

*William Jefferson Clinton*  
42nd President

*Bill Clinton*



Terms: 1993-2001

Political Party: Democrat

First Lady: Hillary Rodham Clinton

Vice President: Albert Gore

Overview

Born: August 19, 1946 in Hope, Arkansas... As a seventeen-year-old member of Boys Nation, Bill Clinton journeyed to Washington and had the opportunity to shake the hand of his political hero, [John F. Kennedy](#)

<[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-kennedy/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-kennedy/)>.

Presenting himself as a New Democrat during the presidential election of 1992, Bill Clinton promised to "focus like a laser beam" on the failing economy. Fending off a serious challenge by independent Ross Perot, and besting incumbent [George Bush](#)

</[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-bush/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-bush/)>, Clinton captured the White House with just forty-three percent of the popular vote. In 1998, when his sexual affair with a White House intern came to light amid charges of perjury, obstruction of justice, and abuse of power, Clinton became the second president to be impeached by the House of Representatives. He was found not guilty in the Senate and apologized to the nation. Clinton left office at the end of his second term with unprecedented popular approval ratings, yet having disappointed many with his personal conduct.

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## The Era

- The FBI attacks Branch Davidian headquarters in Waco, Texas (1993)
- Janet Reno is named as first female U.S. attorney general (1993)
- Massive floods in the Midwest (1993)
- Investigation into death of White House advisor Vincent Foster (1993)
- Whitewater investigation (1993)
- Trial of O.J. Simpson (1994-95)
- Pathfinder sends back pictures from Mars (1997)
- War in Bosnia (1991-96)
- Sheep cloned in England (1997)

## Domestic Policy

Bill Clinton's efforts to forge a constructive and unique domestic agenda met with some early obstacles. Clinton pointedly avoided embracing economic policies that would cast him as a tax-and-spend liberal, yet was indebted to many groups who did not fare well during the conservative reigns of [Ronald Reagan](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/reagan/) and [George Bush](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/bush/). Among his first term victories was the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), for which he garnered more Republican than Democratic support. A significant disappointment of his first term, however, was the failure to gain congressional approval for health care reform.

*“There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America.”*

– William J. Clinton, 1993

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## Foreign Affairs

Newly-elected Bill Clinton was subjected to heavy scrutiny in the area of foreign affairs. During the presidential campaign of 1992, Republican George Bush made much of Clinton's lack of military experience and questioned his ability to effectively command the nation's armed forces. Shortly after entering office, Clinton ordered air strikes against Iraq in retaliation for an assassination plot against Bush. Clinton also dispatched additional troops to Somalia in October 1993 despite public and congressional uproar over the killing of American soldiers who were part of a United Nations relief effort there. A planned invasion of Haiti was called off at the last minute when rebel leaders agreed to reinstate exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

## Presidential Politics

During the 1992 presidential campaign, television played an increased and unconventional role in presenting candidates to the public. Previously, television appearances by candidates came in the form of carefully crafted advertisements and formal interactions with members of the press. By 1992 the rise of the talk-show format and the proliferation of satellite and cable access channels allowed candidates to bypass the traditional press and speak directly to the people. Bill Clinton took advantage of this approach to exploit his skills as an empathic listener who could "feel the pain" of everyday citizens. Gaining exposure on MTV and late-night talk shows, candidate Clinton reached out to young audiences and baby boomers like himself. A crucial moment in the campaign came in a town-meeting style debate between Clinton, Bush, and Perot. As Clinton engaged questioners and moved about freely, Bush was seen looking at his watch, appearing uncomfortable in such an informal setting.

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