



# US Presidents: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

## Contents

[Contents](#)

[Donald J. Trump](#)

[Barack H. Obama](#)

[George W. Bush](#)

[William Jefferson Clinton](#)

[George Herbert Walker Bush](#)

[Ronald Wilson Reagan](#)

[James Earl Carter, Jr.](#)

[Gerald R. Ford](#)

[Richard M. Nixon](#)

[Lyndon B. Johnson](#)

[John F. Kennedy](#)

[Dwight D. Eisenhower](#)

[Harry S. Truman](#)

[Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#)

[Herbert Hoover](#)

[Calvin Coolidge](#)

[Warren Harding](#)

These are my notes from books and articles that I have read over the years. There is no attempt to be complete; when I find out something new, I add it to the list, but I don't particularly go looking for things to add. Also, I've attributed some things to Presidents based simply on the date that are probably more Congressional than Presidential. Finally, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of my sources; I've tried to avoid adding things that are not well documented, I cannot say that the authors I've read don't have biases in their selection of material. Finally, some things (particularly CIA actions) started in one administration and culminated in another, so attribution is sometimes arbitrary.

Most of the items about the CIA come from William Blum's [Killing Hope](#).

## Contents

<a href="#">Donald J. Trump</a>	(2017-)
<a href="#">Barack H. Obama</a>	(2009-2017)
<a href="#">George W. Bush</a>	(2001-2009)
<a href="#">William J. Clinton</a>	(1993-2001)
<a href="#">George H. W. Bush</a>	(1989-1993)
<a href="#">Ronald W. Reagan</a>	(1981-1989)
<a href="#">James E. Carter</a>	(1977-1981)
<a href="#">Gerald R. Ford</a>	(1975-1977)
<a href="#">Richard M. Nixon</a>	(1969-1975)
<a href="#">Lyndon B. Johnson</a>	(1963-1969)
<a href="#">John F. Kennedy</a>	(1961-1963)
<a href="#">Dwight D. Eisenhower</a>	(1953-1961)
<a href="#">Harry S. Truman</a>	(1945-1953)
<a href="#">Franklin D. Roosevelt</a>	(1933-1940)
Herbert Hoover	(1929-1933)
Calvin Coolidge	(1923-1929)
Warren Harding	(1921-1923)
<a href="#">Woodrow Wilson</a>	(1913-1921)
William H. Taft	(1909-1913)
<a href="#">Theodore Roosevelt</a>	(1901-1909)
<a href="#">William McKinley</a>	(1897-1901)
Grover Cleveland	(1893-1897)
<a href="#">Benjamin Harrison</a>	(1889-1893)
Grover Cleveland	(1885-1889)
Chester A. Arthur	(1881-1885)

<a href="#">Woodrow Wilson</a>	James A. Garfield	(1881)
	Rutherford B. Hayes	(1877-1881)
<a href="#">William H. Taft</a>	Ulysses S. Grant	(1869-1877)
<a href="#">Theodore Roosevelt</a>	Andrew Johnson	(1865-1869)
	Abraham Lincoln	(1861-1865)
<a href="#">William McKinley</a>	James Buchanan	(1857-1861)
	Franklin Pierce	(1853-1857)
<a href="#">Benjamin Harrison</a>	Millard Fillmore	(1850-1853)
	Zachary Taylor	(1849-1850)
<a href="#">John Adams</a>	James Polk	(1845-1849)
	John Tyler	(1841-1845)
<a href="#">George Washington</a>	William Henry Harrison	(1841)
	Martin Van Buren	(1837-1841)
	Andrew Jackson	(1829-1837)
	John Quincy Adams	(1825-1829)
	James Monroe	(1817-1825)
	James Madison	(1809-1817)
	Thomas Jefferson	(1801-1809)
	<a href="#">John Adams</a>	(1797-1801)
	<a href="#">George Washington</a>	(1789-1797)

## Donald J. Trump (2017-)

### Good

- [Killing the Trans Pacific Partnership \(TPP\)](#)

### To Be Determined

- Nominations
  - Donald McGahn (White House Counsel)
  - Thomas Bossert (Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism)
  - John Francis Kelly (Secretary of Homeland Security)
  - Elaine Chao (Secretary of Transportation)
  - Nikki Haley (Ambassador to the United Nations)
  - Sonny Perdue (Secretary of Agriculture nominee)
  - David Shulkin (Secretary of Veterans Affairs)
  - Robert Lighthizer (United States Trade Representative nominee)
  - Mick Mulvaney (Director of the Office of Management and Budget nominee)
  - Linda Marie McMahon (Administrator of the Small Business Administration)
  - Kathleen Troia McFarland (Deputy National Security Advisor)
  - James N. Mattis (Secretary of Defense)
  - Tom Price (Secretary of Health and Human Services)
  - Wilbur Ross (Secretary of Commerce nominee)
  - Todd Ricketts (Deputy Secretary of Commerce nominee)

- Benjamin Solomon Carson (Secretary of Housing and Urban Development nominee)
- Reinhold Richard “Reince” Priebus (White House Chief of Staff)
- Dan Coats (Director of National Intelligence nominee)
- (FEMA Director Senate)
- (National Security Agency Director)
- (Federal Housing Administrator)
- (Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Director)
- (NOAA Administrator)
- (Transportation Security Administrator)
- (Bureau Of Land Management Director)
- (National Park Service Director)
- (Customs And Border Protection Commissioner)
- (National Institutes Of Health Director)
- (Food And Drugs Commissioner)
- (Immigration And Customs Enforcement Director)

