

American History: Bill Clinton's Second Term



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A poster advertises a book about President Clinton at a Beijing bookstore in May 1998, shortly before he visited China. The poster declares his troubles as the "number one sex scandal in the world."

STEVE EMBER: Welcome to THE MAKING OF A NATION – American history in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember.

This week in our series, we look back at Bill Clinton's second term as president.

BILL CLINTON: "For four years now, to realize our vision, we have pursued a simple but profound strategy – opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a strong united American community."

Americans elected Clinton as their forty-second president in nineteen-ninety-two and re-elected him four years later.

(MUSIC)

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President Clinton speaks to the United Nations General Assembly on September 22, 1997



In the summer of nineteen ninety-six, President Clinton's first term was coming to an end. He had established a mixed record of successes and failures in his dealings with Congress. He had greater difficulty in those dealings after opposition Republicans won control of Congress in nineteen ninety-four.

All presidents face political battles. But in President Clinton's case there was more to it. He and his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, were being investigated over their personal financial dealings in Arkansas during the nineteen eighties. There were also accusations of womanizing from his years as governor of that state.

But in the summer of ninety-six President Clinton's public approval ratings stayed above fifty percent and went as high as sixty percent.

The economy had improved during his first term. Americans were getting jobs and spending more money. More people, and not just the wealthy, were investing in the stock market.

In August of nineteen ninety-six the Democratic Party met in Chicago and nominated President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore for a second term.

BILL CLINTON: "My fellow Democrats and my fellow Americans, thank you for your nomination. I don't know if I can find a fancy way to say this, but I accept."

(MUSIC)

The Republican Party held its nominating convention that summer in San Diego, California. The party chose former Kansas senator Bob Dole as its presidential candidate. He had resigned from the United States Senate to seek the nomination. He chose former congressman and cabinet secretary Jack Kemp of New York as his vice presidential running mate.

Dole was a World War Two hero who suffered a permanent injury to his right arm. He later served four terms in the House of Representatives. He was elected to the Senate in nineteen sixty-eight and re-elected four times.

Another candidate in the presidential race was businessman Ross Perot. He won the nomination of the Reform Party which he started a year earlier. He had also run for president in nineteen ninety-two, and received nineteen percent of the popular vote.

During the ninety-six campaign, President Clinton pointed to the stronger economy. He also campaigned on his legislative record, including new gun-control measures and a higher minimum wage for the lowest paid workers.

Bob Dole, in his campaign, accused President Clinton of spending too much. Clinton's answer was that he had stopped Congress from cutting too much from programs like health insurance for retirees.

Bill Clinton and Al Gore easily won the election, defeating Bob Dole and Jack Kemp. Ross Perot received just eight percent of the popular vote this time.

Clinton became the first Democrat to win a second term since Franklin Roosevelt in nineteen thirty-six.

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William Jefferson Clinton began his second term as president of the United States on January twentieth, nineteen ninety-seven. His inaugural speech would be the last by an American president in the twentieth century.

BILL CLINTON: "Let us lift our eyes toward the challenges that await us in the next century. It is our great good fortune that time and chance have put us not only at the edge of a new century, in a new millennium, but on the edge of a bright new prospect in human affairs, a moment that will define our course, and our character, for decades to come. We must keep our old democracy forever young."

Clinton discussed some of the issues that the country continued to face, including racial divisions.

BILL CLINTON: "The divide of race has been America's constant curse. And each new wave of immigrants gives new targets to old prejudices. Prejudice and contempt, cloaked in the pretense of religious or political conviction are no different."

(MUSIC)

During his first term, President Clinton appointed a large number of women and minorities to the government. As he began his second term, he chose the first

woman to serve as secretary of state. Madeleine Albright had represented the United States in the United Nations during Clinton's first term.

And he appointed the first Asian-American to serve in the cabinet. Norman Mineta became secretary of commerce.

(MUSIC)

The Republican Party kept control of both houses of Congress in the ninety-nine elections.

At the end of his first term Clinton had gotten into a budget fight with the Republicans which resulted in two government shutdowns. Those shutdowns did more political harm to the Republicans than to the president.

In nineteen ninety-seven they reached a compromise. They agreed to a plan to end the federal deficit by two thousand two.

In fact, the budget was balanced much sooner. In nineteen ninety-eight, the economy was so strong that the government found itself with an extra seventy billion dollars -- the first surplus since nineteen sixty-nine.

(MUSIC)

President Clinton visited China in nineteen ninety-eight. He spoke of his belief that in the twenty-first century, democracy "will be the right course practically as well as morally, yielding more stability and more progress."

A month later, in August of nineteen ninety-eight, al-Qaida terrorists bombed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The attacks killed more than two hundred people. President Clinton ordered missile strikes against al-Qaida targets in Sudan -- and in Afghanistan, in an effort to kill the group's leader, Osama bin Laden.

Later in the year, President Clinton ordered military action in response to Iraq's refusal to cooperate with United Nations inspectors. The inspectors were searching for nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Clinton ordered missile strikes against targets that U.N. officials said could have been linked to such weapons of mass destruction.

BILL CLINTON: "Their mission is to attack Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons programs, and its military capacity to threaten its neighbors. Their purpose is to protect the national interests of the United States, and indeed the interests of people throughout the middle east and around the world.

"Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to threaten his neighbors, or the world, with nuclear arms, poison gas, or biological weapons."

(MUSIC)

In nineteen ninety-nine, Clinton deployed American aircraft and missiles as part of a NATO campaign in Yugoslavia. NATO was trying to stop attacks against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Yugoslav military leaders agreed to withdraw their troops. NATO stopped the bombing and sent an international peacekeeping force to Kosovo. The United States provided seven thousand troops for that force.

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Earlier in Clinton's presidency, the United States had led NATO airstrikes against Serb targets in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia. The operations followed the killing of eight thousand Muslim men and boys by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica, a U.N.-declared "safe area." Clinton later pushed for the nineteen ninety-five peace agreement to end the Bosnian war. The Dayton peace accords were named after Dayton, Ohio, the location of the Air Force base where they were negotiated.

Three years later, in nineteen ninety-eight, Israeli and Palestinian leaders signed a memorandum of understanding at the White House. It called for Israeli forces to withdraw from some areas of the West Bank. The Wye Memorandum resulted from nine days of negotiations at the Wye River Plantation in Maryland.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and special diplomat Dennis Ross traveled repeatedly to the Middle East to work on the peace efforts.

In two thousand one, President Clinton tried to get Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to sign a peace agreement. Clinton invited the two leaders to the United States and held many hours of talks with them. Reports said they came close to an agreement, but the negotiations ended without success.

Palestinians declared a new uprising against Israel.

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On trade issues, President Clinton at the end of his second term got Congress to approve permanent normal trade relations with China. That meant no more need for presidents to have to ask Congress for temporary renewals of those trade rights. Clinton argued that the move would create a better environment for democratic reforms in China, as well as creating jobs in the United States.

Among other foreign policy matters during his presidency, Clinton normalized relations with Vietnam. And he supported the expansion of NATO -- the North Atlantic Treaty Organization -- in Europe.

Bill Clinton's presidency will be remembered at least in part for his efforts to reach out to the international community. But it will also be remembered for the impeachment trial in Congress that almost ended that presidency.

BILL CLINTON: "These allegations are false, and I need to go back to work for the American people.

That will be our story next week.

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You can find our series online with transcripts, MP3s, podcasts and pictures at voaspecialenglish.com. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter at VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember, inviting you to join us again next week for THE MAKING OF A NATION -- American history in VOA Special English.

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