

POLITICAL SCANDALS THROUGHOUT AMERICAN HISTORY

What is a political scandal?

A **political scandal** is a scandal in which politicians or government officials are accused of engaging in various illegal, corrupt, or unethical practices. A political scandal can involve the breaking of the nation's laws or plotting to do so.

Political scandals should involve politicians and not private citizens. Civilians should be included only when they are closely linked to elected or appointed officials.

President John Adams' Midnight Appointments

WHO: Government Officials Involved:
President John Adams and President Thomas Jefferson

WHAT: Adams was so upset by the election of Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson that he left town to avoid attending the inauguration. Before he left, President Adams appointed Federalists ("midnight judges") to the 16 new judgeships and 6 new circuit courts that had recently been established in the passing of the Judiciary Act. This last-minute action angered the Democratic Republicans who felt that the Federalist Party was trying to use the judiciary to increase the power of the federal government over the states. Congress (now dominated by the Democratic-Republicans) repealed the Judiciary Act, depriving the new judges of their jobs

WHEN: 1800 – election of Thomas Jefferson

RESULT: With Jefferson's refusal to accept Adams' midnight appointments, William Marbury, one of the last-minute appointees, sued Secretary of State James Madison for refusing to certify his appointment to the federal bench. Chief Justice John Marshall was a Federalist; however, he was not certain that the court could force Jefferson to accept Marbury's appointment. Marshall's decision in the case established one of the most important principles of the Supreme Court: judicial review. The court ruled that Marbury did have a right to his judgeship, but that the court could not enforce his right because he declared this power granted by the Judiciary Act of 1789, unconstitutional. This doctrine of responsibility for reviewing the constitutionality of Congressional acts remains a fundamental principle in the Supreme Court today.

Corrupt Bargain

WHO: John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and the House of Representatives

WHAT: In the 1824 election, William H. Crawford, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and John Quincy Adams, were the nominees for Democratic - Republican Party. Of the four, Andrew Jackson received the greatest number of popular votes and electoral votes; however, as none of the 4 had won the majority, the election was decided in the House of Representatives. There, Clay threw his support to Adams, thereby handing Adams the victory. Adams then named Clay Secretary of State. Opponents refer to Clay's appointment as the "corrupt bargain".

WHEN: 1824 election

RESULT: An indirect result of this action was the "spoils system", practiced by Andrew Jackson during his presidency. Angered that he was denied the presidency in 1824, one of his first acts as President was dismissing numerous government officials and replacing them with political supporters. His opponents quickly found examples of corruption and inefficiency among the new officeholders. What Jackson did was to transfer a common state practice to the national level and to set a precedent that was followed in national politics until passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883, which began reform of the civil service system.

Tammany Hall

WHO: political bosses (William Marcy Tweed)

WHAT: Many of the services provided to those deemed underprivileged were provided by corrupt men known as political bosses. In return for their services, they expected community members to vote as they were instructed. Political bosses – whose organizations were called political machines – rendered services that communities would not otherwise have received. These bosses generally resorted to criminal means in order to accomplish their goals. The most notorious of these bosses was “Boss” Tweed, a former U.S. Representative and New York State Senator. He managed to con and plunder the city of New York out of millions of dollars.

WHEN: late 19th century (1860-1890)

RESULT: A corrupt time period in which lower class citizens were swayed to favor certain parties and candidates.

Whiskey Ring

WHO: Ulysses S. Grant, Orville E. Babcock (Grant's private secretary), and Secretary of War William W. Belknap

WHAT: the **Whiskey Ring** was a scandal, involving diversion of tax revenues in a conspiracy among government agents, politicians, whiskey distillers, and distributors. Before they were caught, a group of mostly Republican politicians were able to siphon off millions of dollars in federal taxes on liquor; the scheme involved an extensive network of bribes involving tax collectors, storekeepers, and others. General Orville E. Babcock, the private secretary to the President, was indicted as a member of the ring — for this reason, President Ulysses S. Grant, although not directly involved in the ring, came to be seen as emblematic of Republican corruption, and later scandals involving his Secretary of War William W. Belknap only confirmed that perception. Belknap was impeached for receiving bribes for the sale of trading posts in Indian Territory.

