

BORN: 1884

DIED: 1972

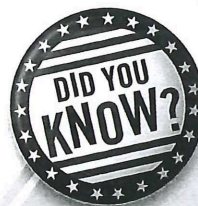
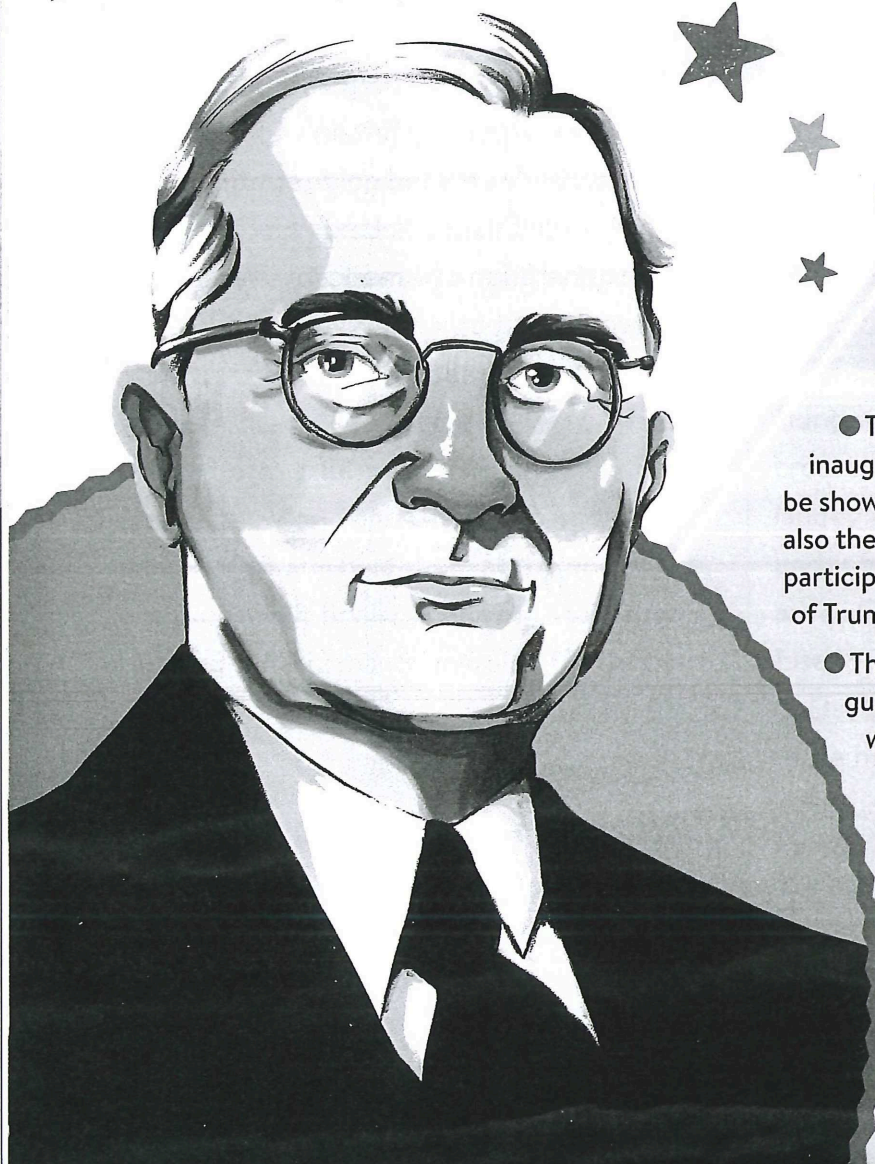
IN OFFICE: April 12,
1945–January 20, 1953

FROM: Missouri

VICE PRESIDENT:
Alben William Barkley

PARTY: Democratic

HARRY S TRUMAN



● A sign on Truman's desk in the Oval Office read:
The BUCK STOPS here! It

meant that he would deal with problems, not pass them on to someone else.

● Truman's 1949 inauguration was the first to be shown on television. It was also the first in which a rabbi participated; the rabbi, a friend of Truman's, gave a prayer.



● The US Army's Battery D served as honor guards at Truman's 1949 inauguration. That was the unit Truman had served with in World War I.

● Truman's parents thought he should have a middle initial—an "S" because both of his grandfathers had names that began with "S." They didn't specify what the "S" stood for so they wouldn't hurt anyone's feelings, and it doesn't have a period after it.

Life Before the Presidency

Harry Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, and grew up in Independence, Missouri. He was a serious kid and liked to read and play the piano. He wanted to go to college, but his father went bankrupt in the summer after Truman finished high school, so Truman went to work for a newspaper, then as a contractor for a railroad company, and then for a bank. He studied for a semester at a business college but never earned a college degree and went back to work on the family farm. Truman would be one of the least wealthy presidents.

Truman had been in the National Guard and joined the army when World War I began. He was the only president to fight in World War I.

Truman returned from war in 1919 and opened a men's clothing store in Kansas City with a partner, but by 1922, Truman & Jacobson had failed after an economic downturn. At that point, local Democratic political boss Mike Pendergast asked him to run for a county judgeship. He won that election, and then he won the position of presiding, or head, judge, a post he held until 1935.

In 1934, Pendergast asked Truman to run for US Senate. He won that race, too. Truman supported FDR's New Deal programs. He strongly favored civil rights legislation, including ending the poll tax that restricted

Black voting rights. He wasn't expected to win reelection in 1940 but squeaked out a victory.

Truman got the Senate to create the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, usually called the Truman Committee, which checked on the billions of dollars being spent on the military buildup as World War II was beginning. It saved the country money by making sure contractors did the work they had agreed to do, but it also discovered things like airplane engines that didn't work properly. It was an important discovery right before the United States entered World War II.



In 1944, Franklin Roosevelt needed a new vice president who would appeal to the South. The political parties were morphing into their modern identities, and the loyalty of Southern and rural voters wasn't guaranteed. (After the Civil War, the Democratic Party had been popular in the South and the Republican Party in the North. When the Democratic Party began to defend Black people's rights, that support switched, and Republicans got more support among white Southerners.)

Truman was reluctant to accept the nomination for vice president, however. It took an angry phone call from Roosevelt to get Truman to cave and agree to run. Truman wasn't well known in Washington before he was nominated to be FDR's vice president in 1944. He was a senator but had little influence. When Roosevelt died in April 1945, Truman became president of the United States.

Mr. President

When Truman came to office after Franklin Roosevelt's death, World War II was winding down, but it wasn't over yet, and it was Truman who had to make the decision whether to use atomic bombs in Japan. Horrified by the tremendous numbers of casualties in the Pacific theater, Truman ordered an atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, and another on Nagasaki on August 9. Japan surrendered on August 15.

Truman wanted to extend the government activism of the New Deal. His domestic agenda included a higher minimum wage, national health insurance, and guaranteed full employment, which means that everyone who wanted a job could find one. He also wanted to continue the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) that had tried to protect Black Americans in government and defense industries from employment discrimination during the war. He got little of what he wanted. In 1945 and 1946, a wave of strikes hit the country as soldiers returned home

from World War II and reentered the workforce. Their wages weren't keeping up with inflation. Coal miners and railroad workers both went on strike, and Truman seized the mines to force

TRUMAN'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION ON THE BOMBING OF JAPAN, AUGUST 6, 1945

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima, an important Japanese Army base. That bomb had more power than 20,000 tons of T.N.T. It had more than two thousand times the blast power of the British "Grand Slam" which is the largest bomb ever yet used in the history of warfare. . . .

It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East.

DECODED

President Truman reports here on the bombing of Hiroshima—and the opening of the atomic age. Truman had not been briefed on the atomic bomb project as vice president and had to make a quick decision on whether to use the new weapon. The United States had only two atomic bombs, and they weren't identical. No one was entirely sure that they would work, but when the *Enola Gay* bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, it killed about 66,000 people and injured another 69,000, although it's very difficult to estimate the casualties because the destruction was so complete.

TRUMAN'S SPECIAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS, NOVEMBER 19, 1945

In my message to the Congress of September 6, 1945, there were enumerated in a proposed Economic Bill of Rights certain rights which ought to be assured to every American citizen.

One of them was: "The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health." Another was the "right to adequate protection from the economic fears of . . . sickness. . . ."

Millions of our citizens do not now have a full measure of opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health. Millions do not now

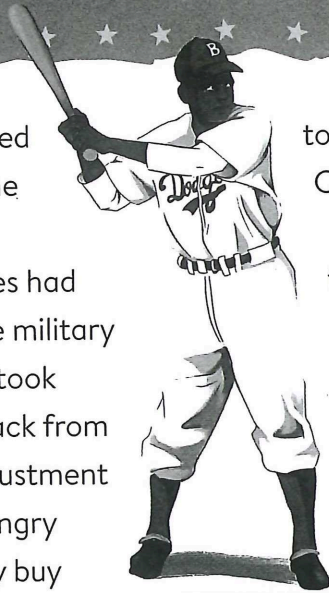
a settlement and then threatened to draft railroad workers into the military to end that strike.

During the war, US factories had produced things needed by the military instead of consumer goods. It took time for industries to switch back from wartime production. The readjustment was bumpy and people were angry that they couldn't immediately buy things that hadn't been available during the war.

Truman, a Democrat, was working with a Republican-controlled Congress, and they didn't always agree with each other. In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which sharply curtailed the power of labor unions, making it harder

have protection or security against the economic effects of sickness. The time has arrived for action to help them attain that opportunity and that protection.

DECODED Truman worked hard to get a national health insurance bill passed, but he wasn't able to do so. It was one of the biggest disappointments of his presidency. When legislation creating Medicare (health insurance for the elderly) and Medicaid (health insurance for the poor) passed under President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, Johnson invited Harry and Bess Truman to the signing of the bill. The Trumans were the first to sign up for the plan. Harry Truman received the first Medicare card, and Bess got the second.



Jackie Robinson

to strike. Truman vetoed the act, but Congress passed it over his veto.

In 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first Black major league baseball player and Harry Truman became the first president to speak to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

TRUMAN'S ADDRESS TO THE NAACP, JUNE 29, 1947

I should like to talk to you briefly about civil rights and human freedom. It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point in the long history of our country's efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens. Recent events in the United States and abroad have made us realize that it is more important today than ever before to insure that all Americans enjoy these rights.

When I say all Americans I mean all Americans. . . .

We must keep moving forward, with new concepts of civil rights to safeguard our heritage. The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people against the Government, but protection of the people by the Government.

We must make the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equalities of all Americans. And again I mean all Americans.

DECODED Truman spoke to the NAACP, the major organization pushing for civil rights for Black Americans, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. His broadcast was carried live on radio.

The next year Truman sent civil rights proposals to Congress and called for civil rights laws in his State of the Union address. Truman wanted a federal law against lynching, protection of the right to vote, and protection from discrimination in employment. His proposals were stiffly opposed in Congress. Truman used an executive order, which doesn't require congressional consent, to desegregate the military.

At the Democratic convention in 1948, Truman got the nomination but was expected to lose in November to Republican candidate Thomas Dewey. The *Chicago Tribune* was so confident Dewey would win that on election night its staff went ahead and printed the next day's paper with a giant headline: DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN.

But the world woke the next morning to a Truman victory, and a few days later Truman was photographed holding that very same newspaper. It's the most famous photograph from his presidency.

Truman announced his "Fair Deal" programs after the election. They included a higher minimum wage, expanded Social Security, national health insurance, repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, and more. Congress didn't give him most of what he wanted, although he got an increase in the minimum wage, which went



from forty to seventy-five cents an hour, as well as a public housing bill meant to provide decent housing for low-income families and an increase in Social Security.

Foreign affairs dominated Truman's terms. The Cold War, or hostile relations with the Soviet Union, had an impact on domestic affairs, too. After World War II a Red Scare—that is, a fear of communists, who were nicknamed "Reds"—gripped Americans. A couple of prominent spy cases shook Americans, especially the cases of Alger Hiss, who had worked in the State Department and was accused of spying for the Soviet Union, and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were executed for passing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union.

Wisconsin Republican senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that the State Department was full of communists.