## Bad

- Reinstated “global gag rule”
- [Narcissitic personality disorder](#)
- [Federal hiring freeze](#)
- [Inviting TransCanada to resubmit its Keystone XL pipeline proposal](#)
- [“Ordering the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to quickly review and approve construction and easement requests for the Dakota Access pipeline and the Corps’ subsequent approval”](#)
- [Executive order for border wall](#)  
(meaningless without an Act of Congress, but terrible symbolism)
- Executive order on Affordable Care Act
- Firing [Sally Yates](#) for refusing to defend illegal executive order on immigration
- [House vote](#) to eliminate [Election Assistance Commission](#).
- Not understanding START treaty on phone call with Vladimir Putin.
- Using Quebec mosque murders by white supremacist to justify Muslim ban.
- Raid in Yemen by Navy Seals.
- Sanctions against Iran.
- Executive order to DHS to start planning border wall with Mexico.
- Executive order to withhold federal funds from sanctuary cities.
- Freeze on contracts and grants at EPA.
- Kellyanne Conway promoting Ivanka Trump products
- S.84 exception to a limitation against appointment of persons as Secretary of Defense within seven years of relief from active duty as a regular commissioned officer of the Armed Forces.
- Using its properties (e.g. Mar-a-Lago) for official business.
- H.J. Resolution 41 nullifying SEC rule on “Disclosure of Payments by Resource Extraction Issuers”.
- DOJ dropping intent claim in objection to Texas Voter ID Law.
- Nominations
  - Michael Richard Pompeo (Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Secretary of State)
  - Rex Wayne Tillerson (Secretary of State)
  - Steven Terner “Foreclosure” Mnuchin (Secretary of the Treasury)
  - Andrew Franklin Puzder (Secretary of Labor nominee, withdrawn)

- James Richard Perry (Secretary of Energy nominee)
- Jared Kushner (Senior Adviser to the President)
- [Neil McGill Gorsuch \(Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States\)](#)
- William Pelham Barr
- Andrew Wheeler
- John Robert Bolton
- Rudolph William Louis Giuliani

## Ugly

- 2016 Election Rhetoric ([a few examples](#), [a few more](#)): racist, misogynist, insulting, bullying, contemptible, lying, narcissistic, conceited
- Occupying the White House despite losing by 2.9 million votes
- Frequent, excessive prevarication, dishonest words and actions
- Failure to disclose tax returns
- Failure to put assets in a blind trust
- Firing Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates
- National Security Advisor nominee Michael Flynn's December 2016 phone call with Russia's ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak discussing sanctions, a violation of the Logan Act, as well as contacts during the campaign.
- Appointing racist Steven Bannon to National Security Council. Also failure to submit Steven Bannon's NSC position to Senate for confirmation in violation of [U.S. Code > Title 50 > Chapter 44 > Subchapter I > §.3021](#).
- Nomination of anti-science individuals to cabinet and cabinet-level positions (particularly climate science deniers)
- Illegal executive order preventing entry into the United States for those with Syrian, Libyan, Iraqi, Iranian, Somalian, Sudanese and Yemenese nationality for 90 days, suspending refugee entry for 120 days, and suspending Syrian refugee entry indefinitely.
- Firing FBI Director James Comey for Russia investigation and refusing to put fealty to Trump over the United States
- Appointments, Advisors, etc.
  - Donald John Trump
  - Michael Richard Pence (Vice President)
  - Michael Thomas Flynn (National Security Advisor, confirmed, resigned 20 days later)
  - Sean Michael Spicer (White House Press Secretary and Communications Director)
  - Kellyanne Elizabeth "Alternative Facts" Conway (Counselor to the President)
  - Stephen Kevin "Steve" Bannon (Senior Counselor)
  - Stephen Miller (Senior Advisor for Policy)
  - Stephen Gorka (Senior Advisor for Policy)
  - Sebastian Lukács Gorka (Deputy Assistant)
  - Katharine Gorka
  - Ajit Pai (Federal Communications Commission)
  - Jefferson Beauregard "Jeff" Sessions III (Attorney General)
  - Edward Scott Pruitt (Environmental Protection Agency)
  - Elisabeth "Betsy" DeVos (Secretary of Education)
  - [John Gore \(deputy assistant attorney general of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department\)](#)

- Gina Haspel (Deputy Director of the CIA)
- Ryan Zinke (Secretary of the Interior nominee)
- Brett Michael Kavanaugh (Supreme Court nominee)

## Pathetic/Contempible

- Pretending inauguration audience was large
- Pretending that it won the election because “illegals” voted
- Labeling journalism false news when it upsets Trump
- Melania Trump libel lawsuit against the Daily Mail concerning escort claims, in which Melania Trump alleges she was harmed by not being able monetize being First Lady status.
- Claiming journalists failed to report 78 terrorist attacks
- Complaints about Ivanka Trump product decisions
- Nepotism
  - Ivanka Trump
  - Jared Kushner

## Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

### Good

- Increasing Federal CAFE standards for 2012-2016 and granting California’s AB1493 waiver request
- Many small, good stimulus bill items
- Minor improvements to U.S. for-profit healthcare system (H.R. 3590, Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act) starting in 2014 (but with significant flaws)
- [Executive Order 13489](#), revoking Bush’s [Executive Order 13233](#)
- Repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell
- 2011 EPA mercury rules
- Ordering an end to most torture ([Executive Order 13491](#) revoking Bush’s [Executive Order 13440](#)) and admitting past torture
- New START Treaty with Russian Federation
- Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument
- Ferguson Police Department investigation (but so far little follow-up)
- Reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba
- EPA regulation of greenhouse pollution from coal power plants
- Rejected Keystone XL pipeline
- End of term pardons and commutations were mostly good

### Bad

- Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act (CISA)
- Syria involvement
- BP Oil Spill settlement
- Granting new oil and gas leases that will worsen greenhouse pollution
- [No Fly List cover-up](#)
- Flawed [Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act](#)
- Honduras
- Continuing President Bush’s military tribunals

- Continuing President Bush's illegal activities
- Ordering closure of Guantanamo and then failing on follow-thru
- Public-Private Investment Program
- [UCAV](#) attacks that kill innocent civilians
- Giving back Bank of America stock from bail-out
- Tax cuts as part of stimulus bill
- Stimulus bill too small
- Continuing President Bush's attack on government scientists ([76 news releases by PEER with the tag Scientific Integrity](#) so far)
- Allowing loaded guns in National Parks
- Failing to sign the landmine treaty after reviewing it
- Proposal to re-establish Indonesia military sales
- Allowing [demolition of Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem](#)
- Supplying white phosphorus shells to Israel and other weapons used in the attack on Gaza
- Endorsing extra-judicial assassination
- Basel III Tier 1 Capital requirements too low
- Failure to curb fundamentalism in U.S. military
- Second-round bailout of AIG
- Not implementing mortgage cramdown in bankruptcy court
- [Attempting to add backdoor to encryption](#)
- Bush tax-cut extension
- [Re-affirming Bush's threatened listing for Polar Bear \(rather than endangered\) and opening Polar Bear habitat to off-shore drilling](#)
- Extending expiring Patriot Act provisions (roving wiretap, lone wolf, and business records)
- USA Freedom Act
- Veto of Security Council resolution calling on Israel to stop settlement construction in occupied territory
- Proposing budget cuts when unemployment was 9%
- Opposed Brown-Kaufman amendment to Dodd-Frank bill in Senate
- [Two-tier justice at DOJ](#)
- [Evo Morales grounding incident](#)
- [FBI spying on political opponents / activists](#)  
(see also [Heard about the FBI Tracking of Keystone XL Activists? It's Worse than You Thought](#))
- Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act 2015, which significantly weakened Section 716 (the Swaps Push-Out Rule) of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act
- Failed to pass FY2011 budget during 2010
- Killing U.S. citizens without trial
- Pushing the 50 states' attorney generals into letting banks off the hook for mortgage fraud
- Failure to bring criminal charges in cases of Wall St fraud (with the exception of the failed Ralph Cioffi and Matthew Tannin prosecution), especially against HSBC employees for laundering money for Mexican and Columbian drug cartels
- Failure to make Elizabeth Warren director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
- Budget Control Act of 2011 and the United States Congress Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction
- Trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia, Panama
- Violating the War Powers Act in Libya

- Bombing of Libya
- Bombing of Syria
- Failing to enact recommendations of the oil spill commission
- [Preventing the EPA from adopting stricter ozone regulations in 2011](#), rejecting findings of the [EPA's scientific advisory panel](#)
- [Failed to sign executive order banning discrimination by employers with federal contracts](#)
- Submitting the expiring [S. 2248 \(110th\): FISA Amendments Act](#) for reauthorization
- [Creating and releasing the Stuxnet worm](#)
- [Failure of HAMP and failure to prosecute HAMP fraud](#)
- [DOJ too often backing police misconduct](#)
- Mass surveillance of Americans
- Raising student loan rates
- [Further weakening](#) an already weak Dodd-Frank
- Trans-Pacific Partnership, Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and Trade In Services Agreement (TISA) negotiation process and content, as well as Trade Promotion Authority (TPA, or “fast-track”) without releasing the treaty contents for public debate
- Supporting military coup and suppression of democracy in Egypt
- Restoring aid to Egypt's Dictatorship
- Resupplying Israel during Gaza atrocities, including the transfer of U.S. arms pre-positioned in Israel
- Blocking prosecution of U.S. war crimes (a violation of Article 7(1) of the [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#))
- Preventing the Senate from releasing a intelligible version of the CIA torture report executive summary
- Defending worst of Bush era in courts
  - Jewel v. NSA
  - Ashcroft v. al-Kidd
  - Appealing Judge Virginia Phillips' decision in *Log Cabin Republicans v. United States of America* ruling “Don't Ask Don't Tell” unconstitutional
  - [Kiyemba III](#)
  - Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation of Oregon, et al. v. Obama, et al.
- Failure to abide by [Leahy Law](#) (selective enforcement)
- Changing Malaysia rating on human trafficking from Tier 3 to Tier 2 to further TPP.
- Prosecution and imprisonment of [John Kiriakou](#) for disclosing CIA waterboarding (the only prosecution related to CIA torture is of the whistleblower).
- [Refusal to pardon Edward Snowden](#)
- Endorsed 2010 International Whaling Commission proposed modification of 1982 moratorium on commercial whaling
- Support of Saudi Arabia war on Yemen
- Bombing of Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan (an probable war crime)
- EPA failed to enforce lead standards in Flint water supply
- Took far too long to block the Dakota Access Pipeline, and didn't require a Environmental Impact Statement for the pipeline
- Appointments
  - Timothy Geithner
  - Larry Summers

- Ken Salazar
- [Bill Daley](#)
- Carmen Ortiz
- James Brien Comey, Jr.

