

# The Politics of Boom and Bust

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1920–1932

*We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land. We have not yet reached the goal—but . . . we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation.*

HERBERT HOOVER, 1928

**T**hree Republican presidents—Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover—steered the nation on the roller-coaster ride of the 1920s, a thrilling ascent from the depths of post-World War I recession to breathtaking heights of prosperity, followed by a terrifying crash into the Great Depression. In a retreat from progressive reform, Republicans sought to serve the public good less by direct government action and more through cooperation with big business. Some corrupt officials served themselves as well, exploiting public resources for personal profit. Meanwhile, the United States retreated from its brief internationalist fling during World War I and resumed with a vengeance its traditional foreign policy of military unpreparedness and political isolationism.

## The Republican “Old Guard” Returns

Warren G. Harding, inaugurated in 1921, *looked* presidential. With erect figure, broad shoulders, high forehead, bushy eyebrows, and graying hair, he was one of the best-liked men of his generation. An easygoing, warm-handed backslapper, he exuded graciousness and love of people. So kindly was his nature that he would brush off ants rather than crush them.

Yet the charming, smiling exterior concealed a weak, inept interior. With a mediocre mind, Harding quickly found himself beyond his depth in the presidency. “God! What a job!” was his anguished cry on one occasion.



Harding, like Grant, was unable to detect moral halitosis in his evil associates, and he was soon surrounded by his poker-playing, shirt-sleeved cronies of the “Ohio Gang.” “A good guy,” Harding was “one of the boys.” He hated to hurt people’s feelings, especially those of his friends, by saying no, and designing political leeches capitalized on this weakness. The difference between George Washington and Warren Harding, ran a current quip, was that while Washington could not tell a lie, Harding could not tell a liar. He “was not a bad man,” said one Washington observer. “He was just a slob.”

Candidate Harding, who admitted his scanty mental furnishings, had promised to gather about him the “best minds” of the party. Charles Evans Hughes—masterful, imperious, incisive, brilliant—brought to the position of secretary of state a dominating if somewhat conservative leadership. The new secretary of the Treasury was a lean and elderly Pittsburgh aluminum king, Andrew W. Mellon, multimillionaire collector of the paintings that are now displayed in Washington as his gift to the nation. Chubby-faced Herbert Hoover, famed feeder of the Belgians and wartime food administrator, became secretary of commerce. An energetic businessman and engineer, he raised his second-rate cabinet post to first-rate importance, especially in drumming up foreign trade for U.S. manufacturers.

But the “best minds” of the cabinet were largely offset by two of the worst. Senator Albert B. Fall of New Mexico, a scheming anticonservationist, was appointed secretary of the interior. As guardian of the nation’s natural resources, he resembled the



wolf hired to protect the sheep. Harry M. Daugherty, a small-town lawyer but a big-time crook in the “Ohio Gang,” was supposed to prosecute wrongdoers as attorney general.

### **GOP Reaction at the Throttle**

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Well intentioned but weak-willed, Harding was a perfect “front” for enterprising industrialists. A McKinley-style old order settled back into place with a heavy thud at war’s end, crushing the reform seedlings that had sprouted in the progressive era. A nest-feathering crowd moved into Washington and proceeded to hoodwink Harding, whom many regarded as an “amiable boob.”

This new Old Guard hoped to improve on the old business doctrine of *laissez-faire*. Their plea was not simply for government to keep hands off business, but for government to help guide business along the path to profits. They subtly and effectively achieved their ends by putting the courts and the administrative bureaus into the safekeeping of fellow stand-patters for the duration of the decade.

The Supreme Court was a striking example of this trend. Harding lived less than three years as president, but he appointed four of the nine justices. Several of his choices were or became deep-dyed reactionaries, and they buttressed the dike against popular currents for nearly two decades. Harding’s fortunate choice for chief justice was ex-president Taft, who not only performed his duties

ably but surprisingly was more liberal than some of his cautious associates.

In the first years of the 1920s, the Supreme Court axed progressive legislation. It killed a federal child-labor law, stripped away many of labor's hard-won gains, and rigidly restricted government intervention in the economy. In the landmark case of *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* (1923), the Court reversed its own reasoning in *Muller v. Oregon* (see p. 670–672), which had declared women to be deserving of special protection in the workplace, and invalidated a minimum-wage law for women. Its strained ruling was that because women now had the vote (Nineteenth Amendment), they were the legal equals of men and could no longer be protected by special legislation. The contradictory premises of the *Muller* and *Adkins* cases framed a debate over gender differences that would continue for the rest of the century: were women sufficiently different from men that they merited special legal and social treatment, or were they effectively equal in the eyes of the law and therefore undeserving of special protections and preferences? (An analogous debate over *racial* differences haunted affirmative-action policies later in the century.)

Corporations, under Harding, could once more relax and expand. Antitrust laws were often ignored, circumvented, or feebly enforced by friendly prosecutors in the attorney general's office. The Interstate Commerce Commission, to single out one agency, came to be dominated by men who were personally sympathetic to the managers of the railroads. Harding reactionaries might well have boasted, "We care not what laws the Democrats pass as long as we are permitted to administer them."

Big industrialists, striving to reduce the rigors of competition, now had a free hand to set up trade associations. Cement manufacturers, for example,

would use these agencies to agree upon standardization of product, publicity campaigns, and a united front in dealing with the railroads and labor. Although many of these associations ran counter to the spirit of existing antitrust legislation, their formation was encouraged by Secretary Hoover. His sense of engineering efficiency led him to condemn the waste resulting from cutthroat competition, and his commitment to voluntary cooperation led him to urge businesses to regulate themselves rather than be regulated by big government.