He spent the last years of Truman's administration, and the first years of Eisenhower's, pushing McCarthyism, which meant making charges based on untrue and misleading allegations that people in the US government were communists. He made outrageous claims without evidence—he just plain lied—but many people believed him. They thought that a US senator would know what he was talking about and that he would be honest. People were genuinely afraid of the spread of communism, thinking that it would hurt US interests. Despite Truman's efforts to stop him, McCarthyism continued past Truman's term in office.

In 1947, Truman's secretary of state, George C. Marshall, started the Marshall Plan, which provided economic aid to European countries devastated by the war. It was a success and helped Europe recover economically.

The postwar settlement of Germany divided that nation into four zones, each controlled by a wartime ally: the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and the United States. The capital, Berlin, was entirely inside the Soviet zone, but because it was an important city it was divided in half. The Western allies controlled the western half of the city. The Soviets controlled the eastern half. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin pinched off access to West Berlin in June 1948—which was easy, because the road to the capital lay inside the Soviet zone, and he could simply close the road. Truman responded with the Berlin Airlift. Planes took off every three minutes around the clock, bringing food and necessities to the people of West Berlin. It continued for almost a year, and finally Stalin called off the blockade.



In 1945, in the wake of World War II, the United Nations (UN) was created to try to prevent future wars and foster international cooperation and communication. President Truman signed the charter that created the UN. The UN had an early test when in June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea. The UN voted to send an international force to Korea, with more than a dozen nations contributing troops, but the United States did most of the fighting. General Douglas MacArthur was in command. When MacArthur pushed too close to the border between North Korea and China, Chinese troops entered the war, and Truman fired MacArthur.

The Korean War ended with an armistice, which means that the fighting stopped, but a peace has never been concluded.

Legacy

After leaving office the Trumans returned to Independence, Missouri. Truman remained an interested observer in politics, and once his presidential library was built in Independence, he spent a lot of time there writing his memoirs and answering letters. He even gave tours of the library himself. Truman is buried in its courtyard.

Truman is remembered for his tough stance on foreign policy issues, bringing World War II to a close, authorizing the use of the atomic bomb, and fighting to protect South Korea. He also advanced civil rights for Black Americans.



BORN: 1890

DIED: 1969

IN OFFICE:

January 20, 1953–

January 20, 1961

FROM: born in Texas;
grew up in Kansas

VICE PRESIDENT:

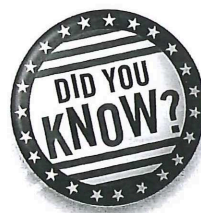
Richard Nixon

PARTY: Republican

DWIGHT

D • A • V • I • D

EISENHOWER



● Dwight Eisenhower didn't have a birth certificate until he ran for president. His 1890 birth was officially recorded in 1952, two weeks ahead of his sixty-second birthday.

● Eisenhower renamed the presidential retreat that was built in the 1930s after his grandson. It's now Camp David.

● Eisenhower was the only president who fought in the army during World War II. (Ronald Reagan was in the army but didn't fight.)

Life Before the Presidency

Dwight David Eisenhower grew up in Abilene, Kansas. He went to West Point, the US military academy. He wanted to try for a spot in the naval academy, but he was too old. The army would still let him take their competitive exam for a spot, so he did. He finished second. When the person who had won couldn't pass the physical, Eisenhower got the spot at West Point. He played football there. He loved it but he was a mediocre player. After seriously injuring a knee, he had to quit football and became the head cheerleader, one of four presidents to be a cheerleader (Franklin Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush were the others). He was an average student and got in trouble for playing pranks.

Eisenhower almost didn't get a job with the army after he graduated. His knee was bad enough that West Point's medical board voted unanimously against giving him a commission. West Point's chief medical officer disagreed and appealed Eisenhower's case to the War Department, which decided to take a chance on him. The bad knee kept him out of World War I, although he wanted to fight. But after the war, the army had him write a guide to World War I battle sites, and he served as an

aide to General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines.

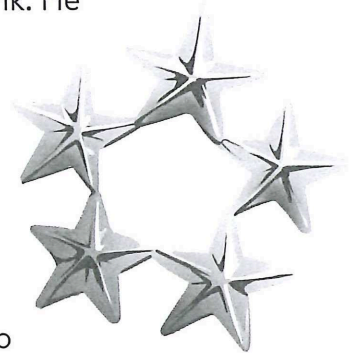
In 1941, Eisenhower was planning to retire from the army. But on December 7, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.

Eisenhower stayed in the army and rose quickly in rank; by the time he did retire in 1948, he was a five-star general, the army's highest rank. He

helped President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill figure out strategy for the war. He impressed them so much that they

put him in charge of the Allied war effort. He was the Supreme Allied Commander of D-Day, the invasion of Normandy, France, on June 6, 1944, when Allied forces opened a western front against Germany. It was the largest amphibious operation (meaning troops were landed from the water) in history—and Eisenhower was in charge.

Eisenhower became president of Columbia University in 1948. In 1950, President Truman asked him to head NATO, the United States' military alliance, a job for which he was better suited. Eisenhower ran for president in 1952. He was a victorious general and well-liked—and he won in a landslide.



Mr. President

Once in office, Eisenhower quickly negotiated an armistice ending the Korean War, as he had promised during his campaign. The Cold War competition with the Soviet Union continued, and Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed that communists were active inside the US government, even though he had no evidence, at a time when many Americans were deeply worried that communism would spread. Eisenhower tried to stay above it all.

The Indian Termination Act of 1953 tried to end the Indigenous nations' reservation and tribal system and move Indigenous people into the mainstream of American life as individuals, stripped of their traditional culture. Some nations were forced to divide their lands up among individuals and end their own governments. Federal benefits for Indigenous nations ended, too. Eisenhower signed the bill, which is widely criticized today.

The president had a major heart attack in 1955, on the birthday of his son who'd died as a little boy. His wife, Mamie, thought the grief he still felt for little "Ikky" was the reason he had the heart attack. But in 1956, Eisenhower ran for reelection and won in another landslide, despite concerns about his health.

While Senator McCarthy whipped up fear, Eisenhower took action against the spread of communism, announcing the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, after brief fighting around the Suez Canal in Egypt the previous year. The Eisenhower Doctrine said that the United States would aid any Middle Eastern country that asked for help in staying independent.

The Civil Rights Movement was given a major boost in 1954 when the Supreme

TELEGRAM FROM DWIGHT EISENHOWER TO GOVERNOR ORVAL FAUBUS, SEPTEMBER 5, 1957

Your telegram received requesting my assurance of understanding of and cooperation in the course of action you have taken on school integration recommended by the Little Rock School Board and ordered by the United States District Court pursuant to the mandate of the United States Supreme Court.

When I became President, I took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. The only assurance I can give you is that the Federal Constitution will be upheld by me by every legal means at my command.

DECODED The president not only sent this terse telegram to Governor Faubus in Arkansas, he also released it to the press. Eisenhower reminded the governor that Supreme Court decisions also applied in Arkansas.

Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that schools had to be desegregated, so that kids of different races would be in school together. When nine Black students enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957 as part of a gradual



desegregation plan, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus called in the National Guard to surround the school and keep the Black students from entering, while a mob of white protesters threatened violence. Eisenhower called in the army to ensure that the students got in.

STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR ORVAL FAUBUS, SEPTEMBER 14, 1957

The President and I had a friendly and constructive discussion of the problem of compliance with Court orders respecting the high schools of Little Rock. . . . The people of Little Rock are law-abiding and I know that they expect to obey valid court orders. In this they shall have my support. In so doing it is my responsibility to protect the people from violence in any form. As I interpret the President's public statements, the national Administration has no thought of challenging this fact. In meeting this obligation, it is essential that, in proceeding to implement the orders of the Court, the complexities of integration be patiently understood by all those in Federal authority. When I assured the President, as I have already done, that I expect to accept the decision of the Courts, I entertained the hope that the Department of Justice and the Federal Judiciary will act with understanding and patience in discharging their duties.



Governor Faubus admits that Supreme Court decisions must be obeyed, even in Arkansas. The phrase "valid court orders" is a throwback to nullification, the idea that a state could reject a federal law or action if it didn't feel it was legitimate. Governor Faubus's statements that federal authorities need patience were part of segregationists' attempts to slow integration.



Letter from Jackie Robinson to Dwight Eisenhower, May 13, 1958

My dear Mr. President:

I was sitting in the audience at the Summit Meeting of Negro Leaders yesterday when you said we must have patience. On hearing you say this, I felt like standing up and saying, "Oh, no! Not again." . . . 17 million Negroes cannot do as you suggest and wait for the hearts of men to change. We want to enjoy now the rights that we feel we are entitled to as Americans. This we cannot do unless we pursue aggressively goals which all other Americans achieved over 150 years ago.



White supremacists repeatedly asked for patience in the face of calls for Black civil rights. Jackie Robinson's letter to President Eisenhower urges the president to make change immediately, pointing out that Black Americans were being denied what others had for over 150 years.

The Cold War continued in Eisenhower's second term. He signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act in 1956, which led to the construction of interstate highways. Ike thought roads were a national security issue—he wanted soldiers and weapons to be able to move around the country quickly if necessary. The Soviet Union launched the first man-made satellite,

Sputnik 1 (pronounced

spoot-neek), in

1957, and the

United States

established

the National

Aeronautics and

Space Administration

(NASA) in 1958—the Cold War

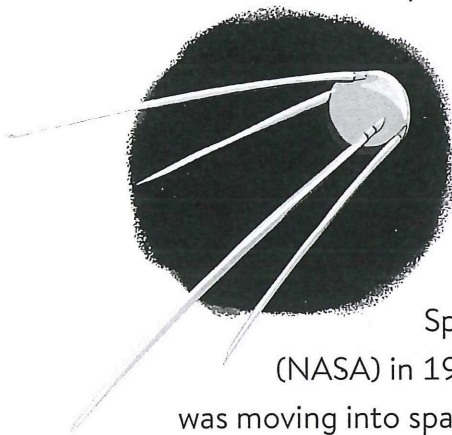
was moving into space. Achievements in space were a splashy way to enhance a nation's prestige.

On May 1, 1960, near the end of Eisenhower's presidency, the Soviet Union shot down a US U-2 high-altitude spy plane over Soviet airspace. The Eisenhower administration scrambled to come up with a cover story, including starting a search for

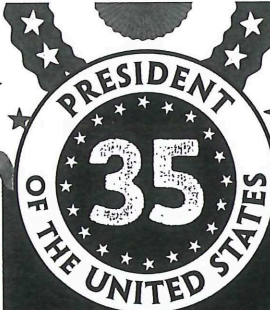
the spy plane, knowing it wasn't in the area they were searching. The US assumed that the pilot was dead—his plane had been hit by a missile and then fell as far as seventy thousand feet. When the Russians produced him—quite alive—the United States had to admit it had been flying spy planes over the Soviet Union.

Legacy

Dwight Eisenhower is better remembered for being the general who oversaw D-Day in World War II than for his presidency. When he was in the White House, many people thought of him as a “caretaker” president: one who doesn't do much, but preserves the office to hand off to the next person. But Eisenhower did negotiate an end to fighting in the Korean War and helped guide the United States through difficult years of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. During the Eisenhower presidency, the United States was mostly peaceful and prosperous.



J • O • H • N FITZGERALD KENNEDY



BORN: 1917

DIED: 1963

IN OFFICE:

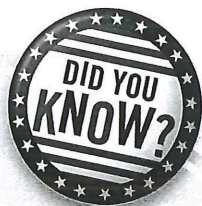
January 20, 1961–
November 22, 1963

FROM: Massachusetts

VICE PRESIDENT:

Lyndon Baines
Johnson

PARTY: Democratic



- Kennedy was the first president to be born in the twentieth century.
- Kennedy won the 1960 election with the smallest popular vote margin of any presidential election in the twentieth century.
- Kennedy wrote *Profiles in Courage* while hospitalized after one of the four surgeries to help his back after an injury while at Harvard. It won a Pulitzer Prize.