## Ugly

- Forced feeding at Guantanamo (a form of torture)
- [2012 National Defense Authorization Act](#) enacting indefinite detention without trial
- Banning Lavalas from first-round and rigging second round of Haiti's 2010-2011 election
- Failure to release prisoners from Guantanamo who the U.S. admits are innocent
- Failure to adequately reform U.S. finance after the panic
- Allowing 42 mountaintop removal mining permits in May 2009
- Continuation of indefinite detention without trial
- More troops for a lost-cause in Afghanistan
- Failure to address greenhouse pollution (so far)
- [Kill List, Rendition, Counting all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants, cluster bombs, keeping Awlaki killing legal memo secret](#)
- [War on whistleblowers](#) and journalists (e.g. [DOJ overbroad subpoenas of AP](#))
- [Firing of John Crane and coverup of misdeeds](#)
- Attack on freedom of the press
- Secret *ex parte* court rulings and proceedings determining the constitutionality of legislation and creating a [secret body of law](#) and a "parallel Supreme Court".
- Violation of [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#))
- Arms sales to Saudi Arabia and support of Saudi Arabia's bombing of Yemen
- Appointments
  - Alan Simpson
  - Eric Holder
  - [John Owen Brennan](#)

## George W. Bush (2001-2009)

### Good

- Plans to abandon the requirement that the U.S. military be able to simultaneously fight two major wars.
- Sponsoring U.N. Security Council resolution 1397
- Signed campaign finance reform bill (hardly adequate, but at least it was something)
- Forced Senate majority leader Lott to step down
- President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (at least the intent, if not the implementation)
- [Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty \(SORT\)](#), with Russian Federation

### Bad



- Outsourcing government functions to private companies (privateering)
- Military tribunals
- Subverting the [American Psychological Association](#) into cooperating with torture.
- Environment
  - Killed some of Clinton's end of term environmental regulations ("let them drink arsenic")
  - Drastic cuts in EPA budget
  - Proposed Energy Plan
  - Relaxed clean-air rules for old factories
  - Changes to forest management policy to benefit logging industry
  - H.J.Res.38 — Disapproving the rule submitted by the Department of the Interior known as the Stream Protection Rule. Changes to regulations made under Clean Water Act regulations to allow dumping of solid waste (e.g. mine tailings) into streams.
  - H.J.Res.41 — Congressional disapproval of a rule submitted by the Securities and Exchange Commission relating to "Disclosure of Payments by Resource Extraction Issuers".
  - Attempts to exempt methyl bromide from the ozone treaty
  - [Rescinding EPA rule to reduce the discharge of mercury](#)
  - [Executive Order 13422](#)
  - Failed to submit Persistent Organic Pollutant treaty for ratification
  - Failed to ban lindane
  - Opposing [REACH](#) in Brussels
  - 2005 Energy Policy Act exempted fracking from Safe Drinking Water Act (the "Halliburton Loophole")
  - [Ignoring science in designating habitat for endangered species](#)
  - Stream Buffer Zone Rule (2008)
  - Editing scientific reports produced by government agencies to suit White House politics ([63 news released by PEER with the tag Scientific Integrity](#))
- Secrecy
  - [Executive Order 13233](#) torpedoing the Presidential Records Act
  - [Executive Order 13292](#)
  - >750 signing statements to undermine acts of Congress
  - Prohibiting Medicare's chief actuary, Richard Foster, from informing Congress of his \$500B to \$600B estimate of the drug benefit change (the CBO estimated only \$395B)
  - Refusal to turn over energy task force records
  - Stonewalling Freedom of Information Act requests
  - Failure to cooperate with 9/11 commission (many items, with the general theme that politics and particularly preventing politically embarrassing disclosures was more important than the work of the commission)
  - [No-Fly List](#)
- Politics
  - Exploiting the California energy crisis
  - A lie a day keeps the Democrats away
  - Firing Lawrence Lindsey for estimating Iraq war cost at 2-4× White House estimates (\$100-200 billion instead of \$50-60 billion)
- Domestic
  - Failed Hurricane Katrina emergency response
  - Budget cuts for other regulatory agencies (e.g. FDA, FEMA)