## The Aftermath of War

Wartime government controls on the economy were swiftly dismantled. The War Industries Board disappeared with almost indecent haste. With its passing, progressive hopes for more government regulation of big business evaporated.

Washington likewise returned the railroads to private management in 1920. Reformers had hoped that wartime government operation of the lines might lead to their permanent nationalization. Instead Congress passed the Esch-Cummins Transportation Act of 1920, which encouraged private consolidation of the railroads and pledged the Interstate Commerce Commission to guarantee their profitability. The new philosophy was not to save the country from the railroads, as in the days of the Populists, but to save the railroads for the country.

The federal government also tried to pull up anchor and get out of the shipping business. The Merchant Marine Act of 1920 authorized the Shipping Board, which controlled about fifteen hundred vessels, to dispose of much of the hastily built wartime fleet at bargain-basement prices. The board operated the remaining vessels without conspicuous success. Under the La Follette Seaman's Act of 1915, American shipping could not thrive in competition with foreigners, who all too often provided their crews with wretched food and starvation wages.

Labor, suddenly deprived of its wartime crutch of friendly government support, limped along badly in the postwar decade. A bloody strike in the steel industry was ruthlessly broken in 1919, partly by exploiting ethnic and racial divisions among the steelworkers and partly by branding the strikers as dangerous "reds." The Railway Labor Board, a successor body to the wartime labor boards, ordered a

*Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841–1935), wryly dissenting in the Adkins case, said,*

"It would need more than the Nineteenth Amendment to convince me that there are no differences between men and women, or that legislation cannot take those differences into account."

wage cut of 12 percent in 1922, provoking a two-month strike. It ended when Attorney General Daugherty, who fully shared Harding's big-business bias, clamped on the strikers one of the most sweeping injunctions in American history. Unions wilted in this hostile political environment, and membership shriveled by nearly 30 percent between 1920 and 1930.

Needy veterans were among the few nonbusiness groups to reap lasting gains from the war. Congress in 1921 generously created the Veterans Bureau, authorized to operate hospitals and provide vocational rehabilitation for the disabled.

Veterans quickly organized into pressure groups. The American Legion had been founded in Paris in 1919 by Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Legionnaires met periodically to renew old hardships and let off steam in good-natured horseplay. The legion soon became distinguished for its militant patriotism, rock-ribbed conservatism, and zealous antiradicalism.

The legion also became notorious for its aggressive lobbying for veterans' benefits. The chief grievance of the former "doughboys" was monetary—they wanted their "dough." The former servicemen demanded "adjusted compensation" to make up for the wages they had "lost" when they turned in their factory overalls for military uniforms during the Great War.

Critics denounced this demand as a holdup "bonus," but the millions of veterans deployed heavy political artillery. They browbeat Congress into passing a bonus bill in 1922, which Harding promptly vetoed. Re-forming their lines, the repulsed veterans gathered for a final attack. In 1924 Congress again hoisted the white flag and passed the Adjusted Compensation Act. It gave every former soldier a paid-up insurance policy due in twenty years—adding about \$3.5 billion to the total cost of the war. Penny-pinching Calvin Coolidge sternly vetoed the measure, but Congress overrode him, leaving the veterans with their loot.

### **America Seeks Benefits Without Burdens**

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Making peace with the fallen foe was the most pressing problem left on Harding's doorstep. The United States, having rejected the Treaty of Ver-

sailles, was still technically at war with Germany, Austria, and Hungary nearly three years after the armistice. Peace was finally achieved by lone-wolf tactics. In July 1921 Congress passed a simple joint resolution that declared the war officially ended.

Isolation was enthroned in Washington. The Harding administration, with the Senate "irreconcilables" holding a hatchet over its head, continued to regard the League of Nations as a thing unclean. Harding at first refused even to support the League's world health program. But the new world body was much too important to be completely ignored. "Unofficial observers" were sent to its seat in Geneva, Switzerland, to hang around like detectives shadowing a suspected criminal.

Harding could not completely turn his back on the outside world, especially the Middle East, where a sharp rivalry developed between America and Britain for oil-drilling concessions. Remembering that the Allies had floated to victory on a flood of oil, experts recognized that liquid "black gold" would be as necessary as blood in the battles of tomorrow. Secretary Hughes eventually secured for American

	Battleships	Battleship Tonnage	Aircraft Carrier Tonnage
U.S.	18	525,000	135,000
Britain	22	525,000	135,000
Japan	10	315,000	81,000
France	7	175,000	60,000
Italy	6	175,000	60,000

**Limits Imposed by Washington Conference, 1921–1922** The pledge of the British and Americans to refrain from fortifying their Far Eastern possessions, while Japan was allowed to fortify its possessions, was the key to the naval limitation treaty. The United States and Great Britain thus won a temporary victory but later paid a horrendous price when they had to dislodge the well-entrenched Japanese from the Pacific in World War II.

oil companies the right to share in the exploitation of the sandy region’s oil riches.

Disarmament was one international issue on which Harding, after much indecision, finally seized the initiative. He was prodded by businesspeople unwilling to dig deeper into their pockets for money to finance the ambitious naval building program started during the war. A deadly contest was shaping up with Britain and Japan, which watched with alarm as the oceans filled with American vessels. Britain still commanded the world’s largest navy, but the clatter of American riveters proclaimed that the United States would soon overtake it.