Life Before the Presidency

John F. Kennedy, known as Jack, was born to a wealthy Irish-Catholic Boston family, the second of nine children. Kennedy had a privileged childhood, but he suffered a series of serious illnesses, including measles and whooping cough. The most dangerous was a monthlong bout of scarlet fever, a potentially fatal illness, when he was two years old. He played football at Harvard and ruptured a disk in his spine, which would cause him lifelong problems. When World War II broke out Kennedy tried to join the navy but he couldn't pass the physical. His father used his political clout to get Kennedy in. He was sent to the South Pacific in command of *PT-109*. (PTs were small patrol torpedo boats with motors.)

In August 1943, a Japanese ship rammed *PT-109*, causing it to explode. The eleven survivors hung on to debris from the ship for hours. Eventually they swam toward a nearby island; Kennedy, who had been on the swim team at Harvard, towed a badly injured crewmate three miles through the ocean, the man's life-jacket straps clamped in his teeth.



Kennedy received a US Navy and Marine Corps Medal for Valor and a Purple Heart.



After the war, Kennedy worked briefly as a journalist, an experience that helped him later when dealing with White House reporters. As president, Kennedy acknowledged that the press could be irritating but said that it was essential to a free society.

Kennedy's older brother, Joe, was killed in World War II, and Kennedy's father transferred his ambitions onto Jack, persuading him to run for political office. In 1946, he won a seat in the US House of Representatives. He was twenty-nine. In 1952, he won a US Senate seat from Massachusetts. In 1956, he failed to get the Democratic vice presidential nomination, but he got the nod for president in 1960. He ran against Republican candidate Richard Nixon, who had been Eisenhower's vice president. Kennedy proposed a televised debate, the first in the nation's history. Kennedy gave the impression of youth and vigor while Nixon, who was unshaven, looked sweaty and nervous. People who saw the debate on television thought that Kennedy won, and he went on to win the 1960 election.



JOHN F. KENNEDY'S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AT THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION, JULY 15, 1960

I am fully aware of the fact that the Democratic Party, by nominating someone of my faith, has taken on what many regard as a new and hazardous risk. . . . And you have, at the same time, placed your confidence in me . . . to uphold the Constitution and my oath of office—and to reject any kind of religious pressure or obligation that might directly or indirectly interfere with my conduct of the Presidency in the national interest. . . .

DECODED Kennedy was the first Roman Catholic President. Some Protestants worried that a Catholic president would do whatever the Pope told him. Kennedy addresses this concern directly, saying that he would put the nation first.

Today some would say that those struggles are all over—that all the horizons have been explored—that all the battles have been won—that there is no longer an American frontier.

But I trust that no one in this vast assemblage will agree with those sentiments. For the problems are not all solved and the battles are not all won—and we stand today on the edge of a New Frontier. . . .

Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered pockets of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus. It would be easier to shrink back from that frontier, to look to the safe mediocrity of the past, to be lulled by good intentions and high rhetoric—and those who prefer that course should not cast their votes for me, regardless of party.

DECODED This speech was later called the “New Frontier” speech. It showcases Kennedy’s optimism and idealism.

Mr. President

Once Kennedy was in office he gave televised press conferences in order to reach more people. An average of eighteen million people watched.

PIERRE SALINGER, IN AN ORAL INTERVIEW ABOUT THE FIRST LIVE TELEvised PRESS CONFERENCE, JANUARY 25, 1961

The fact of the matter is that the time when President Kennedy started televised press conferences there were only three or four newspapers in the entire United States that carried a full transcript of a presidential press conference. Therefore, what people read was a distillation. . . . We thought that they should have the opportunity to see it in full.

DECODED Pierre Salinger was President Kennedy’s press secretary. Kennedy read several newspapers every day, but he understood that he could reach the public better through television.

Kennedy promoted new social programs, including proposals to allow retirement at the age of sixty-two, improve insurance programs for the elderly, and safeguard children of unmarried parents, but Congress rejected many of them. He raised the minimum wage to \$1.25 an hour by January 1, 1963. He set up the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission to address poverty in



Appalachia, where incomes were consistently lower than the national average. In 1961, he issued an executive order establishing the Peace Corps, which sent young Americans to aid other countries and tried to promote peace and help people of different nations understand each other.

He also promoted the space program. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had been established in 1958 and made its first launch that year. It also sent a spacecraft out of Earth's orbit, launched a satellite to observe Earth's weather, and put a chimpanzee named Ham into suborbital flight for sixteen minutes and then recovered him safely. But in May 1961, President Kennedy announced that the United States would try to land astronauts on the moon before the decade ended. It was an incredibly bold statement—NASA wasn't anyplace close to being able to do that.

Kennedy thought education was extremely important and he worked to lower dropout rates, improve teacher training, and provide more services for deaf students. He knew that tackling civil rights issues would provoke great hostility and wanted to delay dealing with civil rights until he could get the rest of his program passed. In particular, Kennedy thought that Southern Democrats were likely to leave the Democratic Party as it continued to advocate for the rights of Black Americans,

an issue that didn't appeal to them. But events pushed Kennedy into earlier action.

In 1960, before Kennedy's election, four college students held a "sit-in" at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, that wouldn't serve Black customers. When they were refused service, they stayed seated. Their protest succeeded in getting the lunch counter to integrate and sparked similar sit-ins in other cities. Then in 1961, groups of Black and white people rode buses together on "freedom rides" through the South to fight segregation.



Letter from Jackie Robinson to John F. Kennedy, February 9, 1961

My dear Mr. President:

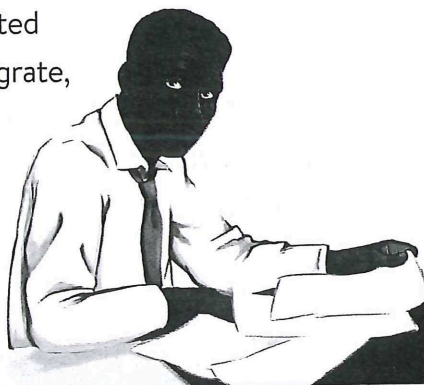
... I thank you for what you have done so far, but it is not how much has been done but how much more there is to do. I would like to be patient Mr. President, but patience has caused us years in our struggle for human dignity. I will continue to hope and pray for your aggressive leadership but will not refuse to criticise [sic] if the feeling persist [sic] that Civil Rights is not on the agenda for months to come.

DECODED Jackie Robinson was the first Black major league baseball player of the modern era. He used his fame to help prod Kennedy toward a more active stance on civil rights.

In September 1962, a young Black man named James Meredith enrolled at the University of Mississippi. Up to this point, the university had been all-white. A federal court ruled that the university had to let Meredith in, but Governor Ross Barnett tried to stop him anyway. A riot erupted when Meredith went to campus, and it took fifteen hours for National Guardsmen and soldiers to restore order. Hundreds of people were injured and two killed. Meredith attended classes under guard by federal troops and graduated in 1963.

In June 1963, Kennedy submitted a civil rights bill to Congress. It proposed protecting Black voting rights by prohibiting discriminatory tests (like Constitution tests), outlawing discrimination in hotels, restaurants, theaters, and public accommodations, enforcing school desegregation, not giving federal funds to any organization that practiced discrimination, and outlawing discrimination by businesses that employed twenty-five or more people. It would also set up the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to handle discrimination complaints.

His proposal didn't end the unrest. The next day NAACP official Medgar Evers, a WWII veteran who organized voter registration drives and wanted schools to integrate, was shot to death in his driveway.



And in August 1963, a quarter of a million people came to the nation's capital for the March on Washington, which continued to pressure the Kennedy administration to protect civil rights.

Kennedy didn't live to see his civil rights proposals become law, but Lyndon Johnson would use the national grief over his assassination to get the legislation passed in 1964 and 1965.

KENNEDY'S TELEVISED ADDRESS TO THE NATION ON CIVIL RIGHTS, JUNE 11, 1963

... Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only. It ought to be possible, therefore, for American students of any color to attend any public institution they select without having to be backed up by troops.

... This is not a sectional issue. Difficulties over segregation and discrimination exist in every city, in every State of the Union, producing in many cities a rising tide of discontent that threatens the public safety. Nor is this a partisan issue. In a time of domestic crisis men of good will and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics. This is not even a legal or legislative issue alone. It is better to settle these matters in the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right.

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. ...

DECODED

It was important for the president to acknowledge that discrimination wasn't just a legal or constitutional issue, but that it was simply wrong. He asked Congress for legislation so that Black people could finally, fully, be free. It energized the Civil Rights Movement.

Kennedy had an ambitious domestic program—most of which Congress blocked—but foreign affairs dominated his term. Eisenhower had left a plan for invading Cuba with the hope of driving out Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who had ties to the Soviet Union. Kennedy signed off on the plan. The CIA helped train Cubans living in the United States who wanted to overthrow Castro, and in April 1961 they invaded, landing at the Bay of Pigs on Cuba's coast. The mission quickly failed. The invaders had thought Cubans would rise up to help them, but that didn't happen. It was a major foreign policy failure and Kennedy was embarrassed.

The Cold War with the Soviet Union continued to influence foreign affairs. In Berlin, divided into an East and West after World War II, the Soviet-backed East Germans built a wall through the middle of the city, physically dividing it. This was the Berlin Wall, built to prevent East Germans from moving to the West, and it lasted until 1989.

The Cold War was played out closer to home, too. In October 1962, the United States discovered that the Soviet Union was planning to put nuclear missiles in Cuba that could reach the US mainland, which was only ninety miles away.

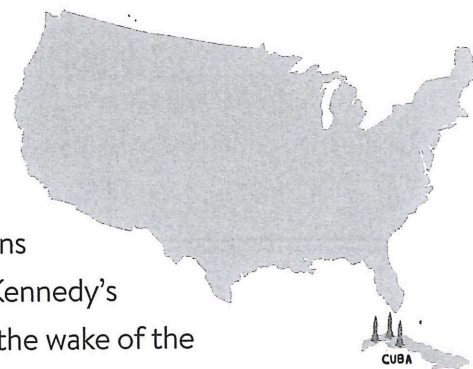
Kennedy consulted with advisors for several tense days and ultimately stationed US naval ships around Cuba to prevent the Soviets from getting further missiles into the country. The world was on the verge of nuclear war.

Finally Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev backed down.

Many Americans considered it Kennedy's finest hour. In the wake of the Cuban missile crisis, the Russian and American governments began arms reduction talks. Both sides worried that continuing to increase their nuclear arsenals would eventually result in a nuclear war or simply an accident. They thought that reducing their quantities of nuclear arms might make the world safer.

In Vietnam, communist nationalists fought to push out France after World War II. France had colonized Vietnam a hundred years before. The United States sent advisors to help France because of the Cold War idea that any communist movement was a threat, but the Vietnamese nationalists won, ending French colonial rule. The country was then divided into two parts, North and South Vietnam, and the United States set up a pro-American government in the south. Kennedy sent more advisors to Vietnam, but near the end of his presidency he announced that he was going to reduce the American presence there. Whether American involvement in the Vietnam War could have been avoided if he had lived is an unanswerable question.

Kennedy made a trip to Texas in November 1963 in preparation for a reelection run in 1964. On November 22, he rode beside his



wife, Jackie, in an open motorcade through Dallas. Lee Harvey Oswald, a former marine, shot Kennedy from a building as his car passed by. Kennedy died immediately.

Lady Bird Johnson Audio Diary Entry, November 22, 1963

It all began so beautifully. . . .

Then almost at the edge of town, on our way to the Trade Mart where we were going to have the luncheon, we were rounding a curve, going down a hill and suddenly there was a sharp loud report - a shot. It seemed to me to come from the right above my shoulder from a building. Then a moment and then two more shots in rapid succession. There had been such a gala air that I thought it must be firecrackers or some sort of celebration. Then in the lead car the Secret Service men were suddenly down. I heard over the radio system, "Let's get out of here," and our ss (Secret Service) man who was with us, Ruf Youngblood, I believe it was, vaulted over the front seat on top of Lyndon, threw him to the floor, and said, "Get down."

