

Presidents Who Changed America  
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Whatever the Founding Fathers envisioned as the United States that they were creating, they seemed to know that over time, changes would be made. Most of them, for example, were slave owners, a system they inherited, but privately knew was an embarrassment in a society that promoted equal rights, justice for all.

Despite the efforts of "originalists" in our Supreme Court to roll back many of the changes approved by Supreme Court majorities over the centuries, the fact that the Constitution has amendments says that original concepts can be changed. The founders never imagined women voting, nor slavery universally emancipated and given voting rights, yet these things happened.

Our next president has not yet been inaugurated, but soon will be, and considering the desperate straits of the country, he may well be added to the list of presidents who changed America, provided below.

George Washington

Our first president took very seriously his duty to establish the behaviors and norms that would become world famous in ages to come. He established a limited term of office (8 years), a peaceful transfer of power to the next elected president, and values established by the European Enlightenment that this new country would be characterized by liberty of conscience, tolerance, a free press, and an enlightened foreign policy in dealing with the world.

Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson set in motion the enlargement of the original 13 colonies with a vision that this country would ultimately occupy the entire continent. He organized the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the size of the country by taking advantage of France's need for money at that time.

He also established the value of science when he funded the Lewis-Clark expedition to explore the lands west of the Louisiana Purchase lands, and to include data on the peoples, plants, and animals in those lands. He established a norm also that he rated reason and science above traditional religion when he revised his family bible to eliminate all the superstitious materials and save the moral teachings and historic accounts.

Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson was an example of malevolent changes to the country in the hands of this particular president. He enlarged voting suffrage to include all adult White men, not just educated property owners. This seemingly democratic change gave rise to decades of elections in which ignorant voters were paid or rewarded by liquor. He also pursued a policy of racial genocide against the Native Americans, refusing to obey a Supreme Court order to desist.

He set forth cycles of boom and bust when he destroyed Alexander Hamilton's system of a National Bank, that could have regulated such volatility.

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln's greatest contribution was saving the country from splitting in two over the issue of slavery. He addressed the country's founding sin, slavery, abolishing it and adding all adult Black men to the voting rolls.

Theodore Roosevelt

Roosevelt reversed a half century of government concerned only with expansion and benefits to the new capitalists. His was the first presidency concerned with working people, safe food and drugs, and protecting the nation's natural treasures from exploitation by the robber barons. National parks was his gift to the country, along with environmentalism.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

This president saw us through a major economic depression, real concern for workers' rights, finally providing social security benefits, wisdom to guide us into World War II, despite great isolationism. Had he not done this, democracy would have been stamped out globally.

Harry S. Truman

This unexpected president faced off the Soviet expansion, and desegregated the Armed Forces, an act that demonstrated the ability of an American institution to end a stupid policy.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Unexpected in a Southern politician, he was the first to address voting rights of American African-American citizens. He also began a program addressing systemic poverty.

Barack H. Obama

Our first African-American president whose election marked an enormous change for the better in the American voters and total honesty in administration.

Joseph Biden

This president will have to repair all the damage done by Donald Trump and will set the agenda for issues essential to our future.

684 words

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