Public agitation in America, fed by these worries, brought about the headline-making Washington “Disarmament” Conference in 1921–1922. Invitations went to all the major naval powers—except Bolshevik Russia, whose government the United States refused officially to recognize. The double agenda included naval disarmament and the situation in the Far East.

At the outset Secretary Hughes startled the delegates, who were expecting the usual diplomatic fence-straddling, with a comprehensive, concrete plan for declaring a ten-year “holiday” on construction of battleships and even for scrapping some of the huge dreadnoughts already built. He proposed that the scaled-down navies of America and Britain should enjoy parity in battleships and aircraft carriers, with Japan on the small end of a 5:5:3 ratio. This arrangement sounded to the sensitive Japanese ambassador like “Rolls-Royce, Rolls-Royce, Ford.”

Complex bargaining followed in the wake of Hughes’s proposals. The Five-Power Naval Treaty of

1922 embodied Hughes’s ideas on ship ratios, but only after face-saving compensation was offered to the insecure Japanese. The British and Americans both conceded that they would refrain from fortifying their Far Eastern possessions, including the Philippines. The Japanese were not subjected to such restraints in their possessions. In addition, a Four-Power Treaty replaced the twenty-year-old Anglo-Japanese alliance. The new pact bound Britain, Japan, France, and the United States to preserve the status quo in the Pacific—another concession to the jumpy Japanese. Finally, the Washington Conference gave chaotic China—“the Sick Man of the Far East”—a shot in the arm with the Nine-Power Treaty of 1922, whose signatories agreed to nail wide open the Open Door in China.

When the final gavel banged, the Hardingites boasted with much fanfare—and some justification—of their globe-shaking achievement in disarmament. But their satisfaction was somewhat illusory. No restrictions had been placed on small warships, and the other powers churned ahead with the construction of cruisers, destroyers, and

*As for the burdens of armament, the New York Independent, a prominent magazine, noted in January 1921,*

*“[The country is] more afraid of the tax collector than of any more distant foe.”*

submarines, while penny-pinching Uncle Sam lagged dangerously behind. Congress also pointedly declared that it was making no commitment to the use of armed force or any kind of joint action when it ratified the Four-Power Treaty. These reservations, in effect, rendered the treaty a dead letter. Ominously, the American people seemed content to rely for their security on words and wishful thinking rather than on weapons and hardheaded realism.

A similar sentimentalism welled up later in the decade, when Americans clamored for the “outlawry of war.” The conviction spread that if quarreling nations would only take the pledge to foreswear war as an instrument of national policy, swords could be beaten into plowshares. Calvin Coolidge’s secretary of state, Frank B. Kellogg, who later won the Nobel Peace Prize for his role, was lukewarm about the idea. But after petitions bearing more than 2 million signatures cascaded into Washington, he signed with the French foreign minister in 1928 the famed Kellogg-Briand Pact. Officially known as the Pact of Paris, it was ultimately ratified by sixty-two nations.

This new parchment peace was delusory in the extreme. Defensive wars were still permitted, and what scheming aggressor could not cook up an excuse of self-defense? Lacking both muscles and teeth, the pact was a diplomatic derelict—and virtually useless in a showdown. Yet it accurately—and dangerously—reflected the American mind in the 1920s, which was all too willing to be lulled into a false sense of security. This mood took even deeper hold in the ostrichlike neutralism of the 1930s.

### **Hiking the Tariff Higher**

A comparable lack of realism afflicted foreign economic policy in the 1920s. Businesspeople, shortsightedly obsessed with the dazzling prospects in the prosperous home market, sought to keep that market to themselves by flinging up insurmountable tariff walls around the United States. They were spurred into action by their fear of a flood of cheap goods from recovering Europe, especially during the brief but sharp recession of 1920–1921.

In 1922 Congress passed the comprehensive Fordney-McCumber Tariff Law. Glib lobbyists once more descended upon Washington and helped boost schedules from the average of 27 percent under Wilson’s Underwood Tariff of 1913 to an aver-

age of 38.5 percent, which was almost as high as Taft’s Payne-Aldrich Tariff of 1909. (See the Appendix.) Duties on farm produce were increased, and the principle was proclaimed that the general rates were designed to equalize the cost of American and foreign production. A promising degree of flexibility was introduced for the first time, when the president was authorized, with the advice of the fact-finding Tariff Commission, to reduce or increase duties by as much as 50 percent.

Presidents Harding and Coolidge, true to their big-industry sympathies, were far more friendly to tariff increases than to reductions. In six years they authorized thirty-two upward changes, including on their list vital commodities like dairy products, chemicals, and pig iron. During the same period, the White House ordered only five reductions. These included mill feed and such trifling items as bobwhite quail, paintbrush handles, phenol, and cresylic acid.

The high-tariff course thus charted by the Republican regimes set off an ominous chain reaction. European producers felt the squeeze, for the American tariff walls prolonged their postwar chaos. An impoverished Europe needed to sell its manufactured goods to the United States, particularly if it hoped to achieve economic recovery and to pay its huge war debt to Washington. America needed to give foreign nations a chance to make a profit from it so that they could buy its manufactured articles and repay debts. International trade, Americans were slow to learn, is a two-way street. In general, they could not sell to others in quantity unless they bought from them in quantity—or lent them more U.S. dollars.