As we ground to a halt - we were still the third car - Secret Service men began to pull, lead, guide and hustle us out. I cast one last look over my shoulder and saw in the President's car a bundle of pink, just like a drift of blossoms, lying on the back seat. I think it was Mrs. Kennedy lying over the President's body.

DECODED Vice President Lyndon Johnson's wife, Lady Bird Johnson, recorded this account of Kennedy's assassination. First-person accounts can help you understand how events unfolded in real time.

Legacy

John F. Kennedy is remembered as a young president taken too soon. Historians give him high marks for his handling of the Cuban missile crisis and the Cold War in general. Domestically, he helped the Civil Rights Movement and funded education. And he inspired a generation of young people to strive to improve society and to believe that government could help make things better. Kennedy didn't survive to see his civil rights legislation passed or men land on the moon, although he set those things in motion and they're an important part of his legacy.

Robert Caro, Oral Interview, May 16, 2012

He touched something in me. I still remember, actually, his inaugural address; I think it touched something in my whole generation. Someone once said to me at Harvard, one minute everybody was going to law school or business school, and the next minute they were all in the Peace Corps or going to join the Justice Department. I think that's the way I felt about him.

DECODED Journalist and biographer Robert Caro talks here about how Kennedy inspired many young people.



BORN: 1908

DIED: 1973

IN OFFICE:

November 22, 1963–
January 20, 1969

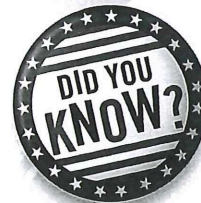
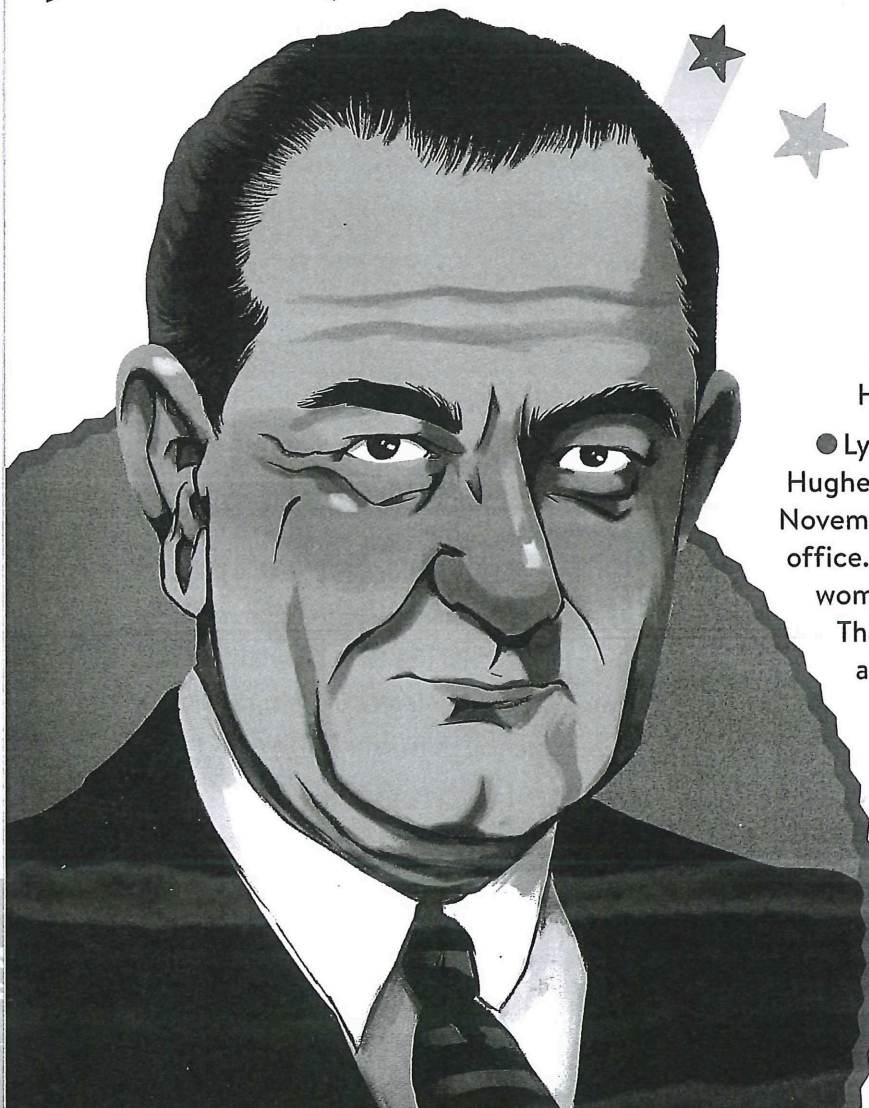
FROM: Texas

VICE PRESIDENT:

Hubert Horatio
Humphrey

PARTY: Democratic

LYNDON B•A•I•N•E•S JOHNSON



● Johnson appointed the first Black cabinet member, Robert Weaver, who headed the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

● Lyndon Johnson asked for Judge Sarah Hughes to come to the airport in Dallas on November 22, 1963, to administer the oath of office. Kennedy had appointed her as the third woman ever to be a federal judge (1961). That appointment is what gave her the authority to give Johnson the oath of office.

● LBJ is the only president to have been sworn in by a woman.

● Johnson had a car that also worked as a boat. He liked to pretend he'd lost control of the car and drive into a lake to terrify passengers who didn't know the car would float.

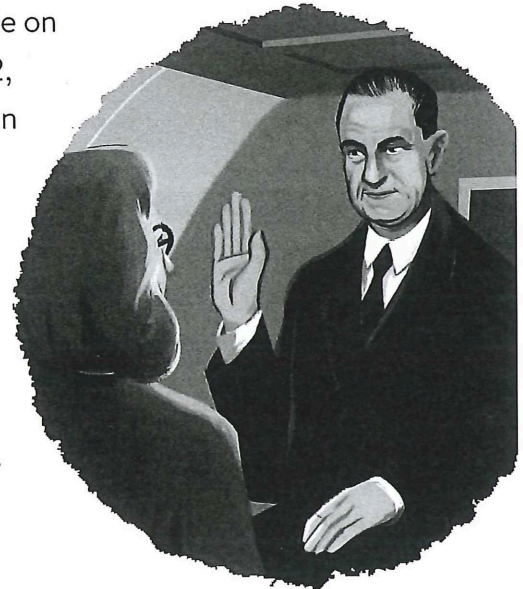
Life Before the Presidency

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born in Texas. His father was a member of the Texas state legislature and a struggling farmer. Johnson didn't do well enough in school to make it to college. He worked on a road crew, fought, drank—and got arrested. Eventually he became a teacher and was a good one. He did his student teaching at an elementary school in Cotulla, Texas, teaching the children of Mexican American farmers. He didn't speak Spanish and many of them didn't speak English, but that didn't stop him. In 1937, at the age of twenty-eight, Johnson was elected to the US House of Representatives. Johnson was the first member of Congress to enlist after the United States entered World War II. He was a congressional inspector in the Pacific and flew in only one bombing mission against Japanese troops.

In 1948, Johnson won a US Senate seat by eighty-seven votes, picking up the ironic nickname "Landslide Lyndon." He became majority leader in 1955. Johnson had a tremendous work ethic and was politically smart—the combination turned him into one of the most powerful Senate majority leaders in history. Members of Congress joked about getting the "Johnson treatment," in which Johnson persuaded people any way

necessary—begging, threatening, or prodding. Johnson could be very effective at lining up the votes he needed to pass a bill. He tried to get the Democratic nomination for president in 1960, but John F. Kennedy got the nod instead. Kennedy asked Johnson to run as his vice presidential candidate.

When Kennedy was assassinated in a motorcade on November 22, 1963, Johnson was two cars behind him. He took the oath of office on *Air Force One* the same day.



Mr. President

Lyndon Johnson came to office after John Kennedy's assassination in November 1963. He called his domestic agenda the "Great Society." Johnson saw an active role for the government and pursued a significant list of legislation. He set up the Department of Housing and Urban Development to oversee national policies on housing and to enforce fair housing laws, and he increased funding to education, from elementary

schools to colleges. He won passage of Medicare, which helps older adults with health care expenses. Lady Bird Johnson pushed for a highway beautification act that limited billboards along highways so that motorists could see the countryside.

Johnson also established the Head Start program to give poor children access to early education and another program to provide legal help to the poor. The War on Poverty worked; the poverty rate fell significantly.

JOHNSON'S REMARKS IN THE ROSE GARDEN ON PROJECT HEAD START, MAY 18, 1965

We set out to make certain that poverty's children would not be forevermore poverty's captives. We called our program Project Head Start. . . . Today we are able to announce that we will have open, and we believe operating this summer, coast-to-coast, some 2,000 child development centers serving as many as possibly a half million children. This means that nearly half the preschool children of poverty will get a head start on their future. Five- and six-year-old children are inheritors of poverty's curse and not its creators. Unless we act these children will pass it on to the next generation, like a family birthmark.

DECODED

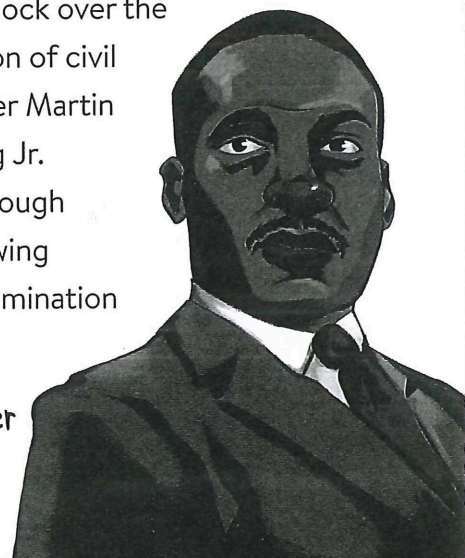
President Johnson began a wide variety of programs to help low-income Americans. The Head Start program was designed for preschool children from poor families. Head Start tried to meet the children's educational, social, emotional, and physical needs so that they could be competitive in school with kids who had more advantages.

In one decade, from 1964 to 1973, it fell from 19 percent to 11.1 percent, or by a little less than half. It was a remarkable achievement.

JFK had asked for a civil rights bill, and Johnson pushed it through. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended segregation in public facilities. Then he won an even bigger battle, the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black people had been denied voting rights through poll taxes, which required people to pay in order to vote, and hurt all poor people.

They also faced literacy or Constitution tests, which were given in such a way that they ensured failure. The Voting Rights Act allowed federal officials to register Black voters and in effect ended literacy tests in the South. Black voter registration exploded, with most Black voters joining the Democratic Party—while white conservatives who were upset with Johnson's civil rights bills left the Democratic Party. As Johnson used the national grief over Kennedy's death to secure passage of the Civil Rights Act, he used the shock over the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to push through a bill outlawing racial discrimination in housing.

Martin Luther King Jr.



JOHNSON'S SPECIAL MESSAGE TO CONGRESS, MARCH 15, 1965

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama. . . .

Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right. . . .

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

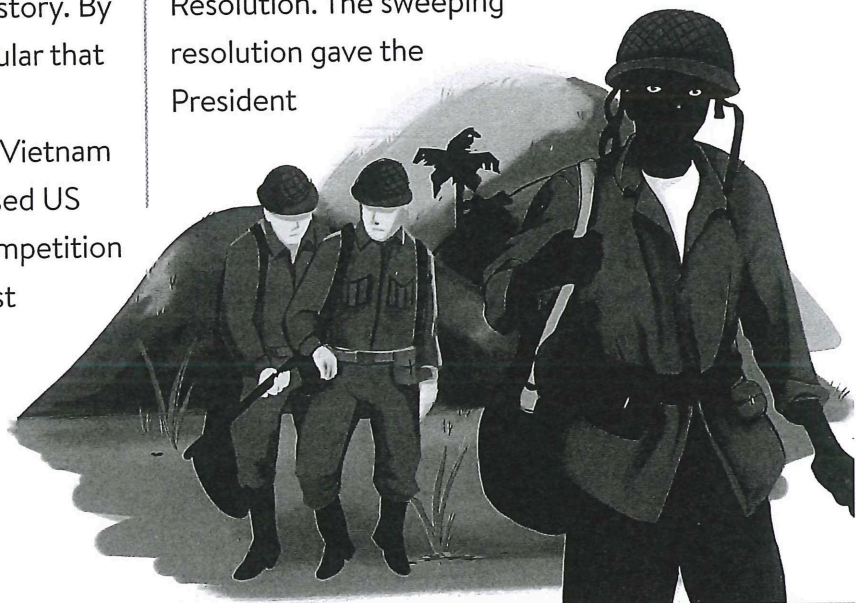
And we shall overcome.

