

Hello, and welcome to Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, NY. Our museum features a wide variety of American art, including folk art, fine art, American Indian art, and photography. This fall, the Fenimore is fortunate to be showcasing the special exhibit, Pete Souza: Two Presidents, One Photographer. Pete Souza was the official White House photographer for two extremely influential presidents on opposite ends of the political spectrum: Republican Ronald Reagan, our 40th president from 1981 to 1989, and Democrat Barack Obama, our 44th president and first African American president, from 2009 to 2016. Souza had unprecedented access while photographing these two men, recording moments that were central not only to their own lives but to the history of the United States and even the entire world. In this program, we'll explore some of these photographs and dig deeper into the moments they capture.

Before his life as a politician, Ronald Reagan was an actor in Hollywood, playing parts in many films in the 1940s and 1950s. He became more and more politically active, and in 1967 he was elected Governor of California as a Republican. He remained in this position until 1975 and the next year he made his first attempt to run for president but he would have to wait for the 1980 campaign for it to become a reality, defeating Jimmy Carter handily in the electoral vote, carrying 44 of the 50 states. Pete Souza became one of Reagan's official white house photographers in 1983, and soon afterwards he found himself recording the events after the deadliest attack against US Marines since world war two. Terrorists bombed the Marines barracks in Beirut, Lebanon during a peacekeeping mission there. 241 US military members were killed. Here we see Reagan and his wife Nancy at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina greeting soldiers injured in the attack. Because it was unclear who masterminded the bombing, the US was unable to retaliate. The president is Commander in Chief of the armed forces, so they are often required to make difficult decisions like this.

Possibly the most well-known tragedy during Reagan's presidency took place on January 28th, 1986, when NASA's space shuttle Challenger exploded in the atmosphere just after launch, killing all seven crew members aboard. I, your narrator, was in first grade when it happened and our school sent us home early afterward. The mission was unique because it included the first school teacher ever chosen to join the shuttle crew, Christa McAuliffe, a high school social studies teacher, but still, by 1986 space shuttle missions were considered so routine that few people watched them live, including the president. Here we see president Reagan and his staff watching a taped recording of the explosion. Reagan was supposed to give his State of the Union address that night, an annual speech where the president gives the Senate and the House of Representatives the legislative agenda for the year, but he postponed it due to the tragedy and instead addressed the nation from the Oval Office, remembering the astronauts.

Diplomacy with other nations is another key focus of the president, and in the mid-1980 the United States was still embroiled in the Cold War, a long period of political tension between the US and the former Soviet Union, a Communist-leaning superpower. Since the end of World War II, the two countries had waged an escalating nuclear arms race, stockpiling nuclear weapons in case of an attack by the other side. In 1986, Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, Iceland, a neutral location, to discuss

the possibility of both countries eliminating their nuclear weapons within a decade. During the meeting Gorbachev asked Reagan for a concession on which the president was unwilling to budge, and the meeting ended abruptly without a deal. This photo by Pete Souza shows the two leaders leaving the meeting, both visibly frustrated. Communist rule in Eastern Europe finally broke down with the crumbling of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolving of the Soviet Union into separate countries in 1991.

Reagan's vice president was George H.W. Bush, who became president from 1989 to 1993. Then, Democrat Bill Clinton held office for eight years, followed by eight years of Republican George W. Bush, George H W Bush's son. In 2008, Democrat Barack Obama became the 44th president of the united states, and Pete Souza returned as the chief official white house photographer. Obama's first major fight wasn't a military one but rather a political one. One of his key campaign promises was a reform of America's health care system in an attempt to provide health insurance to more Americans and to eliminate pre-existing condition rules which prevented many citizens from receiving insurance. Obama wrote and delivered many speeches explaining his plans, including this one which was given to Congress in September 2009, and had changes scribbled on it in pen up to nearly the moment he gave the speech.

On September 11, 2001, a group of terrorists led by Osama bin Laden hijacked passenger aircraft and attacked the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and attempted to attack the Capitol Building. Bin Laden remained on the run for nearly a decade, when US intelligence agencies discovered that he was hiding out in the mountains of Pakistan, and a Navy SEAL raid was planned. In this famous photo on the night of the raid on May 1, 2011, Barack Obama and his national security team including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton watch from the Situation Room of the White House while the raid took place. To quote the photographer: "The tension and anxiety you see etched on their faces was apparent to me throughout the forty plus minutes we were in the room. The only relief came when they heard, "Geronimo KIA" (Geronimo was code for bin Laden; KIA was acronym for killed in action)."

This photograph, also taken in 2011, shows president Obama with First Lady Michelle and their two children, Sasha and Malia, as they visited the former jail cell of Nelson Mandela in Cape Town, South Africa. As a young law student and the only black African student at his South African university, Mandela, began joining and then forming protests against Apartheid, a system of racial segregation in that country that separated public facilities for blacks and whites, criminalized mixed race marriage, and maintained government control to the minority white European population. Mandela was jailed for his protest efforts for eighteen years from 1964 to 1982 in this eight foot by 7 foot jail cell. He remained an icon for anti-Apartheid protesters while in prison, and in the 1980s worldwide pressure for the ending of Apartheid in South Africa grew. Upon the end of Apartheid, Nelson Mandela was elected South Africa's first black president in 1994. As America's first black president and because of this country's own history of segregation, Obama, and his family, surely felt the significance of the visit to Mandela's former cell, and it can be seen in their faces in this photo.

The office of the president of the United States carries with it a great deal of responsibility, not only to the soldiers the Commander in Chief is in charge of and to the 328 million citizens who call this country home, but also to the reputation of the US as a world leader in diplomacy, freedom, and justice. Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama had very different political views but both held a profound respect for the office of the presidency and understood the importance of what it meant to be in that position. Pete Souza's photographs allow future generations to see and study the moments that defined these two men's presidencies, and we hope that you enjoyed this exploration of his pictures and these important events.