Erecting tariff walls was a game that two could play. The American example spurred European nations, throughout the feverish 1920s, to pile up higher barriers themselves. These artificial obstacles were doubly bad: they hurt not only American-made goods but the products of European countries as well. The whole vicious circle further deepened the international economic distress, providing one more rung on the ladder by which Adolf Hitler scrambled to power.

### **The Stench of Scandal**

The loose morality and get-rich-quickism of the Harding era manifested themselves spectacularly in a series of scandals.

Early in 1923 Colonel Charles R. Forbes, one-time deserter from the army, was caught with his hand in the till and resigned as head of the Veterans Bureau. An appointee of the gullible Harding, he and his accomplices looted the government to the tune of about \$200 million, chiefly in connection with the building of veterans' hospitals. He was sentenced to two years in a federal penitentiary.

Most shocking of all was the Teapot Dome scandal, an affair that involved priceless naval oil reserves at Teapot Dome (Wyoming) and Elk Hills (California). In 1921 the slippery secretary of the interior, Albert B. Fall, induced his careless colleague, the secretary of the navy, to transfer these valuable properties to the Interior Department. Harding indiscreetly signed the secret order. Fall then quietly leased the lands to oilmen Harry F. Sinclair and Edward L. Doheny, but not until he had received a bribe ("loan") of \$100,000 from Doheny and about three times that amount in all from Sinclair.

Teapot Dome, no tempest in a teapot, finally came to a whistling boil. Details of the crooked transaction gradually began to leak out in March 1923, two years after Harding took office. Fall, Sinclair, and Doheny were indicted the next year, but the case dragged through the courts until 1929. Finally Fall was found guilty of taking a bribe and was sentenced to one year in jail. By a curious quirk of justice, the

two bribe givers were acquitted while the bribe taker was convicted, although Sinclair served several months in jail for having "shadowed" jurors and for refusing to testify before a Senate committee.

The oily smudge from Teapot Dome polluted the prestige of the Washington government. Right-thinking citizens wondered what was going on when public officials could sell out the nation's vital resources, especially those reserved for the U.S. Navy. The acquittal of Sinclair and Doheny undermined faith in the courts, while giving further currency to the cynical sayings, "You can't put a million dollars in jail" and "In America everyone is assumed guilty until proven rich."

Still more scandals erupted. Persistent reports as to the underhanded doings of Attorney General Daugherty prompted a Senate investigation in 1924 of the illegal sale of pardons and liquor permits. Forced to resign, the accused official was tried in 1927 but was released after a jury twice failed to agree. During the trial Daugherty hid behind the trousers of the now-dead Harding by implying that persistent probing might uncover crookedness in the White House.

Harding was mercifully spared the full revelation of these iniquities, though his worst suspicions were aroused. While news of the scandals was beginning to break, he embarked upon a speech-making tour across the country all the way to Alaska. On the return trip, he died in San Francisco, on August 2, 1923, of pneumonia and thrombosis. His death may have been hastened by a broken heart resulting from the disloyalty of designing friends. Mourning millions, not yet fully aware of the graft in Washington, expressed genuine sorrow.

The brutal fact is that Harding was not a strong enough man for the presidency—as he himself privately admitted. Such was his weakness that he tolerated people and conditions that subjected the Republic to its worst disgrace since the days of President Grant.

### **"Silent Cal" Coolidge**

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News of Harding's death was sped to Vice President Coolidge, then visiting at his father's New England farmhouse. By the light of two kerosene lamps, the elder Coolidge, a justice of the peace, used the old family Bible to administer the presidential oath to his son.

This homespun setting was symbolic of Coolidge. Quite unlike Harding, the stern-faced Vermonter, with his thin nose and tightly set lips, embodied the New England virtues of honesty, morality, industry, and frugality. As a youth, his father reported, he seemed to get more sap out of a

maple tree than did any of the other boys. Practicing a rigid economy in both money and words, “Silent Cal” came to be known in Washington conversational circles for his brilliant flashes of silence. His dour, serious visage prompted the acid observation that he had been “weaned on a pickle.”

Coolidge seemed to be a crystallization of the commonplace. Painfully shy, he was blessed with only mediocre powers of leadership. He would occasionally display a dry wit in private, but his speeches, delivered in a nasal New England twang, were invariably boring. A staunch apostle of the status quo, he was no knight in armor riding forth to tilt at wrongs. His only horse, in fact, was an electric-powered steed on which he took his exercise. True to Republican philosophy, he became the “high priest of the great god Business.” He believed that “the man who builds a factory builds a temple” and that “the man who works there worships there.”

The hands-off temperament of “Cautious Cal” Coolidge suited the times perfectly. His thrifty nature caused him to sympathize fully with Secretary of the Treasury Mellon’s efforts to reduce both taxes and debts. No foe of industrial bigness, he let business have its head. “Coolidge luck” held during his five and a half prosperity-blessed years.

Ever a profile in caution, Coolidge slowly gave the Harding regime a badly needed moral fumigation. Teapot Dome had scalded the Republican party badly, but so transparently honest was the vinegary Vermonter that the scandalous oil did not rub off on him. The public, though at first shocked by the scandal, quickly simmered down, and an alarming tendency developed in certain quarters to excuse some of the wrongdoers on the grounds that “they had gotten away with it.” Some critics even condemned the government prosecutors for continuing to rock the boat. America’s moral sensibility was evidently being dulled by prosperity.