DECODED Johnson gave this address after a civil rights march in Selma, Alabama, in which Alabama state troopers, some on horses, tear-gassed and beat marchers, injuring more than sixty people, some seriously. That day became known as Bloody Sunday. Johnson's use of the words "we shall overcome" sent a powerful signal. That was an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement; to hear those words said by the most powerful American—and a white Southerner—showed a shift in American thought. The Civil Rights Movement was gaining powerful protectors.

After finishing JFK's term, Johnson ran for a term of his own in 1964, and he won by the biggest popular vote margin in US history. By the end of his term he was so unpopular that he wouldn't run again.

There were 20,000 US troops in Vietnam when Kennedy died. Johnson increased US involvement as part of the global competition with the Soviets, fearing a communist takeover of the area. The great escalation of the war came during his administration. In 1964, after it appeared that US Navy

ships had come under attack, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The sweeping resolution gave the President



power to "take all necessary measures."

Johnson never asked for a formal declaration of war; the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution served as one in its absence.

Johnson campaigned on a platform of less involvement in Vietnam, but three weeks after his inauguration in 1965, he authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, which consisted of heavy bombing of North Vietnam. By mid-April 1965, the United States was fully at war, with significant numbers of ground troops in Vietnam. At the end of Johnson's term, the United States would have 535,000 troops in Vietnam. American opposition to the war surged. Before 1969, men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six were eligible for the draft, but the older they were the more likely they were to be drafted. That meant that younger men faced several years where it was hard to make plans, including whether to marry or start a family, because they didn't know if they would be drafted. Faced with a vigorous antiwar movement, Johnson announced that he wouldn't run again.



Letter from Lyndon Johnson to Ho Chi Minh, March 21, 1967

[Released March 21, 1967. Delivered February 8, 1967]

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to you in the hope that the conflict in Vietnam can be brought to an end. That conflict has already taken a heavy toll—in lives lost, in wounds inflicted, in property destroyed, and in simple human misery. If we fail to find a just and peaceful solution, history will judge us harshly.



Ho Chi Minh was president of North Vietnam. The United States would stay involved in the Vietnam War until 1973.

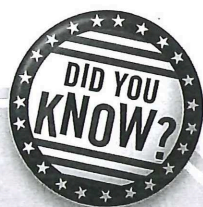
Legacy

Lyndon Johnson had sharply different legacies in domestic and foreign policy. At home, he secured landmark civil rights legislation and social programs that helped needy Americans. At the same time, he greatly increased American involvement in Vietnam, which hurt US prestige abroad and divided Americans. Johnson was one of the presidents who left a very mixed legacy.

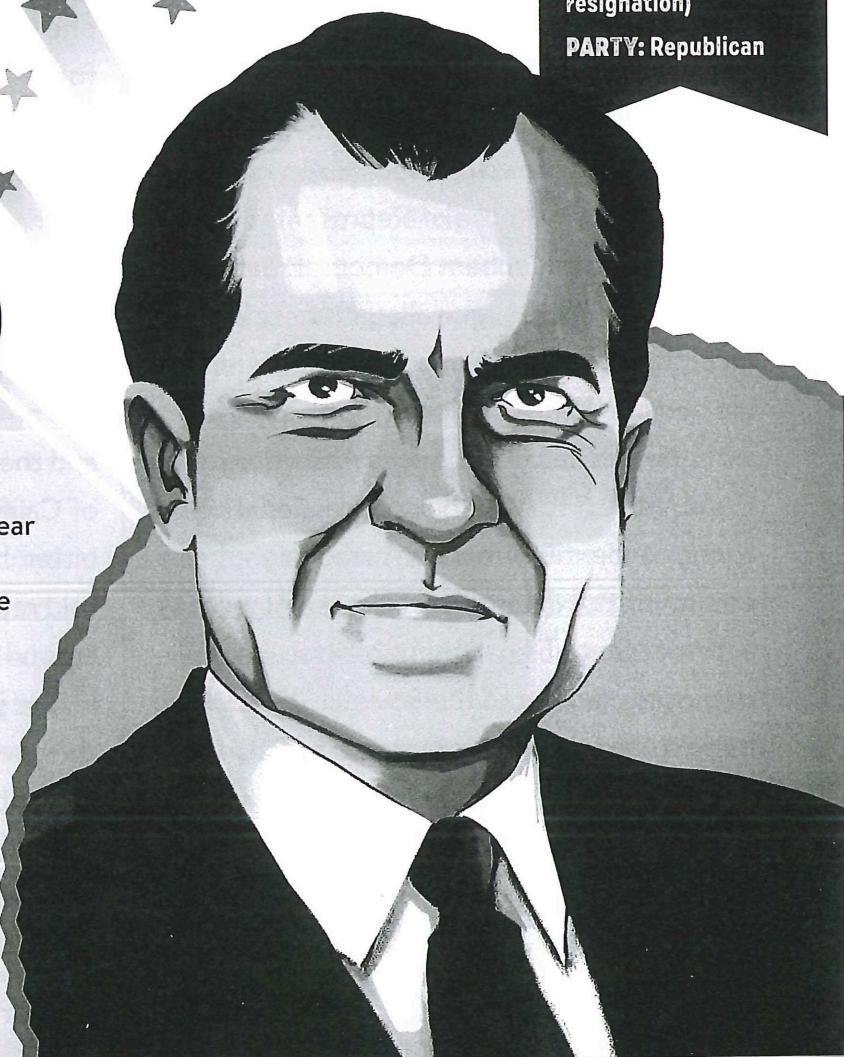


RICHARD MILHOUS NIXON

BORN: 1913
DIED: 1994
IN OFFICE:
January 20, 1969–
August 9, 1974
FROM: California
VICE PRESIDENT:
Spiro Agnew (for
the first term and
the second term
through October 10,
1973), Gerald Ford
(from December 6,
1973, through Nixon's
resignation)
PARTY: Republican



- Nixon is the only president to have resigned.
- Nixon went to law school during the Depression. He was so poor his first year that he lived (without permission) in a tool shed in the woods on campus. The school was in North Carolina, which was good because the shed didn't have heat.
- While he was in law school, Nixon broke into a professor's office through a little window above the door. He rifled through the professor's records to find out where he ranked in the class.



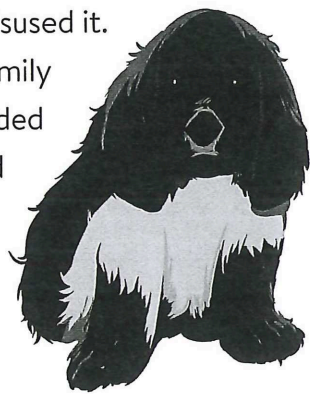
Life Before the Presidency

Richard Nixon was born in California. He went to Whittier College, majored in history, and was active in student government. He went on to Duke University Law School where he was third in his class. Nixon returned to California, worked as a lawyer, and was briefly a partner in a frozen orange juice business that failed.

During World War II, Nixon got a job in the tire-rationing section of the Office of Price Administration in Washington, DC. He later joined the navy and served in the South Pacific. When the war ended, Nixon ran for a seat in the US House of Representatives and beat the incumbent Democrat, partly because he made vague allegations that the incumbent was a communist sympathizer. He became known nationally for his work with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the congressional body trying to identify Americans who might be communists. Nixon helped expose Alger Hiss, a former State Department official accused of passing secrets to the Soviets. The case helped make Nixon's reputation as a strong anticommunist.

In 1950, Nixon ran for Senate and used the strategy that had been effective in his House race—he accused his opponent of

being soft on communism. Nixon was an early innovator in “negative campaigning,” which is making personal attacks on an opponent instead of debating issues. He won the Senate seat. In 1952, he was Eisenhower's vice presidential running mate. When a story broke that Nixon had a secret slush fund of donations, Eisenhower considered dropping him. Nixon gave a televised speech admitting that the fund existed but claiming that he hadn't misused it. He pointed out that his family wasn't wealthy, and he ended by saying he had accepted one gift—a cocker spaniel for his daughter. Nixon wriggled out of trouble and Eisenhower kept him on the ticket.



When he ran against Kennedy in the presidential election of 1960, a televised debate hurt Nixon and he lost a close race. The next year he wrote a book, *Six Crises*, and the year after that, he ran for governor of California and lost badly. Nixon had a bitter, brooding edge, and after the loss he told reporters, “You don't have Nixon to kick around any more.”

He joined a law firm in New York City, but then he decided to run for president in 1968 and got the Republican nomination. It was a chaotic year for the country—the Democratic convention was disorderly, antiwar protests were strong, Martin Luther King Jr. was

assassinated in April, and Robert Kennedy, who was running for the Democratic nomination, was assassinated in June. Nixon campaigned with the “Southern Strategy,” fueling the fears of white Southerners that Black political power was increasing, to get them to vote for Republicans. The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision requiring schools to desegregate was deeply unpopular among white Southerners. The Republican Party championed a slow approach, stalling on desegregation and creating alternatives like private schools for white children. They also appointed conservative judges to stall the progress of civil rights. As the Democratic Party embraced the Civil Rights Movement, the Republican Party became the champion of people who opposed it. The Southern Strategy helped Nixon win in 1968.

Mr. President

One of the most stunning moments in American history occurred during Nixon’s presidency: Astronauts landed on the Moon. President Kennedy had called for NASA to try to reach the moon by the end of the decade, but he didn’t live long enough to see the landing.

Nixon inherited the war in Vietnam. Working very closely with his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, Nixon followed a

President’s Daily Diary, July 20, 1969

11:45 11:50 P [p.m.] The president held an interplanetary conversation with Apollo 11 Astronauts, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin on the Moon.

DECODED What an astonishing entry! The president’s daily diary lists his activities and this notes his conversation with astronauts who were on the moon. Edwin Aldrin is usually called “Buzz.”

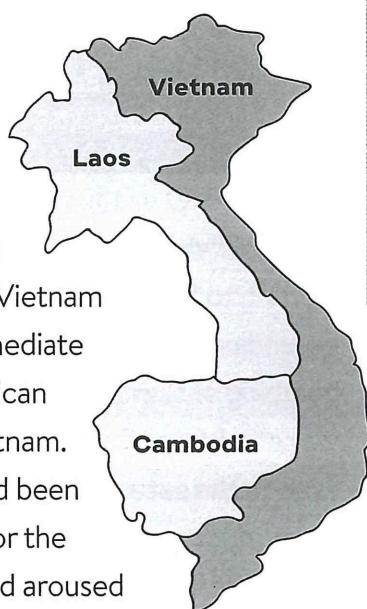
policy of “Vietnamization”—turning over the fighting to South Vietnamese forces while expanding the war. Nixon ordered the bombing of Cambodia in 1969 and kept it a secret from Congress and the people, even to the extent of altering pilots’ flight reports.

In 1969, the military draft changed to a lottery system so that instead of drafting men at the higher end of the age range first, everyone had an equal and random chance of being drafted, at least in theory. Anxiety and anger about the draft fueled antiwar protests.

In 1970, Nixon sent US ground troops into Cambodia to destroy communist strongholds there. He ran a secret war in Laos as well. (Cambodia and Laos lie on Vietnam’s western border.) The antiwar movement protested the bombings in Cambodia. A protest at Kent

State University ended in tragedy when the Ohio National Guard opened fire on students, killing four people. In 1971, the *Pentagon Papers*, a top secret study by the Defense Department of US involvement in Vietnam, starting before the Nixon administration, was published. It revealed that the government had lied to the American people about what was going on in Vietnam, revelations that increased suspicion of the government and frustration with the war.

