked in about 42nd place among the 45 presidents. If he is re-elected (and at this writing the November 3 vote was still a few days away) I am certain he will, eventually find his way into 45th and last place. But for now, although he is an unmitigated disaster, he isn't the worst president ever to hold the office.