

George H.W. Bush

41st President

Terms: 1989-1993

Political Party: Republican

First Lady: Barbara Pierce Bush

Vice President: J. Danforth Quayle

Highlights from the [George H.W. Bush](#)

<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/bush/> website include:

- step through Bush's decisions on taxes, the [Gulf War](#)
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/bush-gulf-war/>,
and Cold War diplomacy
- watch a video about the [1988 presidential campaign](#)
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/bush-election88/>,
and footage of Bush [skydiving](#)
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/bonus-video/bush-parachute/>
- meet the extended Bush family in a [photo gallery](#)
<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/bush/>
- access a [timeline](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/bush/>
tracking the rise of one of America's best-known political families

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Overview

Born: June 12, 1924 in Milton, Massachusetts... Prior to winning the presidency, George Bush served as a U.S. congressman, ambassador to the United Nations, chairman of the Republican National Committee, chief of the U.S. Liaison Office to China, director of the C.I.A, and vice president under [Ronald Reagan](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/reagan/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/reagan/>. Bush inherited some of the public goodwill felt for the Reagan administration -- and much of the growing skepticism. As the economy faltered and a recession set in, the supply-side economic policies of the 1980s were questioned and Bush was forced to break his promise of "no new taxes." Further damaging his chances for reelection was the impression that he was more concerned with world affairs than the problems vexing Main Street, USA.

The Era

- Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989)
- Valdez oil spill (1989)
- Anita Hill v. Clarence Thomas (1991)
- race riots in Los Angeles (1992)
- Environmental summit held in Rio (1992)
- Breakup of the Soviet Union (1991)

Domestic Policy

Many of the domestic initiatives launched by the Bush administration pitted the president against a Congress under Democratic control. As the economy soured and the federal deficit soared, Bush was forced to renege on his "no new taxes" pledge of 1988. This action resulted in his losing support of hard-core conservatives and paved the way for a challenge from within his party during the 1992 election. Bush did enjoy some successes on the domestic front, particularly in his appointing of two justices to the Supreme Court, something the far more popular Reagan had been unable to do. In the end, Bush's domestic agenda was judged, by

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many, to lack vision and purpose. Indeed, as early as 1990, Bush's chief-of-staff John Sununu declared, "...there's not a single piece of legislation that needs to be passed in the next two years." With the economy growing at a meager 1% annually, and unemployment steadily rising, the public wanted to see more assertive action from the White House.

Foreign Affairs

It was in the area of foreign affairs that George Bush was most comfortable and most effective. His career up to the time of his election as president had allowed him to cultivate relationships with heads of state the world over. As commander-in-chief, Bush orchestrated military operations in Panama, Somalia, and most notably in the Persian Gulf. Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm found Bush successfully marshaling an international coalition against Iraq. Elsewhere, it was on Bush's watch that the Soviet Union collapsed along with its satellite countries. In the aftermath, the Bush administration struggled to define what he had proclaimed to be a New World Order.

Presidential Politics

During the presidential elections of 1988 and 1992, George Bush sought to portray his opponents as being out of touch with the concerns of mainstream America. In 1988, sidebar issues such as flag-burning and the pledge of allegiance were used by the Bush camp to paint his Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis, as too liberal. In 1992, Bush, facing an uphill battle due to a failing economy, questioned [Bill Clinton's](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/clinton/> patriotism based on his actions during the [Vietnam War](#) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/>. As the Republican party split off into various factions representing increasingly polarized opinions, candidates fought vigorously to capture the vote of "middle America."

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