In January 1973, a peace agreement was reached between the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam that included an immediate cease-fire and American withdrawal from Vietnam. The Vietnam War had been an embarrassment for the United States and had aroused large-scale resistance at home,



including many protests on college campuses and efforts to resist the draft.

China had had a communist revolution in 1949, and the United States had not recognized the new government. Nixon sent Henry Kissinger to China for talks that were kept secret because the countries had no diplomatic relations and these first attempts to establish communication were very sensitive. Then in 1971, China invited a US table tennis team to visit, and the next year a Chinese team came to the United States. The press called it "ping-pong diplomacy." In February 1972, Nixon visited China, the first visit by an American president while in office. It was a significant breakthrough in relations. In May 1972, Nixon traveled to Moscow and signed the SALT I (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) agreement that limited specific weapons, reducing the Soviet and American arsenals. It ushered in an era of détente, or better relations, in which the nations communicated more.



WAR POWERS RESOLUTION, 1973

The President in every possible instance shall consult with Congress before introducing United States Armed Forces into hostilities . . . and after every such introduction shall consult regularly with the Congress until United States Armed Forces are no longer engaged in hostilities or have been removed from such situations. . . .

Within sixty calendar days after a report is submitted. . . the President shall terminate any use of United States Armed Forces . . . unless the Congress . . . has declared war. . . .

DECODED

President Nixon bombed two neutral countries and didn't tell Congress or the American people. Upset at the lack of transparency and angry that its constitutional role had been ignored, Congress passed the War Powers Act, which allows presidents to send troops into conflict but requires them to get congressional approval to leave troops in place. (The Constitution says that Congress declares war, not the president.)

In his domestic agenda, Nixon proposed a program that would have given poor families a guaranteed annual income, or a “negative tax,” as he put it. In 1969, a family of four would have had a guaranteed income of \$1,600 a year. Nixon ran a test program to see if the people who received the funds would work less, but they didn’t. The Senate rejected his proposal, but discussion of the measure eventually helped people accept similar bills, such as cost of living increases for people getting Social Security. Nixon also proposed expanding the food stamp program, although he was hoping it would fail and he could blame that on Democrats. And he put in the first affirmative action programs, which he called “set asides.” On construction projects financed with federal money, a certain percentage of jobs would be given to minorities. He increased funding for some civil rights agencies, although he opposed busing as a way to integrate schools. And he proposed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), an agency to oversee workplace safety.

Nixon barely mentioned environmental issues while campaigning, but the environmental movement rose up at this time and both Democratic and Republican voters cared about the issue. Nixon responded by creating the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970. He signed the Clean Air Act, which allowed federal and state governments to limit air pollution from both factories and cars. Congress passed the Clean Water Act

over his veto; it regulated how much of a pollutant could be dumped into the water and established standards for what counted as safe water.

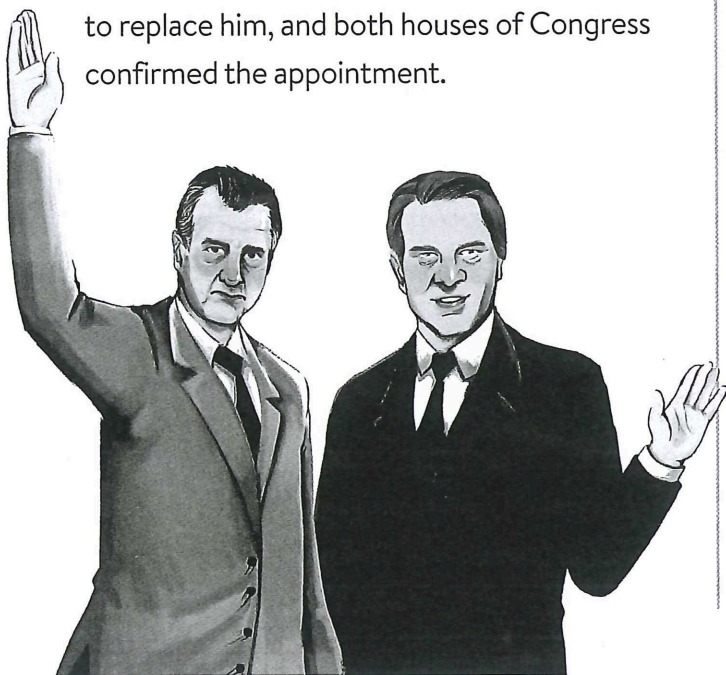
In 1973, he signed the Endangered Species Act, which tried to protect animals in danger of dying out, and in 1974, he signed the Safe Drinking Water Act, which set guidelines for safe drinking water, including water treatment. At the same time, he angered environmentalists by requiring economic analyses that highlighted the costs of environmental legislation. Seeing the costs increased opposition to environmental measures.

The economy was sluggish. High inflation and unemployment prompted Nixon to freeze wages and prices, which means to lock them in place, something normally only done during war. The controls helped, but once they were lifted inflation rose sharply.

In 1973, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew was investigated on charges of bribery, extortion, and income tax evasion. Agnew argued that a vice president couldn’t be indicted while still in office and refused to resign. But President Nixon had a scandal of his own brewing, and after a court ruled that sitting vice presidents can be indicted, Agnew resigned. The prosecutor worked out a deal for Agnew that saved him from a lengthy prison term.



Nixon immediately nominated Gerald R. Ford, a Republican congressman from Michigan, to replace him, and both houses of Congress confirmed the appointment.



Spiro Agnew

Gerald Ford

The Nixon administration is best known for the Watergate burglary and cover-up. On June 17, 1972, police caught five White House operatives in the process of illegally bugging phones and photographing documents in the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate Building. There was an election coming up in 1972, and what the burglars were up to would likely benefit Nixon's campaign. President Nixon said the White House had nothing to do with it. The *Washington Post* investigated and discovered that Nixon's reelection campaign had paid the burglars thousands of dollars. Further revelations showed that Nixon had arranged for the burglars to get "hush money," which

means a payment not to talk. And he tried to get the CIA to stop the FBI from investigating the crimes. The question became whether the president was personally involved. As Republican senator Howard Baker of Tennessee asked, "What did the president know, and when did he know it?"

In 1973, the Watergate burglars were found guilty. A special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was appointed to look into the affair. When Cox discovered that Nixon had taped conversations in the Oval Office, he ordered the tapes to be turned over. Nixon said no and ordered Attorney General Elliot Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson refused and resigned.

TRANSCRIPT of a Recording of a Meeting Between the President and H. R. Haldeman in the Oval Office on June 23, 1972, from 10:04 to 11:39 a.m.

Haldeman: Now, on the investigation, you know, the Democratic break-in thing, we're back to the—in the, the problem area because the FBI is not under control, because Gray doesn't exactly know how to control them, and they have, their investigation is now leading into some productive areas, because they've been able to trace the money, not through the money itself, but through the bank, you know, sources—the banker himself. And, and it goes in some directions we don't want it to go.

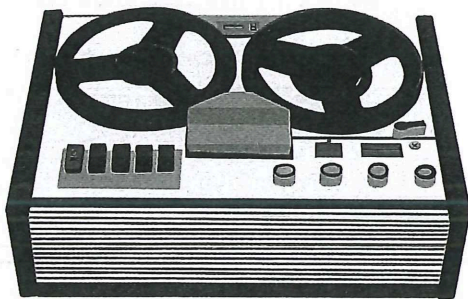
Nixon then ordered Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus to fire Cox, and he also refused and resigned. That all happened in one evening, which became known as the "Saturday Night Massacre." (No one was killed. "Massacre" just refers to the people losing their jobs.) Finally the acting attorney general, Robert Bork, followed Nixon's order and fired Cox. Republicans as well as Democrats thought that the president shouldn't have fired the person investigating him.

In May 1974, the House began impeachment proceedings against Nixon, and in July, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that he had to hand over the tapes. Nixon

had claimed executive privilege, which means the right of the president to keep some things private to preserve national security. The Supreme Court ruled that there is no absolute right to executive privilege and that it can be overridden by the need to make sure the law is obeyed. Nixon turned the tapes over—although his secretary had erased an eighteen-minute segment on one of them. The House passed three articles of impeachment against Nixon: obstruction of justice, misuse of power, and contempt of Congress. Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, and the next day, Gerald Ford was sworn in as president.

DECODED

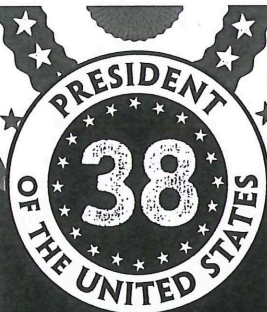
This is the "smoking gun" tape. *Smoking gun* means proof that somebody committed a crime. This tape showed that President Nixon was trying to use the CIA to stop an FBI investigation, and led the House to draw up impeachment charges against him. "Gray" is L. Patrick Gray, acting director of the FBI, and H. R. Haldeman was White House chief of staff. The "Democratic break-in thing" was the burglary at the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate Building.



Legacy

After resigning, Nixon wrote several books, including his autobiography and books on foreign policy. He traveled widely as a private citizen, including to China and the Soviet Union.

Nixon's administration had a number of real achievements in environmental protection, opening communication with China, and improving relations with the Soviet Union. He is remembered for the Watergate scandal, however, and as the only president to have resigned. Nixon's scandals shocked the nation and increased suspicion of the government.



BORN: 1913

DIED: 2006

IN OFFICE:

August 9, 1974–
January 20, 1977

FROM: born in in
Nebraska; grew up in
Michigan

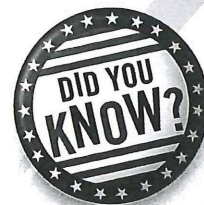
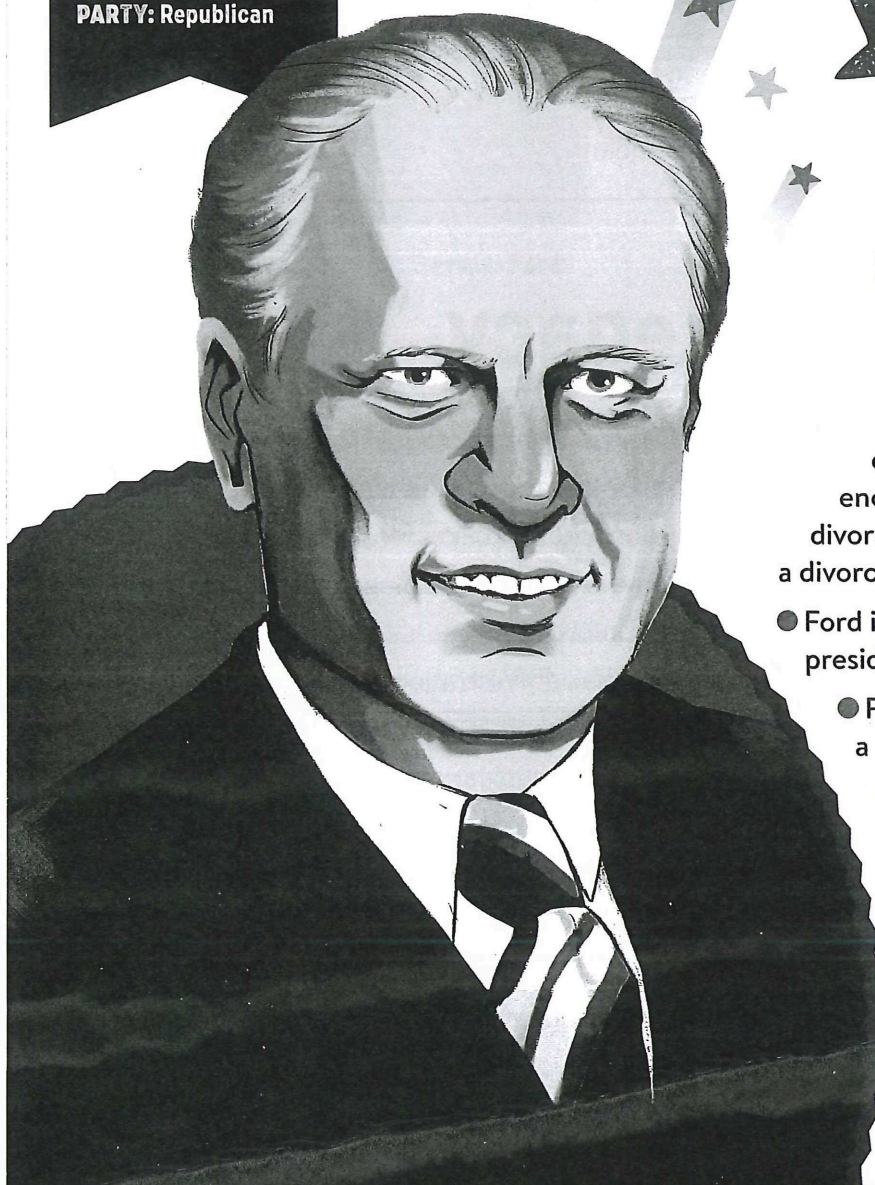
VICE PRESIDENT:

Nelson Rockefeller

PARTY: Republican

GERALD

F•O•R•D



● Ford was the first president whose parents were divorced.

