

Franklin roosevelt and jimmy carter: the tale of two presidents essay

[Business](#), [Decision Making](#)



What makes a good president? Consequently, what makes an great president? How does one measure the greatness of a political leader? In the history of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt is revered as a great American president. On the other hand, Jimmy Carter is not perceived the same way. This essay aims to discuss the differences between the two presidents and discover how these differences result in the people's perception of their presidency. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is considered as one of the great presidents of the United States. If the longevity of one's presidential term is used to measure a president's greatness, then Roosevelt is indeed a great president.

Roosevelt was the 32nd American president; his term lasted from 1933 to 1945 (Rosen, 1992). His is the longest term in the history of the American presidency; he was the only president who exceeded two terms in office (Roosevelt " Impact," 2008; Franklin, n. d.

). However, it is more important to note that what he did during his presidency is more significant than the actual length of service. During the time of Roosevelt, the United States was still suffering from the Great Depression, a period marked by the most severe economic situation the country had ever faced (Rosen, 1992). Between his election and inauguration, the economic state continued to worsen; more and more people were unemployed, while banks continued to suffer as people in panic withdrew all their savings (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). As president, it became his task to save his country from the economic slump it was facing. It was his character that truly made him an exceptional president. Roosevelt

was optimistic and confident, despite the dire economic conditions he had to deal with (Roosevelt “ Domestic,” 2008).

It was his self-confidence that was the source of assurance for the American people, who were losing hope in such problematic times. He also was a pragmatic and flexible president. He said that he will try to do something about the depression; if his plan works, he will proceed in solving the next problem. If his plan does not work, he will figure out what went wrong and try another option. He also connected with the public with his “ fireside chats,” which were broadcast on the radio (Rosen, 1992, p. 308). It is these qualities that made him an epitome of great leadership (Roosevelt “ Domestic,” 2008). Roosevelt was a great president because he modified the role the federal government played in the economic and corporate aspects of American life (Roosevelt “ Domestic,” 2008).

He was able to do so through the New Deal, his plan in solving the economic problems of the country (Rosen, 1992). As part of the New Deal, there was a period called “ Hundred Days,” which was characterized by the passage of many bills that sought to improve the country’s economic issues (Roosevelt “ Domestic,” 2008, para. 7). The first sector Roosevelt acted on was the banking sector. He first declared a “ bank holiday” to halt the people from withdrawing their savings from the struggling banks (Roosevelt “ Domestic,” 2008, para. 8).

This gave way for the federal government to determine which banks were to be kept open, which had to be reorganized, and which ones should remain

closed. One of the outcomes of the legislative efforts of the Roosevelt administration is the Banking Act of 1935. It is that which provided the country a central structure for banking (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008).

Roosevelt was a great president because he resolved the issues regarding unemployment and agriculture. Through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Roosevelt allotted a significant amount of money to those without jobs (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). Through the Civilian Conservation Corps, thousands of young men were hired to work in construction, planting and cleaning. During his time, he also had to address the problem of decreasing prices which also decreased the farmer's earnings. As a result, the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). These are only some of the successes of the Roosevelt administration.

Roosevelt continued his efforts with the " Second Hundred Days," which was more focused on labor and the workers' welfare (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008, para. 26). He established the Works Progress Administration, which sought to ensure the employment of many Americans in fields such as construction and even the arts. Then there was the Wagner-Connery National Labor Relations Act, which allowed workers the right of collective bargaining and organization. In addition, the Social Security Act of 1935 gave way to programs which permitted assistance and insurance to the elderly and unemployed, as well as provided aid to those who are physically handicapped or with children (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). Roosevelt was also responsible for causing a political change in the American presidency

through reorganization. Through the Executive Reorganization bill of 1939, he was able to modify the function of the White House by giving more responsibilities to the presidency (Roosevelt " Impact," 2008).

As part of the reorganization, six executive assistants were assigned to the President (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). The reorganization also gave the Roosevelt more involvement in the decision making in government, such as planning the budget (Roosevelt " Domestic," 2008). Roosevelt's greatness as president may have been evident in his domestic contributions but he also proved successful in international affairs.

From the beginning, Roosevelt believed that the United States had a global responsibility to fulfill (Roosevelt " Foreign," 2008). One of his most notable accomplishments as president was his " good neighbor" policy (Roosevelt " Foreign," 2008, para. 5). However, his skill as leader became most evident when the Second World War occurred. Roosevelt helped the country's allies without being directly involved in the fighting (Roosevelt " Impact," 2008). Since the United States assumed a neutral position towards the war, the American government could not directly participate or assist other countries in war. However, Roosevelt was still able to help other countries through the Lend-Lease initiative and " Atlantic Charter" (Roosevelt " Foreign," 2008, para.

