



# POWER IN CHECK

CHESS AND THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY

# POWER IN CHECK

Chess has influenced the American presidency since the administration of George Washington. While a game replete with kings and queens might at first seem antithetical to democratic leadership, commanders-in-chief have continually appreciated chess' practical benefits and cultural significance, playing to escape the pressures of a stressful job, hosting successful players from around the world, and utilizing the game as a metaphor for larger national and international issues.

Curated by Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator, and Emily Allred, Curator, World Chess Hall of Fame.



Maker unknown

**American Bicentennial: 1976 vs. 1776**

Date unknown

King size: 5 ½ in.

Plaster

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Harvey and Teddi Robbins

At the same time, chess, with its two opposing sides, provides a perfect medium for artists to illustrate the stakes of elections. One advertisement pairs Edmund Burke's quote "All that is necessary for the forces of evil to prevail in the world is for good men to do nothing," with a photograph of a chess set and a reminder to vote.

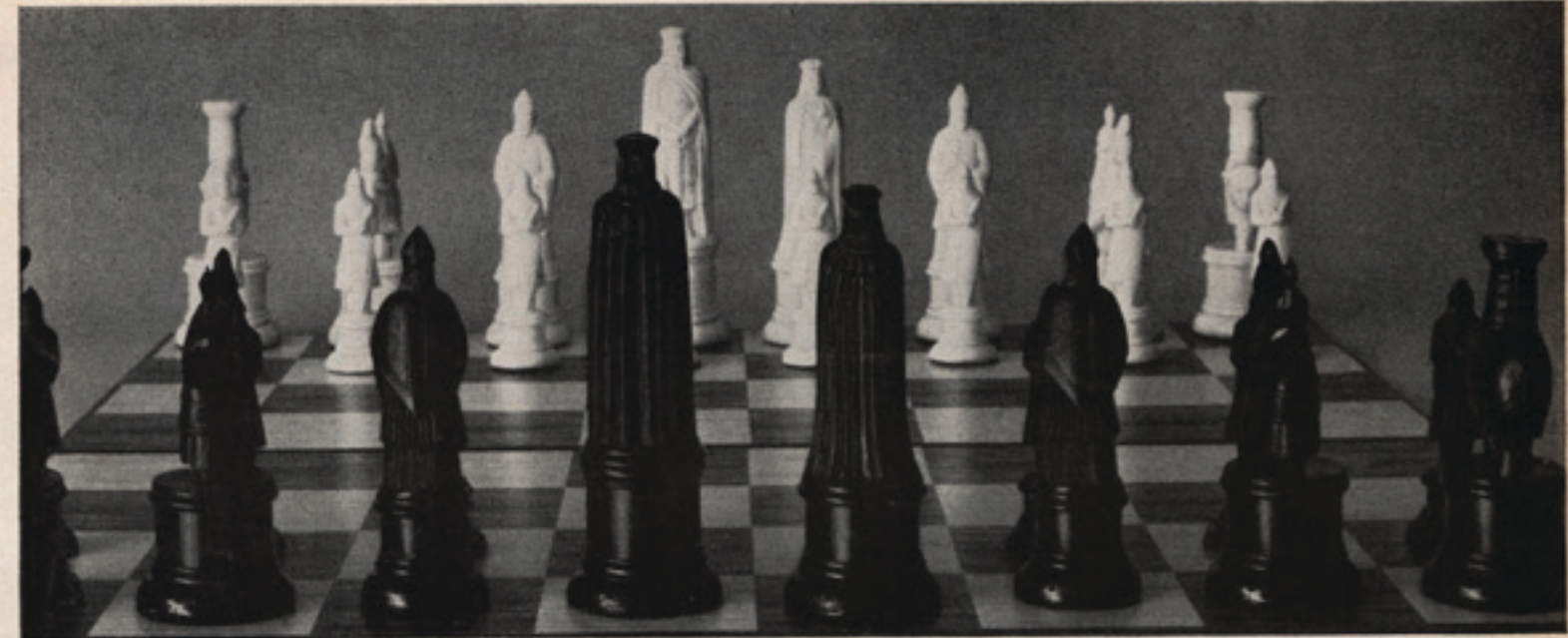
*Remember to Vote*

1958

12 7/8 x 9 1/4 in.