### **Frustrated Farmers**

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Sun-bronzed farmers were caught squarely in a boom-or-bust cycle in the postwar decade. While the fighting had raged, they had raked in money hand over gnarled fist; by the spring of 1920, the price of wheat had shot up to an incredible \$3 a bushel. But peace brought an end to government-guaranteed high prices and to massive purchases by



other nations, as foreign production reentered the stream of world commerce.

Machines also threatened to plow the farmers under an avalanche of their own overabundant crops. The gasoline-engine tractor was working a revolution on American farms. This steel mule was to cultivation and sowing what the McCormick reaper was to harvesting. Blue-denimed farmers no longer had to plod after the horse-drawn plow with high-footed gait. They could sit erect on their chugging mechanized chariots and turn under and harrow many acres in a single day. They could grow bigger crops on larger areas, using fewer horses and hired hands. The wartime boom had encouraged them to bring vast new tracts under cultivation, especially in the “wheat belt” of the upper Midwest. But such improved efficiency and expanded agricultural acreage helped to pile up more price-dampening surpluses. A withering depression swept through agricultural districts in the 1920s, when one farm in four was sold for debt or taxes. As a plaintive song of the period ran,

*No use talkin', any man's beat,  
With 'leven-cent cotton and forty-cent meat.*

Schemes abounded for bringing relief to the hard-pressed farmers. A bipartisan “farm bloc” from the agricultural states coalesced in Congress in 1921

and succeeded in driving through some helpful laws. Noteworthy was the Capper-Volstead Act, which exempted farmers’ marketing cooperatives from antitrust prosecution. The farm bloc’s favorite proposal was the McNary-Haugen Bill, pushed energetically from 1924 to 1928. It sought to keep agricultural prices high by authorizing the government to buy up surpluses and sell them abroad. Government losses were to be made up by a special tax on the farmers. Congress twice passed the bill, but frugal Coolidge twice vetoed it. Farm prices stayed down, and farmers’ political temperatures stayed high, reaching fever pitch in the election of 1924.

### **A Three-Way Race for the White House in 1924**

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Self-satisfied Republicans, chanting “Keep Cool and Keep Coolidge,” nominated “Silent Cal” for the presidency at their convention in Cleveland in the simmering summer of 1924. Squabbling Democrats had more difficulty choosing a candidate when they met in New York’s sweltering Madison Square Garden. Reflecting many of the cultural tensions of the decade, the party was hopelessly split between

“wets” and “drys,” urbanites and farmers, Fundamentalists and Modernists, northern liberals and southern stand-patters, immigrants and old-stock Americans. In one symptomatic spasm of discord, the conventioners failed by just one vote to pass a resolution condemning the Ku Klux Klan.

Deadlocked for an unprecedented 102 ballots, the convention at last turned wearily, sweatily, and unenthusiastically to John W. Davis. A wealthy corporation lawyer connected with the Wall Street banking house of J. P. Morgan and Company, the polished nominee was no less conservative than cautious Calvin Coolidge.

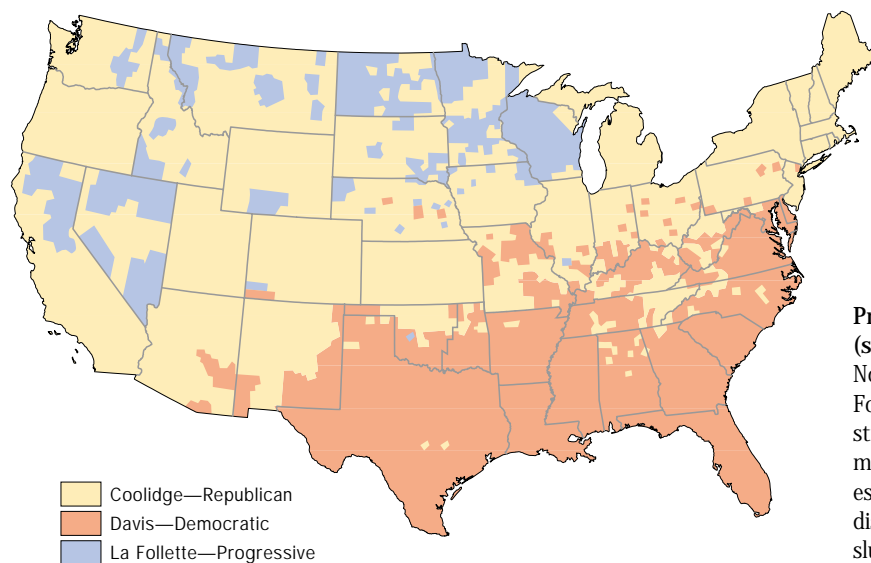
The field was now wide open for a liberal candidate. The white-pompadoured Senator (“Fighting Bob”) La Follette from Wisconsin, perennial aspirant to the presidency and now sixty-nine years of age, sprang forward to lead a new Progressive grouping. He gained the endorsement of the American Federation of Labor and enjoyed the support of the shrinking Socialist party, but his major constituency was made up of the price-pinched farmers. La Follette’s new Progressive party, fielding only a presidential ticket, with no candidates for local office, was a head without a body. It proved to be only a shadow of the robust Progressive coalition of prewar days. Its platform called for government ownership of railroads and relief for farmers, lashed out at monopoly and antilabor injunctions, and urged a constitutional amendment to limit the Supreme Court’s power to invalidate laws passed by Congress.

