

Presidents, Politics, and Powers

Sources

Every four years American citizens have the right to elect a new president, the most powerful person in the federal government. This exhibit, drawn from the library's extensive federal depository collection, documents the presidency throughout our history. It covers the election of George Washington and George W. Bush, the expansion of the voting population and presidential powers, plus the record of assassinations and impeachments. A selection from the papers of the presidents documents the enormity of many of their decisions and their efforts to rally the country.

Top Shelf, Case One

Voting for President

Presidential Elections

1. Election of George Washington for President and John Adams for Vice-President, *Annals of Congress*, April 6, 1789. 2. *Bush v. Gore*, Supreme Court's 2000 decision which resulted in the election of George W. Bush as the 43rd president, 531 U.S. 98 (2000). 3. *A Voter's Guide to Election Day* (2008) from the U.S. Election Assistance Committee, a bi-partisan committee created by Congress in the Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Expansion of the Vote

4. *Constitutional Amendment to Reduce Voting Age to Eighteen*, a 1943 hearing to reduce the voting age from 21. Similar hearings were held during the Vietnam War and the voting age was eventually reduced by the 26th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified July 1, 1971. 5. The 15th Amendment to the Constitution prohibited denying the vote because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Despite the amendment, black voting rights were frequently restricted, particularly in the South. "Black Voting and the Selma March" from the Smithsonian's *We the People*, documents the 1965 voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. 6. *The Voting Rights Act of 1965* from the U.S. Civil Rights Commission contains the text of the law (P.L. 89-110) and an explanation of the new tools to assure the right to vote.

Backdrop photo: Women Suffragettes marching on Pennsylvania Avenue in March 1913. (Library of Congress) Women's right to vote was eventually guaranteed by the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, ratified August 18, 1920.

Optional item

Presidential Campaign 1976 is a three volume set which documents the campaign speeches and debates between Jimmy Carter, former Governor of Georgia and President Gerald R. Ford. A similar set exists for the 1960 election between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.

Middle Shelf, Case One

Presidential Succession

Three American presidents have been assassinated, 2 have died in office and 1 has resigned. Presidents have also been the targets of assassination or become ill while in office. All have led to debates on presidential succession. This display includes:

1. Warren Commission Exhibits 363 & 364 showing the clothes worn by President John F. Kennedy when he was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963.
2. *Lincoln Museum and the House Where Lincoln Died*, a 1953 National Parks Service guide to Ford's Theater, where President Abraham Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865, and the Peterson House where he died the next day.
3. *Presidential Inability*, 1958 congressional hearings held during the Eisenhower administration. President Eisenhower suffered a near-fatal heart attack in September 1955 and was hospitalized for seven weeks.
4. *Assassination and Political Violence*, a report from the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence documents the numerous attacks made on public officials. The Commission was formed in 1968 as a response to the assassinations of President Kennedy, his brother Sen. Robert Kennedy, and Rev. Martin Luther King.
5. Presidents who are unable to serve out their terms are normally succeeded by their Vice Presidents but that office could also be vacant. *Application of the Twenty-fifth Amendment to Vacancies in the Office of Vice President* documents the legal history of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution which instructs the President to nominate a Vice President who would take office upon confirmation by both Houses of Congress. The 25th amendment was ratified February 10, 1967.
6. Letter from Gerald Ford, Minority Leader of the House of Representatives to President Richard Nixon, Oct 11, 1973. A beleaguered President Richard Nixon, faced with applying the 25th Amendment to the Constitution for the first time after the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew, requested advice on possible vice presidential nominees. In his response Rep. Ford lists several possible nominees. In the end Nixon nominated Ford himself who was confirmed on Nov. 27, 1973.

Backdrop photo: President Lyndon B. Johnson takes the Oath of Office aboard Air Force One after the assassination of President Kennedy, Nov. 22, 1963. (John F. Kennedy Library)

Bottom Shelf, Case One

Impeachment

The Constitution (Article I, Section 2) provides that presidents may be impeached for "Treason, Bribery or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors." Impeachment charges are brought by the House of Representatives and, if passed, the impeachment trial is held in the Senate with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court presiding. Two presidents, Andrew Johnson and

William Clinton, have been impeached but not convicted. President Richard Nixon resigned while Articles of Impeachment were being considered.