- [FEC](#) rulings gutting campaign finance reform
- [FCC](#) rulings allowing further media consolidation
- Failure to clean up the corporate mess (e.g. not following through on [SEC](#) budget increase, keeping Harvey Pitt too long)
- Estate tax reduction/elimination
- Libby pardon
- Allowed Federal Assault Weapons Ban to expire
- Legalization of warrantless wiretapping ([S. 2248 \(110th\): FISA Amendments Act of 2008](#))
- [Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act](#) (see [ACLU Letter to Congress Urging Opposition to the Animal Enterprise Act](#))
- Failure to heed whistleblowers William Binney, Thomas Drake, J. Kirk Wiebe, Binney's subsequent arrest, and Drake's subsequent prosecution
- Foreign Policy
  - Opposition to the International Criminal Court
    - The American Servicemen's Protection Act of 2002
    - Forced poor countries to sign mutual immunity pacts
  - Opposition to international treaty to control small arms
  - Opposition to international biological warfare treaty
  - Rejected the landmine treaty in August 2001 (Clinton also failed to sign)
  - Declared it would not be bound by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (signed in 1969, but not ratified)
  - Opposition to a G8 Plan for Cleaner Energy in Genoa, July 2001
  - Withdrew from the UNESCO World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, September 2001
  - Opposition to WTO Ministerial Conference plan of November 2002 to help poor nations buy medicines to AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other diseases
  - The "axis of evil" designation, combined with the Iraq threats, pushing North Korea and Iran further toward nuclear capability
  - Ignoring multiple warnings on Al Qaeda before 2001.09.11, prioritizing Iraq over Al Qaeda before and after
  - Looking into Putin's eyes and being hypnotized
  - Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations
  - Failure to abide by [Leahy Law](#) (selective enforcement)
  - Giving safe haven to terrorists (failure to extradict Luis Posada Carriles to Cuba or Venezuela)
- Iraq
  - The Iraq war justification (e.g. Powell's Security Council testimony), lying about weapons of mass destruction
  - [Executive Order 13303](#)
  - [Executive Order 13438](#)
  - Allowing the looting of Iraq's museums (but protecting the oil ministry)
  - Deciding on an Iraq invasion in April 2001
  - Waging the war so incompetently that it will cost the US \$3 trillion (according to Stiglitz and Bilmes)
  - Releasing identity of CIA agent to punish her husband
  - Failure to manage KBR (formerly Kellogg Brown & Root) (see [Pay Any Price](#), by James Risén)
  - Giving one billion dollars of Iraq Central bank money to Commander's Emergency Response Program and spending and losing it with no oversight or accounting
- Afghanistan

- Failing to abide by International law in attack on Al Qaeda / Taliban (e.g. bypassing the U.N., ignoring the Geneva convention)
- Allowing opium production to resume
- Failing to rebuild the infrastructure destroyed in the war
- Allowing warlords to reemerge
- Economy
  - Very weak job creation
  - Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation in 2007 switched from 100% bonds to 55% stocks and real estate.
  - Federal Reserve Bank first-round bailout of AIG.
- Nominations
  - Harriet Miers
- Appointments
  - George Tenet (CIA) — too weak to stand up to the neocons on Iraq intelligence
  - Elevated Michael Powell to chairman of [FCC](#)
  - Richard Armitage
  - John Owen Brennan

## Ugly

- Appointments
  - Dick Cheney (Vice President)
  - Karl Rove (Deputy Chief of Staff)
  - John Ashcroft (Attorney General)
  - Donald Rumsfeld (Secretary of Defense)
  - Alberto Gonzalez (Attorney General)
  - John Yoo (Office of Legal Counsel)
  - Paul Wolfowitz (Deputy Secretary of Defense)
  - Douglas Feith (Under Secretary of Defense)
  - Samuel Alito (Supreme Court)
  - Christopher Cox (Securities and Exchange Commission)
  - Stephen Johnson (Environmental Protection Agency)
  - Paul Bremer (Iraq Proconsul)
  - Michael Hayden (NSA)
  - John R. Bolton (Ambassador to the United Nations)
- Politics
  - Occupying the White House despite losing the 2000 election (the Florida vote was manipulated through Republican fraudulent voter registration purges, counting illegal ballots, and dirty post-election legal tactics)
  - Occupying the White House despite losing by 544 thousand votes
- Environment
  - Abandoned Kyoto treaty and campaign promise to limit CO<sub>2</sub>, substituting only “research”
  - Denied California’s AB1493 waiver request.
  - Ignored Supreme Court’s *Massachusetts v. EPA* order to enforce the Clean Air Act.
  - Failed to follow the law on mountain top removal mining
- Foreign Policy
  - Illegal war on Iraq (which actually started in summer 2002 according to Lt. General T. Michael Moseley)

- Withdrew from the ABM treaty to waste billions on missile defense
- Letting the Darfur situation reach the level of genocide before acting, refusing to use the word “genocide” to describe the situation, and not acting vigorously to get a UNSCR mandating action
- Fiscal Policy
  - Rekindled deficit spending through tax cuts and spending increases (another “borrow and spend” Republican who thinks the wealthy are insufficiently rich, so the U.S. has to borrow to give them more)
  - Increased US debt from \$5,727,776,738,304.64 (2001.01.19) to \$10,628,881,485,510.23 (2009.01.16). This 86% increase does not include the legacy of the financial collapse, or the additional \$2 trillion that the Iraq war will cost in future years.
- Human/civil Rights
  - Torture (violation of [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#))
  - [Executive Order 13440](#)
  - Abu Ghraib
  - Indefinite detention of prisoners without due process in Guantanamo
  - Use of the enemy combatant designation to avoid due process
  - Curtailing rights of suspects and otherwise moving the U.S. toward a police state (e.g. USA PATRIOT Act)
  - Plans to [subvert U.S. democracy](#) by accelerating [Free Trade Area of the Americas](#)
  - Poindexter’s Pentagon Total Information Awareness project (a database of personal information about Americans)
  - Bypassing the [FISA](#) court with its illegal wiretap program
  - Aerial bombing and [UCAV](#) attacks that kill innocent civilians
  - Increase of fundamentalism, proselytism in U.S. military
- Economy
  - Sub-prime mortgage / Collateralized Debt Obligation crisis
  - Paulson plan to buy bad debt from Wall St (Cash for Trash), instead of equity investments