La Follette turned in a respectable showing, polling nearly 5 million votes. But “Cautious Cal” and the oil-smeared Republicans slipped easily back into office, overwhelming Davis, 15,718,211 to 8,385,283. The electoral count stood at 382 for Coolidge, 136 for Davis, and 13 for La Follette, all from his home state of Wisconsin (see the map below). As the so-called conscience of the calloused 1920s, La Follette injected a badly needed liberal tonic into a decade drugged on prosperity. But times were too good for too many for his reforming message to carry the day.

### Foreign-Policy Floundering

Isolation continued to reign in the Coolidge era. Despite presidential proddings, the Senate proved unwilling to allow America to adhere to the World Court—the judicial arm of the still-suspect League of Nations. Coolidge only halfheartedly—and unsuccessfully—pursued further naval disarmament after the loudly trumpeted agreements worked out at the Washington Conference in 1922.

A glaring exception to the United States’ inward-looking indifference to the outside world was the armed interventionism in the Caribbean and Central America. American troops were withdrawn (after an eight-year stay) from the Dominican Republic in 1924, but they remained in Haiti



**Presidential Election of 1924**  
(showing popular vote by county)  
Note the concentration of La Follette’s votes in the old Populist strongholds of the Midwest and the mountain states. His ticket did especially well in the grain-growing districts battered by the postwar slump in agricultural prices.

from 1914 to 1934. President Coolidge in 1925 briefly removed American bayonets from troubled Nicaragua, where they had glinted intermittently since 1909, but in 1926 he sent them back, five thousand strong, and they stayed until 1933. American oil companies clamored for a military expedition to Mexico in 1926 when the Mexican government began to assert its sovereignty over oil resources. Coolidge kept cool and defused the Mexican crisis with some skillful diplomatic negotiating. But his mailed-fist tactics elsewhere bred sore resentments south of the Rio Grande, where angry critics loudly assailed “*yanqui* imperialism.”

Overshadowing all other foreign-policy problems in the 1920s was the knotty issue of international debts, a complicated tangle of private loans, Allied war debts, and German reparations payments. Almost overnight, World War I had reversed the international financial position of the United States. In 1914 America had been a debtor nation in the sum of about \$4 billion; by 1922 it had become a creditor nation in the sum of about \$16 billion. The almighty dollar rivaled the pound sterling as the financial giant of the world. American investors loaned some \$10 billion to foreigners in the 1920s, though even this huge river of money could not fully

refloat the war-shelled world economy. Americans, bewitched by lucrative investment opportunities in their domestic economy, did not lend nearly so large a fraction of their national income overseas as had the British in the prewar period.

The key knot in the debt tangle was the \$10 billion that the U.S. Treasury had loaned to the Allies during and immediately after the war. Uncle Sam held their IOUs—and he wanted to be paid. The Allies, in turn, protested that the demand for repayment was grossly unfair. The French and the British pointed out, with much justice, that they had held up a wall of flesh and bone against the common foe until America the Unready had finally entered the fray. America, they argued, should write off its loans as war costs, just as the Allies had been tragically forced to write off the lives of millions of young men. The debtors also complained that the real effect of their borrowed dollars had been to fuel the boom in the already roaring wartime economy in America, where nearly all their purchases had been made. And the final straw, protested the Europeans, was that America’s postwar tariff walls made it almost impossible for them to sell the goods to earn the dollars to pay their debts.

### **Unraveling the Debt Knot**

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America’s tightfisted insistence on getting its money back helped to harden the hearts of the Allies against conquered Germany. The French and the British demanded that the Germans make enormous reparations payments, totaling some \$32 billion, as compensation for war-inflicted damages. The Allies hoped to settle their debts to the United States with the money received from Germany. The French, seeking to extort lagging reparations payments, sent troops into Germany’s industrialized Ruhr Valley in 1923. Berlin responded by permitting its currency to inflate astronomically. At one point in October 1923, a loaf of bread cost 480 million marks, or about \$120 million in preinflation money. German society teetered on the brink of mad anarchy, and the whole international house of financial cards threatened to flutter down in colossal chaos.

Sensible statesmen now urged that war debts and reparations alike be drastically scaled down or even canceled outright. But to Americans such proposals smacked of “welshing” on a debt. “We went

across, but they won't come across," cried a prominent politician. Scroogelike, Calvin Coolidge turned aside suggestions of debt cancellation with a typically terse question: "They hired the money, didn't they?" The Washington administration proved especially unrealistic in its dogged insistence that there was no connection whatever between debts and reparations.

Reality finally dawned in the Dawes Plan of 1924. Negotiated largely by Charles Dawes, about to be nominated as Coolidge's running mate, it rescheduled German reparations payments and opened the way for further American private loans to Germany. The whole financial cycle now became still more complicated, as U.S. bankers loaned money to Germany, Germany paid reparations to France and Britain, and the former Allies paid war debts to the United States. Clearly the source of this monetary merry-go-round was the flowing well of American credit. When that well dried up after the great crash in 1929, the jungle of international finance quickly turned into a desert. President Herbert Hoover declared a one-year debt moratorium in 1931, and before long all the debtors had defaulted—except "honest little Finland," which struggled along making payments until the last of its debt was discharged in 1976.