1. Impeachment of the President ((H. Rept. 40-7) contains the impeachment proceedings against President Andrew Johnson. Johnson was impeached by the House of Representatives on February 24, 1868 but the Senate failed to convict him by a single vote.
2. Submission of Recorded Presidential Conversations. During the congressional hearings on the 1972 Watergate burglary, it was revealed that the White House had a taping system. President Nixon claimed that the tapes were covered by executive privilege but eventually released 1,254 pages of edited transcripts in April 1974. The transcripts revealed the President using expletives and discussing "hush money" for the burglars in the White House.
3. Referral from Independent Counsel Kenneth Star (H. Doc 105-310), often called the "Starr Report, " recommended that President Clinton be impeached for obstructing justice in the investigation of his relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The report contained numerous details of sexual encounters.
4. Debate on Articles of Impeachment (1974) and Impeachment of President William Jefferson Clinton (1999) are samples of hundreds of volumes of hearings, debate and reports dealing with the impeachment of Presidents Nixon and Clinton. Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives but not convicted in the Senate; Nixon resigned before the House voted on the impeachment articles.

Backdrop: Copy of President Richard Nixon's letter of resignation, August 9, 1974. (National Archives)

Top Shelf, Case Two

Presidential Powers

The president has numerous powers as head of the executive branch of government and as commander-in-chief. Article II of the Constitution also specifies the power of the president to make appointments and nominations to office, including the Supreme Court, and the power to grant pardons and reprieves. Presidents often expand their powers in times of crisis.

1. President Roosevelt's Emergency Conservation Work Program (1933) and Our Job with the WPA (1936) are examples of Roosevelt's efforts to create jobs during the Great Depression.
2. Authorizing Wire Tapping in the Prosecution of the War, hearing document a 1942 effort of the F.B.I. and other agencies to expand intelligence gathering during WWII.
3. Tools against Terror: How the Administration is Implementing New Laws in the Fight to Protect our Homeland are hearings on the intelligence gathering capability of the government after 9/11.
4. Report from the Field: the USA Patriot Act at Work, an update from the Justice Department on a controversial intelligence gathering law passed after 9/11.

5. United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions, also known as the "Plum Book," is issued every four years after a presidential election and lists government positions that are subject to noncompetitive appointment.
6. Presidential Pardon Power, hearing to explore pardons made by President Clinton at the end of his term.
7. Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq Resolution of 2002, House report on the legislation giving the president the right to declare war against Iraq.

Backdrop: Statement by President Harry S. Truman announcing that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, August 6, 1945. (Harry S. Truman Library)

Middle Shelf, Case Two

Papers of the Presidents

Presidential papers are the property of the United States government and reveal much about presidential personalities as well as policies. The papers of the early presidents are largely found in the Library of Congress and the papers of presidents from Herbert Hoover on are kept in individual presidential libraries, built by private funds but run by the National Archives and Records Administration.

1. Index to the Abraham Lincoln Papers held at the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress holds the papers of 23 early presidents.
2. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, a guide to the Hoover Presidential Library and museum at West Branch, Iowa.
3. President Kennedy's speech card from his remarks in Berlin. Contains the famous quote "Ish bin ein Bear lee ner" ("I am a Berliner") written phonetically.
4. Copy of draft text of President Reagan's January 28, 1986 speech on the death of the space shuttle Challenger crew.
5. Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents contains a transcript of all of a president's public remarks as well as copies of executive orders and proclamations. Later the content is republished in annual volumes called the Public Papers of the Presidents.

Backdrop: President Washington's first inaugural address written in his own hand. (National Archives)

Optional Item: Our Mission and Our Moment: Speeches since the Attacks of September 11, a special commemorative publication containing President Bush's remarks in the weeks after 9/11.

Bottom Shelf, Case Two

The Presidents' Homes

The White House is a president's home and office. Construction of the mansion began in 1792 and John Adams was the first president to occupy it. The White House has been burned,

renovated, and redecorated throughout the years. It remains today one of the most well known buildings in the country. Other homes occupied by presidents are often made historic sites, open to the public, and overseen by the National Park Service.

1. The Living White House, the official guide from the White House Historical Association.
2. The North Portico during the 1949-1952 renovation of the White House from Report of the Commission on the Renovation of the Executive Mansion.
3. National Parks Service visitor guides to other presidential homes.
4. Jimmy Carter National Historic Site and Preservation District General Management Plan, a detailed discussion of the areas of Plains connected to the former President.
5. The First Ladies (White House Historical Association) contains official portraits or photos of the First ladies and short biographies.

Backdrop: Original Design of the White House in 1800. (Library of Congress)