## William Jefferson Clinton (1993-2001)

### Good

- Signed [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty](#) (but Senate did not ratify)
- Vetoed the worst of the Gingrich congress
- Further Myanmar sanctions
- Federal Assault Weapons Ban (aka Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act)
- Almost balancing the budget in FY1998-FY2000 (a surplus is sometimes claimed, but that counts the social security trust fund)
- Ratified [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)

### Bad

- GATT
- NAFTA

- Killed [Layla Al Attar](#) with an errant cruise missile in 1993 attack on Baghdad in retaliation for an [alleged assassination plot against former President George Bush](#)
- Failed to sign [landmine](#) treaty
- Giveaway of the digital TV spectrum
- Bombing Sudan on the pretext of a nerve gas factory
- Opposed the creation of the International Criminal Court
- Campaign fund-raising scams
- Subverting the Iraq arms inspection process (UNSCOM)
- Violated the War Powers Act
- Failed to get ratification of various arms control agreements
- Biased mediation in the peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine (threatened to move U.S. embassy to Jerusalem)
- End of term pardons
- Waited until end of term to issue several environmental regulations
- Giveaway of spectrum in the Telecommunications Act of 1996
- Took three years to restore Jean-Bertrand Aristide as Haitian President
- Handling of East Asia financial crisis (primarily the IMF's fault, but the U.S. has an effective veto over IMF policy)
- Appointed Michael Powell as FCC commissioner
- Releasing oil from the strategic petroleum reserve for political purposes
- Defense of Marriage Act
- Helium Privatization Act of 1996
- Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994
- Cuba embargo

## Ugly

- World Trade Organization (much good, but much bad and ugly too)
- Added \$1,539,684,631,121.04 (37%) to US debt
- Failed to implement U.S. commitment to greenhouse gas control
- Bombing of Yugoslavia
- Killed over a million Iraqis with continued sanctions
- Blocked efforts to stop the genocide in Rwanda
- Resurrected missile defense and attempted to destroy the ABM treaty
- End of term pardons
- [Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000](#)
- Repeal of Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 ([Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act](#))
- Appointments
  - Colleen Kollar-Kotelly (FISA Court)

## George Herbert Walker Bush (1989-1993)

### Good

- Phaseout of ozone-depleting chemicals
- Market approaches to emissions control that worked
- Various sanctions against Myanmar starting with a ban on arms sales in 1988
- Signed [START I](#) and [START II](#) arms control agreements with the Soviet Union

- People
  - David Souter

## Bad

- Failed to prevent the invasion of Kuwait
- Dirty campaign tricks (e.g. Willy Horton)
- Failed to enact enabling legislation for the Basel Convention
- Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch
- Pardons
  - Alan D. Fiers
  - Caspar W. Weinberger
  - Clair George
  - Duane R. Clarridge
  - Elliott Abrams
  - Robert C. McFarlane

## Ugly

- Veto of Congressional attempts to reinstate the fairness doctrine via legislation
- Invaded Panama
- Added \$1,042,000,000,000 to the U.S. debt
- Aided the Guatemala military's genocide of its Mayan population
- Appointed Clarence Thomas to Supreme Court
- Intensification of War on Drugs instead of treatment

## Ronald Wilson Reagan (1981-1989)

### Good

- Simplified the tax code
- Arms control agreements with Soviet Union
  - [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty](#)
  - Initiated [START I](#) discussion with Gorbachev
- Appointed Sandra Day O'Connor to Supreme Court
- Signed and had Senate ratify the [Montreal Protocol](#) on ozone depletion
- Signed [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)

### Bad

- Massive military defense spending increases
- "Stars Wars" missile defense system (aka [SDI](#))
- Laid the foundation for the Savings and Loan debacle by deregulation
- Gutted the EPA using hatchet-woman Anne Gorsuch
- James Watt
- Government by anecdote\*
- Supply-side economics
- Lebanon policy (allowing Israel's invasion and having US marines take sides in the civil war)

- Refused to sign Law of the Sea
- [Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986](#) and 1988, and the subsequent surge in U.S. incarceration rate
- [Hissène Habré coup in Chad and subsequent secret police repression](#)
- People / Appointments
  - Alan D. Fiers
  - Alan Greenspan
  - Caspar W. Weinberger
  - Clair George
  - Elliott Abrams
  - James Watt
  - John Poindexter
  - Michael Deaver
  - Oliver North
  - Richard Secord
  - Robert C. McFarlane
  - Richard Armitage

## Ugly

- [FCC](#) repeal of the fairness doctrine in 1985 and veto of Congressional attempts to reinstate it via legislation in 1987
- Iran-Contra
- Grenada
- El Salvador terror
- Mining of harbors in Nicaragua
- Angola
- So unbalanced the budget that he created a multi-trillion dollar debt legacy: e.g. \$1,763,884,000,000 in his 8 years, \$1,469,243,000,000 in Bush's, totaling \$3.2 trillion (a 346% increase from the \$934,073,000,000 debt left by President Carter to Reagan)
- Intensification of War on Drugs instead of treatment
- Committed treason (negotiating with Iran to delay release of hostages) in order to win the 1980 election
- Aided the Guatemala military's genocide of its Mayan population (subverting Congressional bans against military aid to do so)
- Deregulated derivatives (Wendy Gramm)
- [Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act](#)
- [Executive Order 12333](#), now used to [justify NSA mass surveillance](#)
- People / Appointments
  - Antonin Scalia
  - William J. Casey

## James Earl Carter, Jr. (1977-1981)

### Good

- Made Human Rights an issue
- Expansion of national parks
- Egypt-Israel Camp David accords
- Presidential Records Act of 1978

- [SALT II](#) arms control agreement

## Bad

- Continued to support and defend dictators and their human rights abuses
- Handling of the Iranian situation

## Ugly

- Allowed continued slaughter in East Timor
- CIA forms the Contras in Nicaragua

## Gerald R. Ford (1974-1977)

### Good

- Safe Drinking Water Act (1974)
- Toxic Substances Control Act (1976)
- Strengthening of the Freedom of Information Act (1974) (Ford vetoed, Congress overrode)
- Executive Order 11905, which stipulated “No employee of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, political assassination.”
- [Executive Order 11246](#)
- Finished ending gold as basis for U.S. currency (started by President Nixon)
- [Rockefeller Commission](#) (though it didn't go far enough)
- People
  - John Paul Stevens

### Bad

- Increased budget deficit
- Bombing of Cubana flight 455

### Ugly

- Allowed and probably sanctioned Indonesia's invasion and massacre in East Timor
- Team B, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz

## Richard M. Nixon (1969-1974)

### Good

- United Nations Population Fund
- National Environmental Policy Act (1969)
- EPA (1970)
- Signed Clean Air Act (1970)
- Signed Occupational Safety and Health Act (1970)



- Signed Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 (commonly referred to as the Clean Water Act)
- Signed Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (1972)
- Signed Endangered Species Act (1973)
- [SALT I](#) arms control agreement
- China
- War Powers Resolution of 1973 (Nixon vetoed, Congress overrode)
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
- Title X of the Public Health Service Act
- Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970 lowering voting age to 18, and the subsequent Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution (although the President has no formal role in Constitutional amendments, this list is partially Congressional rather Presidential, and also President Nixon advocated for the amendment)
- Started decoupling U.S. dollar from gold (August 1971)

## Bad

- Possible CIA involvement in overthrow of Prince Sihanouk
- Politicizing abortion
- Assassination of Fred Hampton as part of COINTELPRO operation
- Wiretaps for political or personal reasons
- [Operation Chaos](#)
- [Project MINARET](#)
- [Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970](#), making useful medicines illegal (“Schedule I”).
- [Falsification of military records to hide bombing of Cambodia](#)
- Wage and price controls
- People
  - Vice President
    - Spiro Agnew
  - Nominations
    - G. Harrold Carswell
    - Clement Haynsworth

## Ugly

- Treason ([sabotaging the Paris peace deal before the 1968 election](#), see also [NYT](#))
- Intensification of the War on Drugs
- Watergate
- Vietnam
- Bombing of Cambodia and the murder of 600,000 to 700,000 Cambodians
- Bombing of Laos with 30,000 Laotians killed immediately and 20,000 after the bombing by unexploded ordinance
- CIA destabilization of Cambodian Prince Sihanouk’s government (and possible support of the 1970 coup) that eventually brought Pol Pot to power
- Overthrow of Salvador Allende and the support of Augusto Pinochet’s reign of terror
- [Corruption \(ITT, Somoza, Davidson, Hughes, Rebozo\), assassination plot](#)
- Dirty campaign tricks
- CIA spying on Americans

- [Plumbers](#)
- People
  - Henry Kissinger
  - John Mitchell
  - Charles Colson
  - John Ehrlichman
  - H. R. Haldeman
  - John Dean

## Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969)

### Good

- Civil Rights
- Voting Rights Act
- Freedom of Information Act (1966)

### Bad

- Failed nomination of Abe Fortas to replace Earl Warren, allowing Richard Nixon to fill the Chief Justice position
- Started significant deficit spending to pay for Vietnam
- Started combining the Social Security surplus and the general account deficit to make the deficit appear smaller
- Probable CIA involvement in 1967 Greek coup by George Papadopoulos
- [Operation Chaos](#)
- [Project MINARET](#)
- Very flawed Warren Commission (e.g. placing Allen Dulles on it)

### Ugly

- Vietnam
- [Provoking](#) and then using of the [Gulf of Tonkin](#) incident
- Bombing of Cambodia (2,565 sorties dropping 214 tons of bombs) and Laos
- Invasion of Dominican Republic
- Bombing and napalming of Guatemala countryside and giving military aid to the government and its death squads
- FBI started campaign to discredit Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Overthrow of Brazilian democracy (President Goulart) followed by installation of a military dictatorship

## John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)

### Good

- [Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty](#)
- Twenty-fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution (although the President has no formal role in Constitutional amendments, this list is partially Congressional rather Presidential, and also President Kennedy advocated for the amendment)

- Fired Allen Dulles after the Bay of Pigs fiasco

## Bad

- Missile Gap deceit
- CIA destabilization of Prime Minister Dr. Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana
- FBI investigation of Martin Luther King
- [Providing intelligence to South Africa that led to the arrest of Nelson Mandela](#)
- People
  - John A. McCone

## Ugly

- Vietnam
- [Operation 34A](#)
- Bay of Pigs
- Operation MONGOOSE
- Increased U.S. involvement in Latin American military repression
- FBI greatly expanded COINTELPRO
- Failure to reign in the CIA shadow government
- People
  - Allen Dulles (CIA)

## Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961)

### Good

- NASA
- Stopped the Governor of Arkansas from thwarting a local plan to desegregate a Little Rock high school