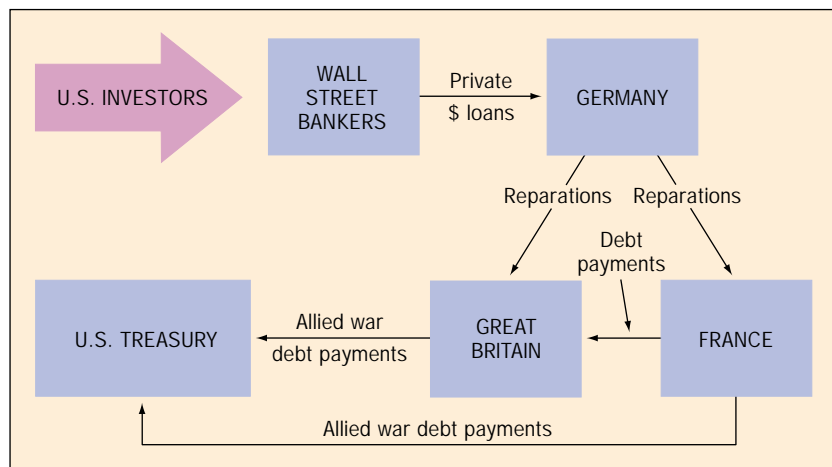
The United States never did get its money, but it harvested a bumper crop of ill will. Irate French crowds on occasion attacked American tourists, and throughout Europe Uncle Sam was caricatured as Uncle Shylock, greedily whetting his knife for the

last pound of Allied flesh. The bad taste left in American mouths by the whole sorry episode contributed powerfully to the storm-cellar neutrality legislation passed by Congress in the 1930s.

## **The Triumph of Herbert Hoover, 1928**

Poker-faced Calvin Coolidge, the tight-lipped "Sphinx of the Potomac," bowed out of the 1928 presidential race when he announced, "I do not choose to run." His logical successor was super-Secretary (of Commerce) Herbert Hoover, unpopular with the political bosses but the much-admired darling of the masses, who asked, "Hoo but Hoover?" He was nominated on a platform that clucked contentedly over both prosperity and prohibition.

Still-squabbling Democrats nominated Alfred E. Smith, four-time governor of New York and one of the most colorful personalities in American politics. He was a wisecracking, glad-handing liberal who suffered from several fatal political handicaps. "Al(cohol)" Smith was soakingly and drippingly "wet" at a time when the country was still devoted to the "noble experiment" of prohibition. To a nation that had only recently moved to the city, native New Yorker Smith seemed too abrasively urban. He was a Roman Catholic in an overwhelmingly Protestant—and unfortunately prejudiced—land. Many dry, rural, and Fundamentalist Dem-



### Aspects of the Financial Merry-go-round, 1921–1933

Great Britain, with a debt of over \$4 billion owed to the U.S. Treasury, had a huge stake in proposals for inter-Allied debt cancellation, but France's stake was even larger. Less prosperous than Britain in the 1920s and more battered by the war, which had been fought on its soil, France owed nearly \$3.5 billion to the United States and additional billions to Britain.

ocrats gagged on his candidacy, and they saddled the wet Smith with a dry running mate and a dry platform. Jauntily sporting a brown derby and a big cigar, Smith, "the Happy Warrior," tried to carry alcohol on one shoulder and water on the other. But his effort was doomed from the start.

Radio figured prominently in this campaign for the first time, and it helped Hoover more than Smith. The *New Yorker* had more personal sparkle, but he could not project it through the radio (which in his Lower East Side twang he pronounced "radd-dee-o," grating on the ears of many listeners). Iowa-born Hoover, with his double-breasted dignity, came out of the microphone better than he went in. Decrying un-American "socialism" and preaching "rugged individualism," he sounded both grass-rootish and statesmanlike.

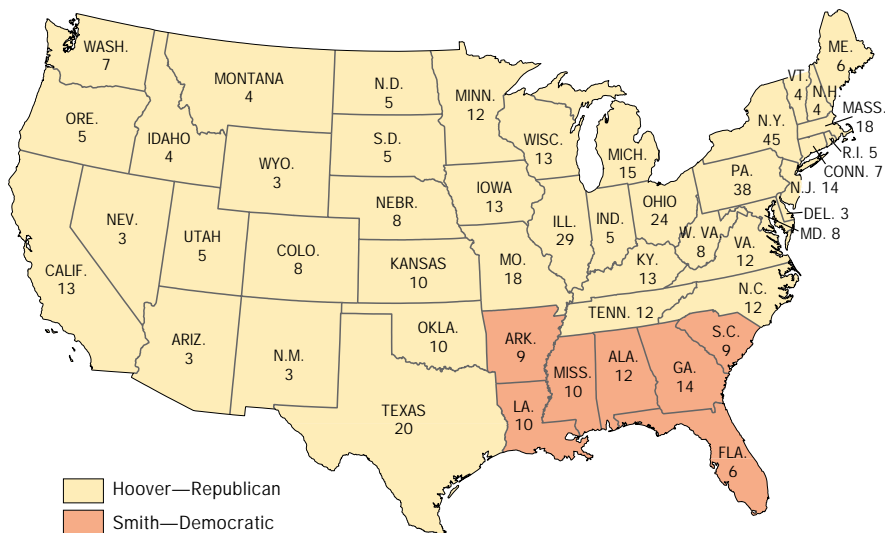
Chubby-faced, ruddy-complexioned Herbert Hoover, with his painfully high starched collar, was a living example of the American success story and an intriguing mixture of two centuries. As a poor orphan boy who had worked his way through Stanford University, he had absorbed the nineteenth-century copybook maxims of industry, thrift, and self-reliance. As a fabulously successful mining engineer and a brilliant businessman, he had honed to a high degree the efficiency doctrines of the progressive era.

