

*Martin Van Buren*  
8th President

*M. Van Buren*



Terms: 1837-1841

Political Party: Democrat

First Lady: Angelica Singleton Van-Buren (daughter-in-law)

Vice President: Richard M. Johnson

Overview

Born: December 5, 1782, in Kinderhook, New York... Martin Van Buren allied himself with President [Andrew Jackson](#), [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-jackson/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-jackson/) who in turn rewarded Van Buren with cabinet positions and the vice presidency. As president, however, Van Buren maintained Jacksonian policies that magnified an economic downturn, leading to the Panic of 1837. "Martin Van Ruin" was not re-elected... Died: April 4, 1841, in Washington, D.C.

The Era

- Queen Victoria becomes the British monarch (1837)
- Samuel Morse files for a patent for his [telegraph](#) [www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/lincolns-technology/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/lincolns-technology/), Charles Goodyear "vulcanizes" rubber, Antoine Joseph Sax creates a new musical instrument (1837, 1839, 1840)
- Opium War between Britain and China (1839-1842)

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**Domestic Policy**

At the end of his term, Jackson stipulated that all public lands must be bought with gold or silver. Soon after Van Buren took office, the nation was gripped in a financial panic as citizens rushed to exchange their state-issued paper money for hard currency. The state banks had depleted their own reserves, interest rates rose above 20 percent, and runaway inflation was devaluing all liquid assets. No President could have done much to halt or reverse the situation, but Van Buren's insistence on doing nothing -- along with his tendency to live high and dress well (he had come from a poor family) -- infuriated many Americans. Not until late in his term did his bill to establish an independent treasury become law.

*“Overlooking partial and temporary evils as inseparable from the practical operation of all human institutions, and looking only to the general result, every patriot has reason to be satisfied.”*

– Martin Van Buren, 1837

**Foreign Affairs**

As in all else, Van Buren's relations with Native American nations were not much more than an extension of the policies of his predecessor. Enforcing the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Van Buren's administration removed Cherokee and other native peoples from their homes to be relocated west of the Mississippi, an event known as the "Trail of Tears" that resulted in the death of one quarter of the Cherokee nation. To the north, proto-Canadian rebels agitated for independence from Great Britain, leading loyalist Canadian troops to seize the American ship that had been supplying arms to the rebels and setting it adrift over Niagara Falls. Although many called for a war against Britain, Van Buren exercised restraint.

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## Presidential Politics

In 1836, the [Whig Party](#)

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/lincolns-timeline/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/lincolns-timeline/) had just been established. The Whigs' strategy for taking the presidency was to offer three regional candidates, split the electoral college and leave the brokering of the presidency to the House of Representatives as it had in 1824. Against this mixed assemblage, Van Buren had Andrew Jackson's firm support and won just over 50 percent of the national popular vote and a majority of electoral votes. In his bid for reelection in 1840, Van Buren's reputation had been tarnished over economic issues and he faced what cynics might deem the first modern presidential campaign, complete with pennants, sewing kits and other gifts decorated with his opponent [William Harrison's](#)

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-wharrison/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-wharrison/) slogan ("Tippecanoe and Tyler Too"), scandalous assertions about his vice president's sexual tastes, and possibly large-scale voter fraud. In his third presidential bid, in 1844, Van Buren's position on Texas threw the nomination to [James Polk](#)

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-polk/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-polk/). Van Buren ran for a fourth time in 1848 as a Free Soil candidate and finished third.

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