WHEN: 1875

RESULT: The Whiskey Ring scandal, along with other alleged abuses of power by the Republican Party, contributed to national weariness of Reconstruction, which ended after Grant's presidency with the Compromise of 1877.

Teapot Dome Scandal

WHO: President Warren G. Harding

WHAT: The **Teapot Dome Scandal** refers to a bribery scandal of the White House administration of United States President Warren G. Harding. Teapot Dome is an oil field on public land in Wyoming. Oil companies bribed the secretary of the interior in order to drill on public lands and Harding supported this.

WHEN: 1921

RESULT: The concentrated attention on the scandal made it the first true symbol of government corruption in America. The scandal did reveal the problem of natural resource scarcity and the need to protect for the future against the depletion of resources in a time of emergency. Calvin Coolidge, who assumed the presidency after Harding's death, handled the problem very systematically and his administration avoided any damage to their reputation. Overall the Teapot Dome scandal came to represent the corruption of American politics.

McCarthyism

WHO: U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy

WHAT: Throughout the 1940s and 1950s America was overwhelmed with concerns about the threat of communism growing in Eastern Europe and China. Capitalizing on those concerns, a Senator named Joseph McCarthy made a public accusation that more than two hundred “card-carrying” communists had infiltrated the United States government. Though eventually his accusations were proven to be untrue, and he was censured by the Senate for unbecoming conduct, his zealous campaigning ushered in one of the most repressive times in 20th-century American politics.

WHEN: 1950s

RESULT: McCarthy’s accusations caused many Americans who were accused of being associated with Communists to lose their jobs and respect in society, while everyone else remained in a constant state of fear of Communists possibly living within America.

Watergate Scandal

WHO: President Richard M. Nixon and Nixon's closest advisors
(Republican Party)

WHAT: The scandal began with the arrest of five men for breaking and entering into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Office complex in Washington, D.C. on June 17, 1972. Investigations conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and later by the Senate Watergate Committee, House Judiciary Committee and the press revealed that this burglary was one of many illegal activities authorized and carried out by Nixon's staff. They also revealed the immense scope of crimes and abuses, which included campaign fraud, political espionage and sabotage, illegal break-ins, improper tax audits, illegal wiretapping on a massive scale, and a secret slush fund laundered in Mexico to pay those who conducted these operations.

WHEN: 1972

RESULT: The effects of the Watergate scandal did not end with the resignation of President Nixon and the imprisonment of some of his aides. The effect on the upcoming Senate election and House race only three months later, was enormous. Voters, disgusted by Nixon's actions, became thoroughly disillusioned with the Republican Party. In that election, the Democrats gained five seats in the Senate and a remarkable 49 in the House.

The Watergate Scandal also indirectly caused many changes in campaign financing. The scandal became a driving factor in amending the Freedom of Information Act in 1976, as well as laws requiring new financial disclosures by key government officials.

Iran-Contra Affair

WHO: The Reagan Administration

WHAT: Although administration officials railed against “state-sponsored terrorism”, they had little luck in capturing terrorists or gaining back the Western hostages. During the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-1988), the administration tilted toward Iraq to please the Arab states around the Persian gulf. But in 1986 the administration began secret negotiations with the Iranian government, making a trade of weapons for hostages. The president, it appeared, had broken his oft repeated promise that he would “never negotiate with terrorists”.

WHEN: 1986

RESULT: Internationally the damage was more severe. U.S. willingness to engage in concessions with Iran and the Hezbollah not only signaled to its adversaries that hostage-taking was an extremely useful instrument in extracting political and financial concessions for the West but also undermined any credibility of U.S. criticism of other states' deviation from the principles of no-negotiation and no concession to terrorists and their demand.

The Keating 5

WHO: Alan Cranston, Dennis DeConcini, John Glenn, John McCain, and Donald W. Riegle

WHAT: The **Keating Five** were five United States Senators accused of corruption in 1989, igniting a major political scandal as part of the larger Savings and Loan crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The five senators were accused of improperly intervening in 1987 on behalf of Charles H. Keating, Jr., chairman of the Lincoln Savings and Loan Association, which was the target of a regulatory investigation by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB).

WHEN: