

37 A Congressman and a Peanut Farmer



Gerald Ford was never elected president or vice president, and yet he became president of the United States. How did that happen?

This was the way: President Nixon chose him to replace Spiro Agnew when Agnew resigned as vice presi-

dent. Then, when Nixon resigned, Ford became president.

Ford, a popular, pleasant man, was a congressman from Michigan and House minority leader. That means he was the Republican leader in the House of Representatives (where there was a Democratic majority). When he became president, he put his feet into two hornet's nests: the messes that were left from Watergate and Vietnam.

He said he would heal the "long national nightmare," and he was talking about the scandal of Watergate. He promptly granted Nixon an unconditional pardon for any wrongdoings against the United States. Some people howled in protest—they thought Nixon should be put on trial—but others believed the country was better off spared that agony; they were glad to forget the national nightmare. Then Ford pardoned draft protestors who had refused to fight in Vietnam, although there were some conditions attached to their pardons.

During Gerald Ford's presidency the last U.S. troops and support workers were evacuated from Vietnam. Vietnam

When Gerald R. Ford, Jr., was 12, he learned that he had been born Leslie L. King, Jr. His name was changed when his mother divorced King and married Ford. Five years later, when he was in high school, a stranger came up to him and said, "I'm your father. Can I take you to lunch?"

They ate lunch, then King gave his son \$25 and left. That night in bed, Jerry Ford wept.



"To me," said Ford, seen here with his wife, Betty, waving goodbye to Nixon as he left the White House for good, "the presidency and the vice presidency were not prizes to be won but a duty to be done."

I believe that truth is the glue that holds government together, not only our government but civilization itself....As we bind up the internal wounds of Watergate, more painful and more poisonous than those of foreign wars, let us restore the golden rule to our political process, and let brotherly love purge our hearts of suspicion and of hate.

—GERALD FORD,
IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS

would take its place in history as America's worst foreign-policy defeat.

As president, Gerald Ford didn't break new ground or excite the imagination of most Americans. His wife, Betty Ford, did. She spoke out openly on controversial subjects, especially the rights of women. She talked of her own problems with cancer and alcoholism and discussed the pressures on young people to use drugs. But that wasn't enough to get her husband elected. In 1976, when Ford tried to win an election for president, he lost.



Betty Ford, aged 20

James Earl "Jimmy" Carter became the 39th president. A redheaded peanut farmer with a big, toothy grin, Carter had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis and become governor of Georgia. When he decided to run for president he was hardly known outside his state. Most people laughed at the very idea; his own mother laughed. But Jimmy Carter was determined. Soft-spoken and deeply religious, Carter told the American people, "I will not lie to you." And, as far as we know, he never did.

Carter was a southern Democrat with progressive views on civil rights and moderate ideas on economics. But he was an outsider when it came to dealing with the government in Washington. He brought his friends from Georgia with him to the capital. They had some good ideas, and President Carter thought Congress would go along with those ideas. But Jimmy Carter hadn't learned the ways of Congress. He couldn't get things done. It was frustrating for him and for the country.

Besides, he was unlucky. While he was president, a worldwide energy crisis made prices—especially the price of oil and gas—in the United States zoom way up. (It was an inflationary time.)

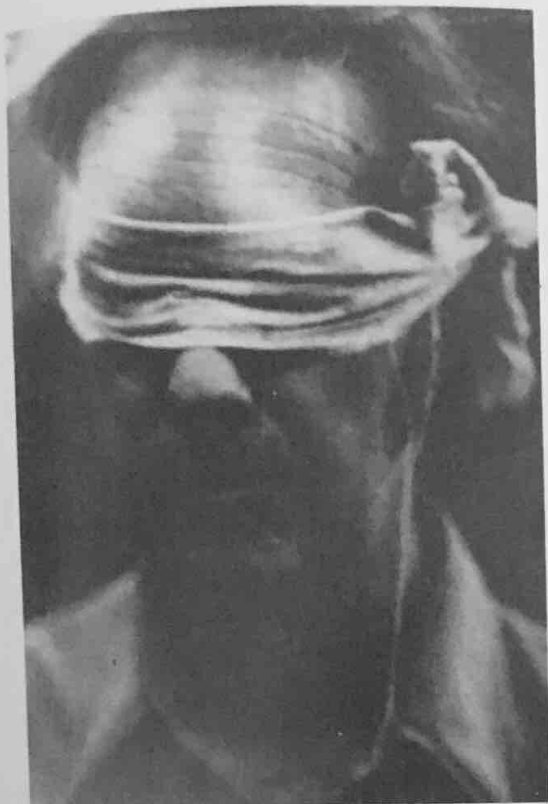


The Carter family—Rosalynn, Jimmy, and Amy—at the White House

No president's child had gone to public school since the days of Theodore Roosevelt. But Amy Carter did. She walked to public school with a bookbag on her back. (The Secret Service followed her.) Amy roller-skated on the porch in front of the White House and played in a treehouse her father had built for her.



The Energy Crisis, 1974: oil shortages caused long lines and restrictions at gas stations around the country. In the '70s, with 6 percent of the world's population, the United States used 33 percent of the world's energy.



In 1978, militant Moslem students stormed the U.S. embassy in Teheran, the capital city of Iran, and took several of the embassy staff hostage. During their imprisonment, their captors frequently humiliated the hostages by parading them, bound and blindfolded, in front of Iranian photographers and TV cameras. When American TV networks rebroadcast scenes like this, American viewers were horrified and angry. It was the single worst disaster of Carter's presidency.

Then the ruler of Iran, the shah, was overthrown and replaced by a fundamentalist Muslim religious leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who preached hatred of the United States. The Iranians captured some Americans and held them as hostages for 444 days. President Carter ordered a daring rescue mission, but it fizzled into an embarrassing mess of poor planning and failed equipment. As if that weren't bad enough, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, another Muslim country in Central Asia, and, when we protested, relations with Soviet Russia became icy.

President Carter did serve as a peacemaker between Egypt and Israel. And he did get Congress to agree to turn the Panama Canal over to Panama at the end of the century (which was a new Good Neighbor policy). And he did support measures to help protect our natural environment.

But Jimmy Carter never seemed to capture the enthusiasm of most Americans. A highly intelligent, compassionate man, he was, nevertheless, a poor communicator. He tried to solve problems of national debt and energy conservation by asking people to make sacrifices. Maybe he didn't know how to ask—or maybe Americans weren't ready to make sacrifices. When Carter ran for reelection, he was defeated.

In 1978, Carter invited the prime minister of Israel, Menachem Begin (*left*), and Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat (*right*), to a summit meeting at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. It was a big breakthrough, getting these angry neighbors to sit down and agree to a peace treaty.



Why did Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini preach hatred of America? It's a complicated story, but here's a bit of it. When Eisenhower was president, Iran had a ruler, Mohammed Mossadegh, who was trying to exist independently—outside the influence of the United States. We wanted influence—especially since Iran is oil-rich. We helped return the Shah of Iran to power through secret—and illegal—activities of our CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). The shah was out of touch with his people; the CIA helped train and support his secret police (SAVAK); it tortured and murdered political opponents.

Then the shah was overthrown, to be replaced by the anti-American and repressive government of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini took American citizens as hostages, defying the Carter administration. Later, the Reagan administration sold arms to Iran in the hope of getting other hostages released in Lebanon. This is a tangled tale.