Divorce used to be less common, and it bothered some people enough that they wouldn't vote for a divorced candidate. The nation wouldn't have a divorced president until Ronald Reagan.

● Ford is the only vice president who became president because of a resignation.

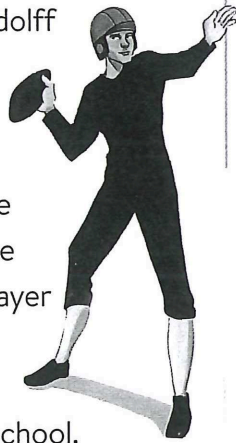
● Ford is the only person to have pardoned a president.

● Ford is the only president who was an Eagle Scout (the highest rank in the Boy Scouts).

● Five consecutive presidents fought in World War II. Ford was the last of that line, which included Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon.

Life Before the Presidency

Gerald Ford was born Leslie Lynch King Jr. His mother left his abusive father, moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and married Gerald Rudolff Ford. He adopted young Leslie and changed his name to Gerald Rudolff Ford Jr. (The future president later changed the spelling of his middle name.) Ford played football in high school and at the University of Michigan, where he was the team's most valuable player his senior year. He was a good student and turned down pro football contracts to go to law school.



After Pearl Harbor, Ford enlisted in the navy and served for four years. He won ten battle stars for service in the Pacific theater. After the war, he practiced law in Grand Rapids. He won a seat in the House of Representatives, and in 1965, he became the House minority leader. He developed a reputation for honesty and conservatism, meaning that he favored small government. Ford, a Republican, opposed Lyndon Johnson's domestic programs and wanted him to increase American involvement in Vietnam.

When Richard Nixon became president in 1969, Ford supported his policies. Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned while under investigation for taking bribes. Nixon, too, was in trouble as his involvement in the Watergate burglary came to light. Nixon nominated Ford

to be his vice president, and Congress confirmed him with an overwhelming vote. He was sworn in on December 6, 1973.

At first Ford thought that Nixon was innocent, but on August 5, 1974, Ford said that taped evidence made it clear that Nixon could be impeached. Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, and Ford took the oath of office the next day. He is the only US president never to have been elected president or vice president by the American people. His vice president, Nelson Rockefeller, was also appointed rather than elected.

FORD'S INAUGURAL REMARKS, AUGUST 9, 1974

The oath that I have taken is the same oath that was taken by George Washington and by every President under the Constitution. But I assume the Presidency under extraordinary circumstances never before experienced by Americans. This is an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts.

Therefore, I feel it is my first duty to make an unprecedented compact with my countrymen. Not an inaugural address, not a fireside chat, not a campaign speech—just a little straight talk among friends. And I intend it to be the first of many.

I am acutely aware that you have not elected me as your President by your ballots, and so I ask you to confirm me as your President with your prayers. And I hope that such prayers will also be the first of many. . . .

Our Constitution works; our great Republic is a government of laws and not of men.

DECODED

Ford came to office in a unique way—and he knew it. His final point, that the United States is a “government of laws and not of men,” is a basic point that John Adams made during the Revolution. Americans are loyal to the law, not the leader. In other words, no one is above the law.

Mr. President

When Ford took office the nation was shocked by Nixon's scandals and divided over social issues. The economy was sputtering, plagued by inflation, high unemployment, and high energy prices. The most immediate issue was the aftermath of Watergate. Most Americans had wanted to see Nixon punished. But Ford pardoned Nixon for his crimes to spare Nixon from jail, allow the country to

move forward without having to focus on scandals, and give himself the chance to govern without being overshadowed by the spectacle of a trial. Ford's press secretary resigned in protest over the pardon and Ford's popularity, as measured by polls, fell by almost half. Some people thought that Nixon and Ford must have made a deal—that Nixon had agreed to resign in return for a pardon. There was no evidence of this and Ford denied it, but a House committee briefly investigated. Ford testified before the committee and the matter was dropped.

GERALD FORD'S REMARKS ON PROCLAMATION 4311, SEPTEMBER 8, 1974

I have come to a decision which I felt I should tell you and all of my fellow American citizens, as soon as I was certain in my own mind and in my own conscience that it is the right thing to do. . . . I have promised to uphold the Constitution, to do what is right as God gives me to see the right, and to do the very best that I can for America. . . .

There are no historic or legal precedents to which I can turn in this matter, none that precisely fit the circumstances of a private citizen who has resigned the Presidency of the United States. But it is common knowledge that serious allegations and accusations hang like a sword over our former President's head, threatening his health as he tries to reshape his life, a great part of which was spent in the service of this country and by the mandate of its people. . . .

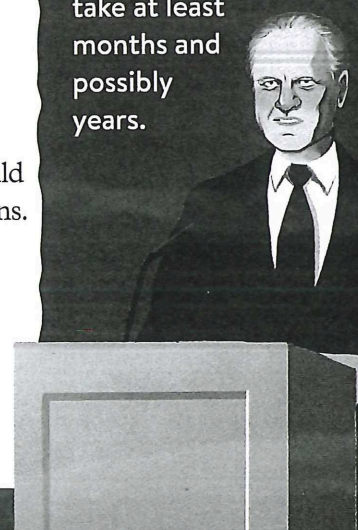
The facts, as I see them, are that a former President of the United States, instead of enjoying equal treatment with any other citizen accused of violating the law, would be cruelly and excessively penalized either in preserving the presumption of his innocence or in obtaining a speedy determination of his guilt in order to repay a legal debt to society.

During this long period of delay and potential litigation, ugly passions would again be aroused. And our people would again be polarized in their opinions. And the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and abroad.

As President, my primary concern must always be the greatest good of all the people of the United States whose servant I am. As a man, my first consideration is to be true to my own convictions and my own conscience.

DECODED

President Ford here explains the American people why he pardoned Richard Nixon. It wasn't a step he took lightly and he understood there would be outrage that the former president escaped accountability. Ford thought it was best for the country to move on instead of being bogged down in a trial, and likely appeals, that would take at least months and possibly years.



Letter from Gerald R. Ford to Betty Ford, September 1974, after Her Diagnosis with Breast Cancer

No written words can adequately express our deep, deep love. We know how great you are and we, the children and Dad, will try to be as strong as you. Our faith in you and God will sustain us. Our total love for you is everlasting. We will be at your side with our love for a wonderful Mom. XXXX, Jerry

DECODED Betty Ford had surgery for breast cancer a month after President Nixon resigned and her husband took over as president. It was a tumultuous time for the Ford family, as well as for the country. Women were often private about breast cancer diagnoses at the time, but Betty Ford used her illness as an opportunity to spread awareness of the disease, helping other women.



Ford had no vice president when he came to office since he himself had been the VP. The Constitution (according to the Twenty-Fifth Amendment, ratified in 1967) required him to name one and he chose Nelson Rockefeller, a moderate Republican, upsetting the party's conservatives. Ford also had problems with Congress, where Democrats had a large advantage and picked up seats in the 1974 midterm elections because voters were tired of scandal and angry that Nixon was pardoned.

The economy was weak, with both high inflation and high unemployment, a condition economists called "stagflation" (a combination

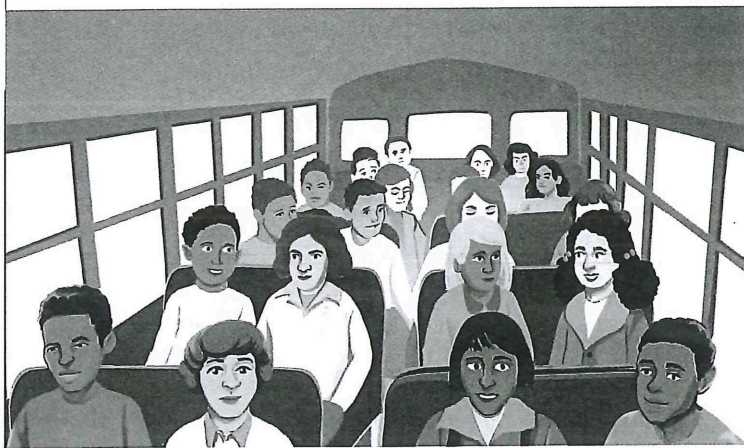
of stagnation, which means lack of growth, and inflation). Ford wanted a tax hike and reduced government spending.

As economic problems worsened and unemployment hit 9 percent, Ford switched over to calling for a tax cut rather than a tax hike. He had focused on trying to reduce inflation, but with midterm elections coming up and unemployment rising, Republicans didn't want to campaign on a tax hike. Democrats pointed out that he was changing his position.

Ford signed an energy bill that reduced oil prices—something Democrats wanted—but also allowed him to phase out price controls on oil. Increasing oil prices were a big part of the economic problems of the 1970s, and they grew out of conflict in the Middle East. In 1967, Israel fought against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in the Six-Day War. Fighting flared again in October 1973, when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel. Since it began on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, this conflict was called the Yom Kippur War. The Soviet Union backed and supplied Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and the United States backed and supplied Israel. The United Nations pressured the two sides to stop fighting, and Israel signed a cease-fire with Egypt in November 1973 and with Syria in May 1974. The Yom Kippur War had interrupted oil production in the Middle East. In addition, oil-producing states that opposed US involvement in the Yom Kippur War made it harder for the United States to get oil to punish it for having supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War. This led to a decreased supply and higher prices, which

hurt the US economy and made things harder for President Ford.

The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954 had called for desegregating schools but it was met with resistance by many white people, and not just in the South. Many northern cities had residential segregation—that is, people of different races or ethnicities lived in separate neighborhoods. Because schools serve children from a specific neighborhood, the schools remained segregated. In 1974, Boston was ordered to integrate its schools by busing in students from outside a neighborhood in order to make the schools more racially diverse. White resistance to busing in Boston led to violence and calls for the president to intervene, but he refused. Ford thought the government should end legal segregation, but not segregation that occurred because of social or economic circumstances.



In foreign affairs, Ford continued to try to lessen tension with the Soviet Union and he signed the Helsinki Accords, which recognized

the borders of all European countries as drawn at the end of World War II. The Helsinki Accords included an important statement on human rights, like the freedom to travel and the free flow of information between countries. The Soviet Union and the United States interpreted the human rights clauses differently, and that was a source of friction between the two nations.

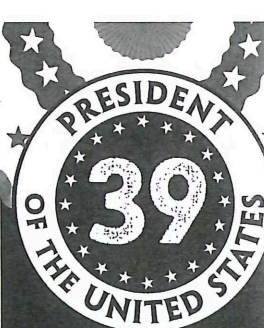
In 1975, the city of Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, fell to North Vietnamese troops. American troops had left in 1973, but there were still Americans in Vietnam. These people left in helicopters that took off from city rooftops, with South Vietnamese allies desperately trying to get on board. The evacuation was embarrassing.

Legacy

After he lost the 1976 election, Ford retired to California, golfed, wrote books, and lectured. Ronald Reagan considered him for his running mate in 1980 but chose someone else. President Clinton awarded him the Congressional Medal of Freedom in 1999 for helping to heal the nation after Watergate.