Paper

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame



ERIC HARTMANN—MAGNUM PHOTOS

**“ALL THAT IS NECESSARY  
FOR THE FORCES OF EVIL  
TO WIN IN THE WORLD IS  
FOR ENOUGH GOOD MEN  
TO DO NOTHING”** — EDMUND BURKE —

**VOTE TUESDAY NOV.4**

*This message was created for display on bulletin boards in our agency. It was to remind our people that voting is not a right, not a privilege, but a responsibility of citizenship. It appears here in the belief that others will also find these words of Edmund Burke a strong and timely reminder of a basic principle. YOUNG & RUBICAM, INC. Advertising.*

The World Chess Hall of Fame (WCHOF) has a large collection of politically themed chess sets, illustrating presidents from George Washington to Donald Trump. Many of these are new donations to the WCHOF's collection from Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn, two prolific American chess set collectors. Their donations include sets depicting historic moments, like the historic 2008 election in which Barack Obama became the first African-American person to serve as president. Others catalogue darker moments in the history of the presidency, like the 1972 Watergate scandal chess set.

Maker unknown

**Watergate Chess Set**

c. mid-late 20th century

King size: Nixon: 4 1/2 in.

Ceramic and paint

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn



Maker unknown

**Democrats vs. Republicans**

c. 2000s

King size: Kennedy: 5 1/4 in.

Resin

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame, gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn



Maker unknown

**American Presidents vs. USSR and Russian Politicians**

c. 2016-2020

King size: 2 3/4 in.

Lacquered and painted wood

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame



*Power in Check: Chess and the American Presidency* includes a colorful array of chess sets, cartoons, and photographs illustrating the connections between the game of kings and the presidency. Among the highlights are Doug Anderson's playful chess set illustrating the 1996 election in which Bill Clinton and Bob Dole competed for the presidency. The comical chess set includes the candidates and supporters, illustrating the energy of a campaign. Another highlight is a chess set made from wood from a tree at Thomas Jefferson's home of Monticello, which was believed to have been planted by the president himself. A photograph of the

legendary Polgar sisters—Susan, Sofia, and Judit—meeting with George Bush illustrates some of the chess world's strongest players alongside the United States' commander-in-chief. Visitors to *Power in Check* will also be able to listen to journalist and Grandmaster Lubomir Kavalek's reading of President Richard Nixon's telegram congratulating Bobby Fischer for his victory in the 1972 World Chess Championship. Alongside these artifacts, the exhibition will feature a digital interactive that will allow visitors to learn more about each president's relationship with chess.



Doug Anderson  
**1996 Presidential Election, Bill Clinton vs. Bob Dole**  
1996  
King size: 8 in.  
Clay, ceramic, paint, and glitter  
Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,  
gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn

ZSUZSA  
ZSÓFIA  
JUDIT

# POLGAR

TACTICS



77 chess combinations

László Polgár

*Polgar Tactics: 77 Chess Combinations*

1991

3 3/4 x 2 13/16 x 5/16 in.

Paper

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,  
gift of John Donaldson



Maker unknown

**Russian Politicians vs. American Politicians**

c. 1990s

King size: 2 3/4 in.

Board: 11 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.

Box: 5 3/4 x 11 1/2 x 1 9/16 in.

Wood lacquered and painted

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame



Maker unknown

**Dwight Eisenhower vs. Adlai Stevenson**

1952

King size: Eisenhower: 3 11/16 in.; Stevenson:  
3 9/16 in.

Wood

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,  
gift of Bernice and Floyd Sarisohn



Jack Kightlinger

**President Ronald Reagan and the National  
Elementary School Chess Champions from  
Indianapolis, Indiana**

1983

8 x 9 15/16 in.

Photograph

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,  
gift of John Donaldson



Lois Harlowe

**Civil War Chess Set**

c. mid-late 20th century

King size: Abraham Lincoln: 7 5/16 in.

