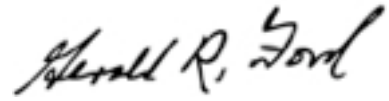


Gerald Ford
38th President




Terms: 1974-1977

Political Party: Republican

First Lady: Elizabeth Anne Bloomer Ford

Vice President: Nelson A. Rockefeller

Overview

Born: July 14, 1913 in Omaha, Nebraska... Gerald Ford, who had never entered a national election, succeeded to both the vice presidency and the presidency without having received a single vote. "Our long national nightmare is over," he intoned on the day of his ascension to the presidency. It fell to him, then, to lead a weary nation following the deluge of cynicism brought about by Watergate. A combative Congress did little to ensure legislative successes, and a turbulent economy further dampened the Ford administration's hopes to win over an increasingly cynical public. His pardon of [Richard Nixon](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-nixon/> cost him national political approval.

The Era

- Chile's president Salvador Allende is killed in coup (1973)
- Patty Hearst kidnapping (1975)
- Communists victorious in Vietnam (1975)
- Khmer Rouge takes power in Cambodia (1975)

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- Mozambique wins independence from Portugal (1975)
- Legionnaire's Disease kills 29 (1976)
- America celebrates the Bicentennial (1976)
- Viking II lands on Mars (1976)

Domestic Policy

Gerald Ford inherited a presidency presiding over a much-troubled nation. The wounds of the [Vietnam War](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/) had not yet begun to heal, President Nixon's Watergate scandal had made a mockery of once-respected institutions, and the American standard of living was being steadily eroded by runaway inflation. Ford's task was made all the more difficult by a combative Congress elected in 1974. The Watergate Class, almost exclusively Democratic, fought Ford on nearly every matter. The president was reduced to governing by veto: sixty-six times he exercised his veto power. Only twelve were overridden. His Whip Inflation Now (WIN) crusade failed badly.

“You know, the President of the United States is not a magician who can wave a wand or sign a paper that will instantly end a war, cure a recession, or make a bureaucracy disappear.”

– Gerald R. Ford, 1976

Foreign Affairs

The debacle of Vietnam inspired Congress to severely curtail the powers of the president in matters of foreign policy. Within this context, Gerald Ford attempted to assert America's leadership role in the world. Congress thwarted his request to issue emergency funds for South Vietnam just before it fell to Communist forces. He was similarly denied when he sought aid for anti-Marxist guerrillas in Angola. Ford saw such limitations of his authority in international matters as "raising the possibility of a dangerous erosion of the president's ability to govern."

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Presidential Politics

Gerald Ford received some public goodwill in the initial days of his administration. Americans were weary from the scandal of Watergate, and, like the new president, were eager to put the "long national nightmare" behind them. Public affection vanished quickly, though, when Ford granted former President Nixon "a full, free and absolute pardon" for any crimes he may have committed. Testifying before a congressional committee, Ford asserted that Nixon had suffered enough and that the nation would be torn apart if he were to stand trial. Critics immediately charged that a deal had been made with the disgraced chief executive. Almost overnight, Ford was perceived differently by the press and the public. No longer was he an accessible alternative, but rather an inept puppet. So eroded was his support that he barely fought off a challenge by [Ronald Reagan](#)

<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-reagan/> for the 1976 Republican nomination.

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