Ford was only in office for two and a half years and the most important thing he did was to pardon Richard Nixon for crimes committed while in office. He was an honest and decent person who helped restore some trust in government after the Nixon years, but that process would take longer than the time he had in office.

JAMES EARL CARTER



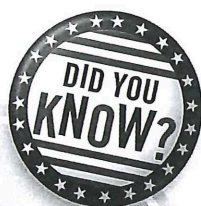
BORN: 1924

IN OFFICE:
January 20, 1977-
January 20, 1981

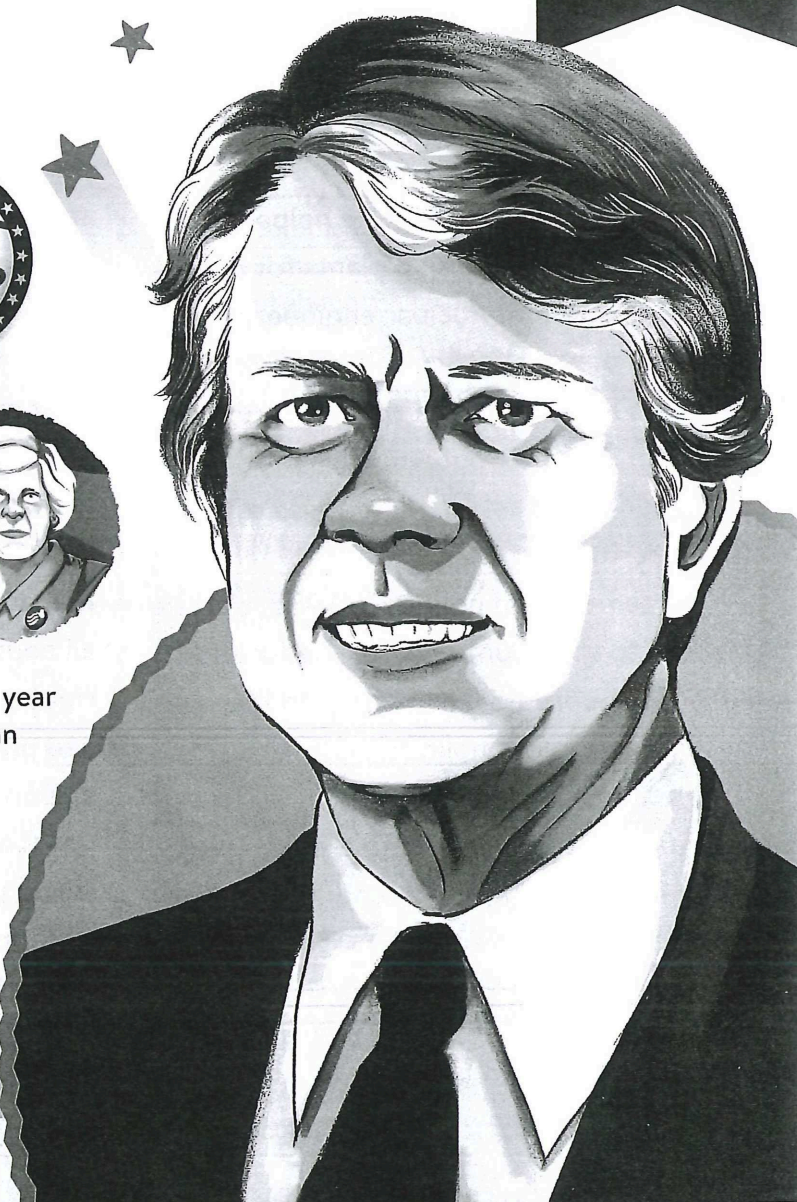
VICE PRESIDENT:
Walter Mondale

FROM: Georgia

PARTY: Democratic



- President Carter's mother, Lillian, became a Peace Corp volunteer at the age of sixty-eight and served in India. When her son was president, he sent her to the 1977 funeral of Indian president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, making her the first mother of a president to go on a diplomatic mission. Earlier the same year the First Lady, Rosalynn Carter, went on a foreign policy trip to Latin America, the first time a First Lady took that type of trip.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Life Before the Presidency

Jimmy Carter was the first president to be born in a hospital. He grew up on a Georgia farm that grew peanuts and cotton. His mother was a nurse but stayed home to raise her four children. Carter, the eldest, attended the US Naval Academy at Annapolis (1943–1946), the only president to do so. In 1946, Carter finished at the Naval Academy and became a submarine officer. He served during the Korean War but not in combat. Instead he helped design nuclear propulsion plants for naval vessels and taught nuclear engineering to the crew of the USS *Seawolf*, a submarine. It looked like he would have an impressive career in the navy, but when his father died in 1953 he returned home to run the family farm.

Carter entered politics in 1955, getting elected to the county board of education. After the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of public schools with *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, serving on a school board in the South became a difficult job. An anti-integration organization called the White Citizens Council formed groups across the South, including in Plains, Georgia, Carter's hometown. He was the only white man in

Plains who refused to join. When other people in town boycotted his business, he still refused to join. Eventually the boycott ended, and when Carter ran for a seat in the state senate in 1963, he won. In 1971, he became Georgia's governor. He served one term before running for president of the United States in 1976.

Mr. President

Jimmy Carter was elected after the scandals of the Nixon administration and Gerald Ford's "caretaker" presidency, meaning an administration that doesn't make many new policies but mostly tries to keep things together to hand off to the next person. Carter, then a Southern Baptist, was a very religious man and said he wanted to bring honesty back to the White House. He also tried to advance human rights internationally: He wanted all countries to respect people's basic rights, like the right to food and shelter, and political rights, like voting, and for all people to have freedom from the government violating their rights, like jailing people for political speech.

Carter's biggest challenges were a bad economy and rising energy costs. He hoped to beat inflation by putting off tax cuts and limiting spending, but inflation and

unemployment both rose. Gasoline prices almost doubled between 1973 and 1976, the year that Carter was elected, creating an energy crisis. Instead of using less energy, Americans began to use more—which only drove the prices higher



CARTER'S "MORAL EQUIVALENT OF WAR" SPEECH,

APRIL 18, 1977

Good evening.

Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem that is unprecedented in our history. With the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge that our country will face during our lifetime.

The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly. It's a problem that we will not be able to solve in the next few years, and it's likely to get progressively worse through the rest of this century. . . .

Two days from now, I will present to the Congress my energy proposals. . . .

Many of these proposals will be unpopular. Some will cause you to put up with inconveniences and to make sacrifices. . . . This difficult effort will be the "moral equivalent of war," except that we will be uniting our efforts to build and not to destroy.

DECODED Carter called for conserving, or using less, energy and for Americans to make sacrifices. But the idea that the world was running out of fossil fuels and people would need to be more careful about their energy use and the environment was extremely unpopular.

and made it necessary to import, or bring in, more oil from other countries.

Faced with rising energy prices and the drag they put on the American economy, Carter tried to promote sustainable energy sources like solar energy.

CARTER'S SOLAR ENERGY REMARKS ANNOUNCING ADMINISTRATION PROPOSALS, JUNE 20, 1979

We import now about half of all the oil we use from overseas. And this dependence on foreign sources of oil is of great concern to all of us. . . .

Today, I am sending to the Congress legislative recommendations for a new solar strategy that will move our Nation toward true energy security and abundant, readily available energy supplies.

In the year 2000, the solar water heater behind me, which is being dedicated today, will still be here supplying cheap, efficient energy. A generation from now, this solar heater can either be a curiosity, a museum piece, an example of a road not taken, or it can be just a small part of one of the greatest and most exciting adventures ever undertaken by the American people: harnessing the power of the Sun to enrich our lives as we move away from our crippling dependence on foreign oil.

DECODED In June 1979, Jimmy Carter gave this speech announcing that thirty-two solar panels had been put on the White House roof. He hoped that they would cause other Americans to take actions to help the environment, especially using solar power. But the next president, Ronald Reagan, had the panels removed. Some of them are now in the Smithsonian, so they are museum pieces and examples of the road not taken.

The United States was heavily dependent on oil as a fuel, much of which it imported. During Carter's term in office, the biggest oil-producing nations raised the price of oil so that it was almost three times as expensive as it had been before.

Carter hoped to increase production of sustainable fuels, which don't get used up the way oil does. But gas prices and inflation remained high, and Americans had what Carter called a "crisis of confidence" in the government and the future.

Carter had a strong record in environmental protection. He signed a bill in 1977 that limited strip mining, in which coal or iron ore is reached by removing the layers of earth above it instead of tunneling after it. He also signed the Superfund law, which required cleanup of hundreds of abandoned hazardous waste sites. And he set aside fifty-six million acres of public land in Alaska.

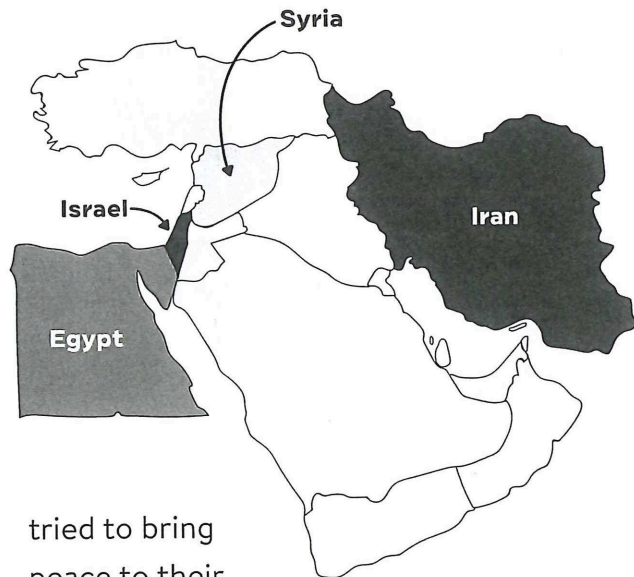


In 1978, Carter deregulated the airline industry, along with trucking and railroads. That meant that the government had far fewer rules for the transportation industry. Rates fell, but airlines stopped flying many routes to small communities, which meant that it could be much harder for people who lived there to find flights.

In 1979, there was a revolution in Iran. The shah (ruler) of Iran was overthrown

and Ayatollah Khomeini became the new ruler. Khomeini and his followers, who were religious conservatives, wanted the government to be religiously based. The shah was dying of cancer, and Carter let him come to the United States for medical treatment. That outraged Muslim fundamentalists in Iran. In November 1979, student militants who supported Ayatollah Khomeini attacked the US embassy in Tehran, Iran's capital. They took sixty-six Americans hostage (and held fifty-two of them), trying to force the shah to return to Iran so they could put him on trial. Carter tried negotiations, which failed. He then authorized a secret military mission to free the hostages, but one of the helicopters crashed, killing eight US soldiers, and the mission failed. At the very end of his term, Carter made an agreement to release Iranian funds in the United States that had been frozen in response to the Iranian Revolution. Iran in turn released the hostages. It happened on the day that Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. Reagan had nothing to do with the release, but it benefited him, and the yearlong hostage drama badly damaged Carter's prestige.

Carter's greatest impact may have been helping to reduce conflict in the Middle East. In September 1978, President Carter hosted Egypt's president, Anwar el-Sadat, and Israel's prime minister, Menachem Begin, at Camp David. Sadat and Begin



tried to bring peace to their countries after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when Egypt and Syria had fought Israel. In 1978, the two nations, along with the United States, signed the Camp David Accords, which were agreements in which Israel and Egypt recognized each other's governments. Israel also agreed to pull out of the Sinai Peninsula. It was a big deal when Sadat and Begin shook hands. There's still fighting in the Middle East, but the Camp David Accords were an important step toward peace.

Legacy

After leaving office, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter started the Carter Center, a nonprofit organization to promote human rights and democracy, improve public health, and help people improve the way they farm. Carter continued to work for human rights around the world, and he even picked up a hammer to help build homes for low-income people. He was one of the most active ex-presidents. In 2002, Carter won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work trying to find peaceful ways to solve social justice problems.

He is remembered as a president troubled with rising energy prices, a poor economy, and a hostage crisis that he couldn't solve, and he had trouble working with Congress. He was also an active advocate of human rights and a leader in the search for a peace settlement in the Middle East.