Ceramic and paint

Collection of the World Chess Hall of Fame,  
gift of Ray Harlowe

# PRESIDENTS WHO PLAY CHESS

1. George Washington (b. 1732-d. 1799)  
First President  
In office: April 30, 1789-March 4, 1797  
Political Party: None

2. John Adams (b. 1735-d. 1826)  
Second President  
In office: March 4, 1797-March 4, 1801  
Political Party: Federalist

3. Thomas Jefferson (b. 1743-d. 1826)  
Third President  
In office: March 4, 1801-March 4, 1809  
Political Party: Democratic-Republican

4. James Madison (b. 1751-d. 1836)  
Fourth President  
In office: March 4, 1809-March 4, 1817  
Political Party: Democratic-Republican

5. James Monroe (b. 1758-d. 1831)  
Fifth President  
In office: March 4, 1817-March 4, 1825  
Political Party: Democratic-Republican

6. John Quincy Adams (b. 1767-d. 1848)  
Sixth President  
In office: March 4, 1825-March 4, 1829  
Political Party: Democratic-Republican

7. Andrew Jackson (b. 1767-d. 1845)  
Seventh President  
In office: March 4, 1829-March 4, 1837  
Political Party: Democratic

8. Millard Fillmore (b. 1800-d. 1874)  
Thirteenth President  
In office: July 9, 1850-March 4, 1853  
Political Party: Whig

9. Abraham Lincoln (b. 1809-d. 1865)  
Sixteenth President  
In office: March 4, 1861-April 15, 1865  
Political Party: Republican

10. Ulysses S. Grant (b. 1822-d. 1885)  
Eighteenth President  
In office: March 4, 1869-March 4, 1877  
Political Party: Republican

11. Rutherford B. Hayes (b. 1822-d. 1893)  
Nineteenth President  
In office: March 4, 1877-March 4, 1881  
Political Party: Republican

12. James A. Garfield (b. 1831-d. 1881)  
Twentieth President  
In office: March 4, 1881-September 19, 1881  
Political Party: Republican

13. Grover Cleveland (b. 1837-d. 1908)  
Twenty-second and Twenty-fourth President  
In office: March 4, 1885-March 4, 1889 (first term)  
March 4, 1893-March 4, 1897 (second term)  
Political Party: Democrat

14. Theodore Roosevelt (b. 1858-d. 1919)  
Twenty-sixth President  
In office: September 14, 1901-March 4, 1909  
Political Party: Republican

15. William Howard Taft (b. 1857-d. 1930)  
Twenty-seventh President  
In office: March 4, 1909-March 4, 1913  
Political Party: Republican

16. Woodrow Wilson (b. 1856-d. 1924)  
Twenty-eighth President  
In office: March 4, 1913-March 4, 1921  
Political Party: Democrat

17. Warren G. Harding (b. 1865-d. 1923)  
Twenty-ninth President  
In office: March 4, 1921-August 2, 1923  
Political Party: Republican

18. Calvin Coolidge (b. 1872-d. 1933)  
Thirtieth President  
In office: August 2, 1923-March 4, 1929  
Political Party: Republican

19. Herbert Hoover (b. 1874-d. 1964)  
Thirty-first President  
In office: March 4, 1929-March 4, 1933  
Political Party: Republican

20. Franklin D. Roosevelt (b. 1882-d. 1945)  
Thirty-second President  
In office: March 4, 1933-April 12, 1945  
Political Party: Democrat

21. Harry S. Truman (b. 1884-d. 1972)  
Thirty-third President  
In office: April 12, 1945-January 20, 1953  
Political Party: Democrat

22. John F. Kennedy (b. 1917-d. 1963)  
Thirty-fifth President  
In office: January 20, 1961-November 22, 1963  
Political Party: Democrat

23. James Carter (b. 1924)  
Thirty-ninth President  
In office: January 20, 1977-January 20, 1981  
Political Party: Democrat

24. William Clinton (b. 1946)  
Forty-second President  
In office: January 20, 1993-January 20, 2001  
Political Party: Democrat

25. Barack Obama (b. 1961)  
Forty-fourth President  
In office: January 20, 2009-January 20, 2017  
Political Party: Democrat

# PRESIDENTS WHO DON'T PLAY CHESS

1. Martin van Buren (b. 1782-d. 1862)  
Eighth President  
In office: March 4, 1837-March 4, 1841  
Political Party: Democratic