### Bad

- CIA interference, murder and terrorism in Indonesia (e.g. captured bomber pilot Allen Lawrence Pope) targeted at President Sukarno
- CIA destabilization of Cambodian government of Prince Sihanouk
- Use of the Smith Act
- Added the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance
- Adopting “In God we trust” as official motto of the U.S. (replacing the founders’ “E pluribus unum”)
- CIA kidnapping of Jesús Galíndez in New York, delivery to Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, where he was murdered, and the subsequent coverup.
- Cuba
  - Cut-off of oil exports to Cuba (leading expropriation of refineries)
  - Termination of diplomatic relations with Cuba
  - Bay of Pigs planning

### Ugly

- FBI started COINTELPRO
- Allowing CIA to function as a shadow government
- CIA overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh, putting the CIA controlled Shah into power
- CIA overthrow of democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, installing dictator Castillo Armas
- Assassination of Congo's President Lumumba
- [Project MKULtra](#)
- People
  - Allen Dulles (CIA) and John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State) ([Steven Kinzer interview about the Dulles brothers](#))
  - Richard M. Nixon

## Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)

### Good

- [Executive Order 9981](#) ending official segregation in the U.S. military and declaring "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC) introduced the Fairness Doctrine
- Vetoed McCarran Internal Security Act (but Congress overrode veto)
- Berlin airlift

### Bad

- Supported and funded the return of Vietnam to France after World War II
- Sending the Military Assistance Advisory Group to Vietnam
- Use of the Smith Act

### Ugly

- [Project Artichoke](#)
- Creation of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- CIA overthrow of democratically elected government of Syria in 1949 to build the Trans-Arabian Pipeline
- Dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki non-combatants to terrorize Japan into surrender
- Using South Korea as a sacrificial goat to encourage Stalin's invasion, with the goal being massive U.S. military budget increases, as outlined in NSC-68. (Details at [The Korean War](#) series of Zack Twamley's *When Diplomacy Fails*.)

## Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933-1945)

### Good

- United Nations

- Social Security
- [Pecora Commission](#)
- [Securities Act of 1933](#)
- Securities and Exchange Commission ([Securities Exchange Act of 1934](#))
- [Glass-Steagall Act](#)
- [Twenty-first Amendment to the United States Constitution](#)
- Ended domestic convertability of U.S. dollar to gold in 1933 (gold continued to be used for settlements with other countries' central banks)

## Bad

- Smith Act (1940), prosecution and conviction of Eugene Dennis
- [Uniform State Narcotic Drug Act](#)
- [Marijuana Tax Act of 1937](#)
- Failure of the [Évian Conference](#)

## Ugly

- Executive Order 9066 — Internment of Japanese Americans
- Firebombing of Dresden
- Firebombing of Tokyo
- Turning away refugees from Nazi persecution

## Herbert Hoover (1929-1933)

### Good

- ?

### Bad

- [Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act](#)
- People / Appointments
  - [Harry J. Anslinger](#)

### Ugly

- Great Depression

## Calvin Coolidge (1923-1929)

### Good

- ?

### Bad

- Appointed J. Edgar Hoover as director of the FBI

## Ugly

- ?

## Warren Harding (1921-1923)

### Good

- ?

### Bad

- ?

## Ugly

- ?

## Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921)

### Good

- Child labor law
- Vetoed [Volstead Act](#) (but Congress overrode the veto)
- Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (although the President has no formal role in Constitutional amendments, this list is partially Congressional rather Presidential, and also President Wilson advocated for the amendment)

### Bad

- Use of the [Lever Act](#) against unions.
- [Palmer raids](#)
- [Harrison Narcotics Tax Act](#)
- Appointments
  - A. Mitchell Palmer

## Ugly

- Rekindled racism in America
- Segregated the federal government
- Paris Peace Conference
- [Espionage Act \(1917\), and use thereof](#)
- [Sedition Act \(1918\)](#), prosecution and arrest of Eugene Debs
- [Palmer Raids](#)
- Invasion of Haiti
- Invasion of Dominican Republic

## Other

- The [Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution](#) passed during President Wilson's term. This *ugly* act is attributable to the 65th United States Congress, not President Wilson, as Article 5 of the U.S. Constitution assigns no role to the President in amending the Constitution, and Wilson even vetoed the Volstead Act, which Congress passed to implement the 18th Amendment. It did occur during Wilson's term, and so I note it here.
- Volstead Act (vetoed by President Wilson, overridden by 66th United States Congress)

## William H. Taft (1909-1913)

### Good

- ?

### Bad

- Supported Juan José Estrada's 1909 rebellion against Nicaraguan President José Santos Zelaya, and the landing of U.S. Marines at Bluefields, leading to Zelaya's resignation

### Ugly

- ?

## Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909)

### Good

- Expanded national forests
- Trust busting
- Reacted to *The Jungle* by improving food safety

### Bad

- ?

### Ugly

- Continued Philippines occupation and massacres (e.g. 1906)
- Splitting Panama off from Colombia

## William McKinley (1897-1901)

### Good

- ?

## Bad

- ?

## Ugly

- Annexation of Hawaii
- Spanish-American War
- War on the people of the Philippines

## Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893)

### Good

### Bad

### Ugly

- [Wounded Knee Massacre](#)

## John Adams (1797-1801)

### Good

- ?

### Bad

- ?

### Ugly

- Alien and [Sedition Acts](#) of 1798
- Use of the Sedition Act (see [It's A Free Country](#).)

## George Washington (1789-1797)

### Good

- Set the two term precedent

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