

## A Man of the People: Thomas Jefferson

Alex Criddle

Though America is still viewed as a young nation, great men have risen to help shape the country into what it is today. One of those men, Thomas the nation both politically and physically. Thomas Jefferson, also known as the “Man of the People,” was born April 13, 1743 in Shadwell, Virginia. His parents were both distinguished members of their communities. His father was a planter and a

surveyor; and his mother came from a highly respected family. Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton on January 1, 1772 and had six children, but only two lived to adulthood.

He attended the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, after which he practiced law and became involved in local government. After a long life of governmental success, Jefferson died on the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Once the United States of America was officially its own nation, political parties began to form throughout the thirteen colonies. Jefferson helped shape the Democratic-Republican Party in 1793—known at



the time as the Republican Party—after disagreements among cabinet members ensued. This party believed that a strong government would undermine the rights of the states and the rights of the people. Jefferson believed in strong state and local governments, and as a founder of the party, attempted to incorporate government by the people throughout his presidency.

Although the Declaration of Independence was written before he was president, it is one of Jefferson’s most famous legacies. Before his death, he told James Madison, one of his closest friends, that he wanted to be remembered for two things: the author of the Declaration of Independence and the founder of the University of Virginia.

Jefferson ran in the 1800 election with fellow Republican, Aaron Burr. They were pitted against the Federalists John Adams and Charles Pinkney.

The Republicans won, but Jefferson and Burr had the same number of electoral votes—73. At the time, whoever received the second highest number of votes would become vice president. Because there was a tie, the House of Representatives had to vote. In February 1801, Jefferson was elected to be President of the United States by only one vote. In the following election in 1804, Jefferson ran for another term against Charles Pinkney, and this time, won decisively.

During his first presidency, Jefferson attained the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803. Because France was in the midst of preparing for war with England, Bonaparte was desperate to receive money. The 512 million acre purchase cost \$15 million, about three cents per acre. Jefferson expanded American territory in one action and soon after, the concept of Manifest Destiny was born. Once the purchase was made, Jefferson sent his secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark to explore the new that led to the Pacific Ocean, as well as to trade with Native Americans, and to record the terrain and animals that they discovered along the way. Lewis and Clark made several maps of the territory they surveyed and wrote about their travels, which were then published for the public to consume. After the explorers returned, many people began to head west to settle in the newly acquired territory. They believed they had been given the duty to move across the continent by God and that they needed to enlighten others about their democracy.

Because of the flaws of the electoral system, Jefferson set out to ratify the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment. It was ratified during his first term as president in June 1804. The 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment created a new electoral system in which the president and vice president are voted for separately which is still done today.

During his second term as president, Jefferson faced foreign were at war and both wanted to trade with America. The Embargo Acts were passed in order to keep America out of the war. In the end, Americans became

angry with the Embargo Acts because they could not trade in order to make a living. Farmers and merchants began to smuggle their goods to other countries through Canada and the Acts were eventually repealed.

Thomas Jefferson expanded the United States to twice its size with the Louisiana Purchase. He ensured that the electing process was smoother and fairer. He created the lasting legacy of the Declaration of Independence. He helped form a rising country that is still admired today. A founding father, Jefferson remains part of the American legacy.





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# Ronald Reagan

## Savannah Winn

Ronald Reagan did many things in his life. He was a Hollywood actor, family man, soldier during World War II, and governor (American President: Ronald Wilson Reagan: Life Before the Presidency). He also served as the 39<sup>th</sup> President of the United States from 1981-1989. During this time he accomplished many key goals and achievements that were influential in shaping the future of the country. In this article we will look at four of his biggest accomplishments while serving as president.

The Cold War—During the Reagan Presidency, the Cold War was raging. Tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union were constantly threatening the peace and stability of each country, and the world as a whole. President Reagan realized the threat that the US faced and sought to confront it. He fought the expansion of the Soviet Empire (Lettow, 2006). He opened dialogue with Soviet leaders like Michael Gorbachev (Lettow, 2006). Both Reagan and Gorbachev were able to work together on issues such as nuclear weapons reductions. In fact, during Reagan's presidency, both the US and the Soviet Union were able to cut the number of nuclear weapons they had (Lettow, 2006). He



encouraged peace and democracy in countries all over the world and provided support to rebels who fought against the spread of communism (Lettow, 2006). These actions played a critical role in the downfall of the Soviet Union. Ultimately the Cold War ended and

President

Reagan was a key part in that process. Economic Growth—When President Reagan took office, the country was

suffering

economically. Due to the policies of his predecessor, the economy went through a horrible recession from 1981-1982 (Ferrara, 2011). An energy crisis affected the economy drastically. Inflation was rampant and income had dropped dramatically for American families (Ferrara, 2011).

Unemployment was over 10% and the poverty rate was climbing (Ferrara, 2011). President Reagan went to work to fix this problem. He rolled back regulations, pursued anti-inflation measures, and cut the budget (Ferrara, 2011). President Reagan also cut taxes and reformed the tax code (Top 10 Reagan Achievements, 2011). His actions led to a period of growth that some say lasted for the next 20 years (Ferrara, 2011). President Reagan believed that America's best days were still ahead. The best way to get to them was by improving the

economic situation through pro-growth policies.

**Bipartisanship**—President Reagan knew that in order to be an effective president who could get things accomplished, he would need a broad coalition of support. He sought out help and support for policies that democrats and republicans alike could champion. He worked closely with elected democratic leaders like Speaker of the House Tip O’Neil to pass legislation on a broad range of issues. Some of the key legislation passed affected economic policy, that tax code, immigration policy, and Cold War policy. By doing this, President Reagan showed the American people that their government and its elected leaders could come together to work for the greater good. This helped restore the American peoples support in their government.

**Energizing the Republican Party**—President Reagan played a key role in shaping the Republican Party and its future. During the 1970’s the country had become disillusioned with the Republican Party. This had largely to do with Watergate and the corruption and scandal many associated with the party. Ronald Reagan helped to reinvigorate the party. He built a broad base of support that included evangelicals, conservatives, moderate democrats and disenchanted republicans (Top 10 Reagan Achievements). They carried him to victory in both elections, with President Reagan winning a landslide 49 states in the 1984 election (American President: Ronald Wilson Reagan: Campaigns and Elections). By building this broad base of support, he increased excitement and support of the party. This excitement carried

over in to the election of President George H.W. Bush, his vice president (American President: Ronald Wilson Reagan: Campaigns and Elections). It also played a role in the republicans taking over control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years in 1994. To this day, many republicans point to Ronald Reagan as the one who rescued the Republican Party from despair. They hold him up as a beacon of light for the Republican Party and conservatism.

President Reagan was an important and influential president. These are just some of his accomplishments that he was able bring about during his presidency. Many of these accomplishments still have an impact on our politics today, and his legacy will continue to grow as we look back on him.



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