2. William Henry Harrison (b. 1773-d. 1841)  
Ninth President  
In office: March 4, 1841-April 4, 1841  
Political Party: Whig

3. John Tyler (b. 1790-d. 1862)  
Tenth President  
In office: April 4, 1841-March 4, 1845  
Political Party: Whig

4. James Polk (b. 1795-d. 1849)  
Eleventh President  
In office: March 4, 1845-March 4, 1849  
Political Party: Democrat

5. Zachary Taylor (b. 1784-d. 1850)  
Twelfth President  
In office: March 4, 1849-July 9, 1850  
Political Party: Whig

6. Franklin Pierce (b. 1804-d. 1869)  
Fourteenth President  
In office: March 4, 1853-March 4, 1857  
Political Party: Democrat

7. James Buchanan (b. 1791-d. 1868)  
Fifteenth President  
In office: March 4, 1857-March 4, 1861  
Political Party: Democrat

8. Andrew Johnson (b. 1808-d. 1875)  
Seventeenth President  
In office: April 15, 1865-March 4, 1869  
Political Party: Democrat

9. Chester A. Arthur (b. 1829-d. 1886)  
Twenty-first President  
In office: September 19, 1881-March 4, 1885  
Political Party: Republican

10. Benjamin Harrison (b. 1833-d. 1901)  
Twenty-third President  
In office: March 4, 1889-March 4, 1893  
Political Party: Republican

11. William McKinley (b. 1843-d. 1901)  
Twenty-fifth President  
In office: March 4, 1897-September 14, 1901  
Political Party: Republican

12. Dwight D. Eisenhower (b. 1890-d. 1969)  
Thirty-fourth President  
In office: January 20, 1953-January 20, 1961  
Political Party: Republican

13. Lyndon B. Johnson (b. 1908-d. 1973)  
Thirty-sixth President  
In office: November 22, 1963-January 20, 1969  
Political Party: Democrat

14. Richard Nixon (b. 1913-d. 1994)  
Thirty-seventh President  
In office: January 20, 1969-August 9, 1974  
Political Party: Republican

15. Gerald Ford (b. 1913-d. 2006)  
Thirty-eighth President  
In office: August 9, 1974-January 20, 1977  
Political Party: Republican

16. Ronald Reagan (b. 1911-d. 2004)  
Fortieth President  
In office: January 20, 1981-January 20, 1989  
Political Party: Republican

17. George H.W. Bush (b. 1924-d. 2018)  
Forty-first President  
In office: January 20, 1989-January 20, 1993  
Political Party: Republican

18. George W. Bush (b. 1946)  
Forty-third President  
In office: January 20, 2001-January 20, 2009  
Political Party: Republican

19. Donald Trump (b. 1946)\*  
Forty-fifth President  
In office: January 20, 2017-Present  
Political Party: Republican

\* No evidence that he is a chess player. Donald Trump made the ceremonial opening move at the 1994 Candidates Tournament.



# POWER IN CHECK:

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The World Chess Hall of Fame acknowledges Dr. Jeanne Cairns Sinquefield and Rex Sinquefield, whose generous support makes our exhibitions possible.

**Special Thanks to:** Floyd and the late Bernice Sarishon, Jordan Aibel and the family of Harvey and Teddi Robbins, Raquel Browne, Barbara and Bill Fordney, Ray Harlowe, the Kasparov Chess Foundation, GM Lubomir Kavalek, The Sinquefield Collection, and Tony Rich and the staff of the Saint Louis Chess Club.

Curated by Shannon Bailey, Chief Curator, and Emily Allred, Curator, World Chess Hall of Fame.

### MIND. ART. EXPERIENCE.

Related programming and a pdf of this brochure are available for download at [worldchesshof.org](http://worldchesshof.org). Donations support our exhibitions, education, outreach, and events.

### World Chess Hall of Fame

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@WorldChessHOF #PowerInCheckChess

The mission of the World Chess Hall of Fame is to educate visitors, fans, players and scholars by collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting the game of chess and its continuing cultural and artistic significance.

The Museum does not discriminate or permit harassment or discrimination on the basis of gender, race, color, national and ethnic origin in the treatment of individuals with respect to employment, or admission or access to Museum facilities, programs or activities.

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