16). It was not until the Pearl Harbor Bombing when the United States officially went to war (Roosevelt " Foreign," 2008). Through his numerous accomplishments, it is no surprise that Roosevelt is considered as a great

president. This is not to say that he was a perfect leader; he did encounter problems, failures and even opposition. However, his achievements have overshadowed the negative aspects of his presidency. This is not the same case for Jimmy Carter, though. Despite the achievements he had during his term, Carter was most identified with the problems that haunted his administration.

Unlike Roosevelt, Carter only served a single term in the White House. As the 39th President of the United States, his presidency lasted from 1977 to 1981 (Stacks, 1992). He lost his reelection bid to Ronald Reagan (Stacks, 1992).

Character and personality may have also played a great role in the perception that Carter was a bad president. Carter was down-to-earth, but he was also austere (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008). He was a gentleman from the South with strong sense of religion and values. However, he lacked what Roosevelt had: confidence. He once gave what was referred to as “ malaise” speech, in which he expressed uncertainty over the future of the country (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008, para.

12). Unlike the confident Roosevelt, who became the source of hope for Americans, Carter’s lack of confidence over his own country and people did little to improve the American situation. To make things worse, in light of their distrust in his leadership, he blamed his fellowmen on the weakening of the American spirit (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008). Another contributor to Carter’s tarnished reputation as president is the bad press or his portrayal to the media. The negative media image was in part derived from his uptight

personality, but it was the scandals and controversies which included people that were associated with Carter either personally or professionally that worsened the people's perception of him (Carter " Domestic," 2008).

One of Carter's greatest accomplishments as president is the policy concerning energy (Carter " Domestic," 2008). The United States was extremely dependent on oil during the 1970s, and the oil imports for energy kept increasing every year. Carter vowed to reduce the dependency of energy on oil, and he worked to make it happen. Through his efforts, the Emergency Natural Gas Act was passed to allow the U. S. government to promote natural gas. He also established the Department of Energy, the institution responsible for utilizing the present sources of energy as well as financing studies that would encourage the use of sustainable and environmentally friendly energy sources.

These two are included in the extensive Carter policy on energy which increased the U. S. energy supply while decreasing oil prices. Despite the relevance of the policy, the issue in itself was complicated; the people and the media could not fully grasp the importance of the policy.

What was easier to understand, however, was initial price increase that came with the program's development. This meant that Carter was not credited for the energy-related accomplishments of his administration (Carter " Domestic," 2008). Carter's negative image in the media was caused by certain issues that involved his family and members of his cabinet. Carter's sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, was publicly seen holding the

hands of a known pornographer (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008). Carter’s younger brother, Billy, has long been poked fun of because of “ country-boy image” (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008, para. 15). However, the media’s scrutiny of Billy intensified when it was discovered that he had relations in Libya, the country from which he had received a large sum of money (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008; Stacks, 1992).

Meanwhile, one of the cabinet members that were involved in scandals was Bert Lance, the budget director of the Carter administration and a close friend of the President (Stacks, 1992). He was linked in questionable financial dealings which caused him to be fired (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008; Stacks, 1992). However, even if there were no controversies that rocked the Carter administration, it was his personality that would eventually result in bad press. This is because his stern image made him appear distant and arrogant to the public.

It also did not help that his pictures often misrepresent him (Carter “ Domestic,” 2008). In international relations, the most notable accomplishment of Carter was the Camp David Accords (Carter “ Foreign,” 2008). In the 1970s, there was a conflict between Israel and Egypt. In an effort to re-establish peace, Carter invited the Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and the President of Egypt Anwar Sadat to Camp David. Carter’s efforts paid off as the two nations reached an amicable agreement (Carter “ Foreign,” 2008). Despite the success of the Camp David Accords, it was Carter’s failures in dealing with foreign issues that became more notable. While he was able to restore the Panama Canal to Panama, the

events prior to the restoration caused Carter and his government much embarrassment (Carter " Foreign," 2008; Stacks, 1992).

Carter also failed to properly settle the conflict with Iran regarding the Shah (Carter " Foreign," 2008; Stacks, 1992). Iranians attacked the American embassy and took sixty-six people hostage (Carter " Foreign," 2008). Carter was not a skilled negotiator, and it took awhile before plans of a rescue were made. The initial attempts to save the hostages were a failure, causing the death of several soldiers (Carter " Foreign," 2008). This caused further decline in the already waning popularity of the president.

It appears that the greatness of an American president is based not only in his achievements, but also in the image he portrays. On one hand, Franklin Roosevelt is considered as a great president because his image and his achievements overshadow the struggles and faults of his governance. On the other hand, Jimmy Carter is considered as bad president because his negative image to the media and his failures as a leader overshadows the achievements he had as president.