


WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Becoming President

In 1963, a high school student named Bill Clinton from Hope, Arkansas, went to the White House as part of a youth leadership conference. He was first in line to shake President Kennedy's hand. Thirty years later, Clinton was sworn in as President of the United States.

“Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundation of our nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time. Well, my fellow citizens, this is our time. . . . And so today, we pledge an end to the era of deadlock and drift—a new season of American renewal has begun.”

—Bill Clinton, First Inaugural Address, 1993

- ▲ Sixteen-year-old Bill Clinton meets President Kennedy on July 26, 1963. A campaign button proclaims his own presidential bid nearly 30 years later.

The Clinton Presidency

Objectives

- Explain why Bill Clinton won the presidency in 1992.
- Assess the success of Clinton's domestic policies.
- Describe the Contract With America and its impact.
- Analyze the Clinton impeachment.

Terms and People

William Jefferson Clinton	Newt Gingrich
H. Ross Perot	Contract With America
Family Medical Leave Act	Kenneth Starr
Brady Bill	impeachment

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Summarize Create an outline like the one below as you read to summarize information about the Clinton presidency.

- I. The 1992 Election

 - A. Bush's popularity plummets
 - B. Clinton runs as "New Democrat"
 - C. Clinton carries the election

II. Clinton's Domestic Policies

 - A.

Why It Matters The conservative revolution of the 1980s had kept Republicans in the White House for 12 straight years and influenced every branch of government. The election of Bill Clinton to the presidency in 1992 signaled that Americans were ready for a change. Clinton's position as a moderate, practical Democrat had broad appeal for a wide range of voters. **Section Focus Question:** What were the successes and failures of the Clinton presidency?

The 1992 Election

After the 1991 Persian Gulf War ended, President George H.W. Bush's approval rating reached 91 percent. In less than one year, however, public opinion had changed. Saddam Hussein had stayed in power, continuing to threaten peace in the Middle East. The American economy had gone into recession and the federal deficit had risen. People were angered by Bush's betrayal of his 1988 campaign pledge not to raise taxes. Bush's sinking popularity opened up the way for the Democratic challenge.

Clinton Raises the Challenge The Democrats nominated **William Jefferson Clinton**, governor of Arkansas, as their presidential candidate. Clinton was born in 1946 into a humble home and had worked his way through college and law school before being elected governor of Arkansas in 1978. To widen his appeal and distance himself from traditional "tax and spend" liberals, Clinton promoted himself as a "New Democrat." New Democrats were centrists who sought to



Celebrating Victory

Newly elected President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, and their families greet supporters in Arkansas on November 3, 1992.

reconcile liberal and conservative ideals. They believed in strong national defense, tough stands on crime, free trade, welfare reform, and closer ties with corporations. They believed that government was necessary and important but that it had grown large and inefficient. Clinton's centrist position attracted conservative and liberal Democrats as well as moderate Republicans.

Winning the White House By 1992, Clinton was poised to capitalize on Bush's political problems. He entered the presidential race along with Texas billionaire **H. Ross Perot**, who led a self-funded independent party and promised to govern by sound business principles. Clinton's campaign focused on economic and social opportunity. Clinton charged that Bush's economic policies had made the rich richer. He also pointed out that, unlike Bush, he came from a family that had struggled through hard times and knew what it was like to worry about paying bills. Bush responded by attacking Clinton's character. Republicans accused the governor of draft-dodging, marital infidelity, and other moral laxities. Bush also suggested that Clinton and his vice presidential candidate Al Gore were too inexperienced to lead the nation.

In the end, Clinton's message carried the election. In the largest voter turnout since 1960, more than one hundred million Americans turned out at the polls. Clinton received 43 percent of the popular vote to Bush's 37 percent and Perot's 19 percent. Democrats also retained control of the House of Representatives and the Senate.



Checkpoint How did Clinton use his stance as a moderate to attract voters?

Clinton's Domestic Policies

When Bill Clinton took the presidential oath of office on January 20, 1993, he faced a great challenge. Since 1968, Americans had chosen Republican Presidents in five out of six elections. The Republican argument that government was the problem, not the solution, resonated with many Americans. Clinton therefore needed to chart a middle course between the limited role for government advocated by Republicans and the traditional Democratic reliance on government programs to address social problems.

Signing New Laws Early in his presidency, Clinton signed the **Family Medical Leave Act**, which had been vetoed by President Bush despite having bipartisan support. The act guaranteed most full-time employees 12 workweeks of unpaid leave each year for the birth and care of a newborn child, to recover

from a serious illness, or to care for an immediate family member with one. The Clinton administration also raised the minimum wage, increased access to college loans, and expanded tax credits for higher education.

Healthcare Reform Fails Healthcare reform headed Clinton's list of priorities. The United States was the only developed country without national healthcare. Though Clinton did not advocate socialized medicine, he wanted a program that would guarantee care for all Americans. His wife, Hillary Clinton, was appointed to head a healthcare task force to investigate the issue. The task force conducted highly publicized hearings and produced a long, detailed proposal that attracted immediate criticism from diverse interest groups. The bill never won congressional support and was ultimately dropped after about a year of debate.

Clinton had miscalculated Americans' faith in the federal government to solve the country's social problems. Millions of Americans simply did not feel that enlarging the federal bureaucracy and allowing the government to run healthcare was a good idea.

Dealing With Violence Clinton also tried to address the issue of violence in American society. In 1993, he signed the **Brady Bill**, a gun-control act named for presidential aide James Brady, who had been wounded in the 1981 assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan. Under Clinton, Congress also passed a \$30 billion anticrime bill that increased funding for police and banned several kinds of assault weapons.

Still, violence continued to haunt the nation. In 1995, Americans were horrified by the bombing of a government building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people and injured more than 800 others. The mass murder was committed, not by foreign terrorists, but by home-grown anti-government extremists. To deal with the threat of terrorism, federal buildings in major cities were surrounded with barriers to ward off similar attacks. New laws were passed to deter terrorism and impose stiffer penalties.

In 1999, yet another act of senseless violence stirred nationwide debate. At Colorado's Columbine High School, two heavily armed students killed 12 fellow students and a teacher, as well as wounding 24 others. In the aftermath of this tragedy, schools across the nation installed metal detectors and other security measures. Many schools instituted new anti-bully policies and "zero tolerance" approaches to school violence.

✓ **Checkpoint** What were Clinton's legislative successes and failures?

The Republicans Galvanize

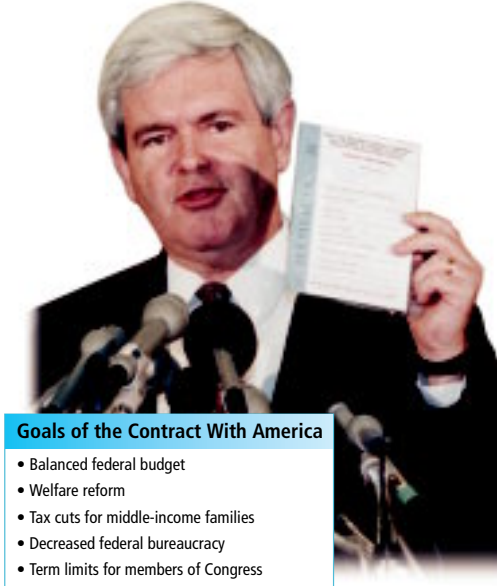
After two years in office, Clinton had achieved a few lasting legislative victories. Yet the failure of his healthcare initiative signaled that his popularity, and his control of Congress, was waning. With the 1994 mid-term elections approaching, congressional Republicans seized the opportunity to advance their own ideas.

Vocabulary Builder
ultimately – (UHL tuh miht lee)
adv. in the end; finally

Oklahoma City Bombing

The Oklahoma City bombing of April 1995 was the worst act of domestic terrorism in American history. The victims included a number of children in a day care center.





Goals of the Contract With America

- Balanced federal budget
- Welfare reform
- Tax cuts for middle-income families
- Decreased federal bureaucracy
- Term limits for members of Congress

The “Gingrich Revolution”

Gingrich explains his Contract with America at a press conference in January 1994. *How did his goals attract voters who were opposed to “big government”?*

Gingrich’s Contract With America Georgia congressman **Newt Gingrich** led the opposition to Clinton. Gingrich was bold and aggressive and not interested in compromising with the Democrats: “We will cooperate, but we won’t compromise.” Many people thought that Gingrich’s goal of the Republicans gaining control of the House of Representatives in 1994 was a nearly impossible task. After all, the Democrats had controlled the House for 58 of the previous 62 years.

Gingrich, however, galvanized Republicans around his **Contract With America**, a plan that attacked big government and emphasized patriotism and traditional values. The Contract With America called for congressional term limits, reduction of the federal bureaucracy, a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution, and large tax cuts, as well as increased defense spending, significant welfare reform, and tough anticrime legislation. The idea was to capture the votes of Americans who felt the federal government was too big, too wasteful, and too liberal.

Capturing the 1994 Elections Although most eligible voters did not vote in 1994, there was a strong turnout among Republicans. For the first time in 40 years, the Republicans won control of the House. They also captured the Senate and most of the governorships. *Newsweek* magazine observed:

Primary Source

“Last week in one of the most profound electoral routs in American history, Republicans won the right to occupy the Capitol and mount what their . . . commanders think of as a counter-revolution: a full-scale attack on the notion that a central government should play a central role in the life of the nation.”

Once in office, Republicans passed most of Gingrich’s program, but their attempts to slash Medicare and other government programs proved unpopular. Many Americans were also upset when the government shut down in 1995 because Congress would not pass Clinton’s budget. Meanwhile, Clinton incorporated some of the conservative agenda into his own 1996 reelection bid. He signed a bill to reform welfare, passed legislation that appropriated more money for law enforcement, and called for stiffer sentencing for criminals. Finally, he made balancing the budget and reducing the federal deficit a priority.

Clinton Wins Reelection Beginning in the mid-1990s, the American economy broke out of recession and began to soar, starting the longest period of sustained growth in the country’s history. Americans benefited from low unemployment, low inflation levels, and the government’s efforts to balance the budget and reduce the deficit. In 1994, Clinton’s disapproval rating had exceeded 60 percent, and few expected him to win a second term. As the 1996 election approached, however, the booming economy meant that few Americans had a compelling reason to change leadership.

The Republicans nominated Senate Majority Leader Robert Dole, a World War II hero and a moderate Republican. H. Ross Perot entered the race as the Reform Party candidate. Clinton skillfully captured the middle ground, labeling Dole as an out-of-touch conservative and Perot as a political quack. On election day, Americans chose Clinton by a wide margin. The House of Representatives and Senate, however, retained their Republican majorities.



Checkpoint How did the Republicans take control of Congress?

Scandals, Impeachment, and Trial

President Clinton had dodged scandals from his first days in office. One, a sexual harassment suit, had stemmed from his years as governor of Arkansas. Another concerned investments that Bill and Hillary Clinton had made in the Whitewater Development Corporation, an Arkansas real estate company, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Prosecuting Clinton A special prosecutor appointed by Attorney General Janet Reno investigated the Whitewater investment case and recommended that no criminal charges be filed. However, in July Congress passed a new law requiring that special prosecutors be selected by a three-judge panel from the U.S. Court of Appeals. As a result, in August of 1994 special prosecutor **Kenneth Starr** was appointed to investigate the case again. In seven years of investigation Starr failed to uncover any conclusive evidence of the Clintons' guilt, though some of their associates were convicted.

In the process of prosecuting Whitewater, Starr began investigating Clinton's relationship with a White House intern. Clinton had denied under oath that the two had an affair. Eventually, Clinton admitted that he had lied. The Whitewater case was quickly overshadowed by the new scandal. In 1998, Starr recommended **impeachment** proceedings on a number of counts, all related to the intern scandal rather than to Whitewater.

Impeaching the President Most Americans condemned Clinton's actions but opposed impeachment. Congressional Democrats, similarly, did not believe his behavior met the standard of "Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors" required by the Constitution for the impeachment and removal of a President. Nevertheless, the House of Representatives, led by the Republican majority, impeached Clinton on the charges of perjury and obstruction of justice.

In January 1999, the Senate tried the President. The removal of a President requires a two-thirds majority of senators, and from the beginning it was clear that Clinton's opposition did not have the necessary votes. After a short trial, the President was acquitted on both counts on February 12.

 **Checkpoint** What was the outcome of the Clinton impeachment?

SECTION

2 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-2021

Comprehension

1. Terms and People For each item below, write a sentence explaining how it relates to Clinton's presidency.

- H. Ross Perot
- Family Medical Leave Act
- Brady Bill
- Newt Gingrich
- Contract With America
- Kenneth Starr
- impeachment

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Summarize Use your completed outline to answer the Section Focus Question: What were the successes and failures of the Clinton presidency?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Form a Main Idea

This section touches on the American issue of social problems and reforms. Compare the scandals surrounding Clinton to historical scandals you have read about. Write down a main idea that you will present in your response.

Critical Thinking

4. Identify Central Issues How did Clinton position himself ideologically in order to win over both Democrats and Republicans in the 1992 election?

5. Recognize Ideologies On what domestic issues did Democrats and Republicans differ during Clinton's presidency?

6. Synthesize Information Why did Clinton win reelection?

7. Summarize Summarize the events surrounding Clinton's impeachment.