A small-town boy from Iowa and Oregon, he had traveled and worked abroad extensively. Long years of self-imposed exile had deepened his determination, abundantly supported by national tradition, to avoid foreign entanglements. His experiences abroad had further strengthened his faith in American individualism, free enterprise, and small government.

With his unshaken dignity and Quaker restraint, Hoover was a far cry from the typical backslapping politician. Though a citizen of the world and laden with international honors, he was quite shy, standoffish, and stiff. Personally colorless in public, he had been accustomed during much of his life to giving orders to subordinates and not to soliciting votes. Never before elected to public office, he was thin-skinned in the face of criticism, and he did not adapt readily to the necessary give-and-take of political accommodation. His real power lay in his integrity, his humanitarianism, his passion for assembling the facts, his efficiency, his talents for administration, and his ability to inspire loyalty in close associates. They called him "the Chief."

As befitted America's newly mechanized civilization, Hoover was the ideal businessperson's candidate. A self-made millionaire, he recoiled from anything suggesting socialism, paternalism, or "planned economy." Yet as secretary of commerce, he had exhibited some progressive instincts. He endorsed labor unions and supported federal regulation of the new radio broadcasting industry. He even flirted for a time with the idea of government-owned radio, similar to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

As bands blared Smith's theme song, "The Sidewalks of New York," the campaign sank into the sewers beneath the sidewalks. Despite the best efforts of Hoover and Smith, below-the-belt tactics were employed to a disgusting degree by lower-level campaigners. Religious bigotry raised its hideous head



### Presidential Election of 1928 (with electoral vote by state)

Smith, despite his defeat, managed to poll almost as many votes as the victorious Coolidge had in 1924. By attracting to the party an immense urban or “sidewalk” vote, the breezy New Yorker foreshadowed Roosevelt’s New Deal victory in 1932, when the Democrats patched together the solid South and the urban North. A cruel joke had Smith cabling the Pope a single word after the election: “Unpack.”

over Smith’s Catholicism. An irresponsible whispering campaign claimed that “A Vote for Al Smith Is a Vote for the Pope” and that the White House, under Smith, would become a branch of the Vatican—complete with “Rum, Romanism, and Ruin.” Hoover’s attempts to quash such rumors were in vain.

The proverbially solid South—“100 percent American” and a stronghold of Protestant Ku Klux Klanism—shied away from “city slicker” Al Smith. It might have accepted a Catholic, or a wet, or the descendant of Irish grandparents, or an urbanite. But a concoction of Catholicism, wettism, foreignism, and liberalism brewed on the sidewalks of New York was too bitter a dose for southern stomachs. Smith’s theme song was a constant and rasping reminder that his upbringing had not been convincingly American.

Hoover triumphed in a landslide. He bagged 21,391,993 popular votes to 15,016,169 for his embittered opponent, while rolling up an electoral count of 444 to 87. A huge Republican majority was returned to the House of Representatives. Tens of thousands of dry southern Democrats—“Hoovercrats”—rebelled against Al Smith, and Hoover proved to be the first Republican candidate in fifty-two years, except for Harding’s Tennessee victory in 1920, to carry a state that had seceded. He swept five states of the former Confederacy, as well as all the Border States.

### President Hoover’s First Moves

Prosperity in the late 1920s smiled broadly as the Hoover years began. Soaring stocks on the bull market continued to defy the laws of financial gravitation. But two immense groups of citizens were not getting their share of the riches flowing from the national cornucopia: the unorganized wage earners and especially the disorganized farmers.

Hoover’s administration, in line with its philosophy of promoting self-help, responded to the outcry of the wounded farmers with legislative aspirin. The Agricultural Marketing Act, passed by Congress in June 1929, was designed to help the farmers help themselves, largely through producers’ cooperatives. It set up the Federal Farm Board, with a revolving fund of half a billion dollars at its disposal. Money was lent generously to farm organizations seeking to buy, sell, and store agricultural surpluses.

In 1930 the Farm Board itself created both the Grain Stabilization Corporation and the Cotton Stabilization Corporation. The prime goal was to bolster sagging prices by buying up surpluses. But the two agencies were soon suffocated by an avalanche of farm produce, as wheat dropped to fifty-seven cents a bushel and cotton to five cents a pound.

Farmers had meanwhile clutched at the tariff as a possible straw to help keep their heads above the

waters of financial ruin. During the recent presidential campaign, Hoover, an amateur in politics, had been stampeded into a politically unwise pledge. He had promised to call Congress into special session to consider agricultural relief and, specifically, to bring about “limited” changes in the tariff. These hope-giving assurances no doubt won many votes for Hoover in the midwestern farm belt.

The Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930 followed the well-worn pattern of Washington horse trading. It started out in the House as a fairly reasonable protective measure, designed to assist the farmers. But by the time the high-pressure lobbyists had pushed it through the Senate, it had acquired about a thousand amendments. It thus turned out to be the highest protective tariff in the nation’s peacetime history. The average duty on nonfree goods was raised from 38.5 percent, as established by the Fordney-McCumber Act of 1922, to nearly 60 percent.

To angered foreigners, the Hawley-Smoot Tariff was a blow below the trade belt. It seemed like a declaration of economic warfare on the entire outside world. It reversed a promising worldwide trend toward reasonable tariffs and widened the yawning trade gaps. It plunged both America and other nations deeper into the terrible depression that had already begun. It increased international financial chaos and forced the United States further into the

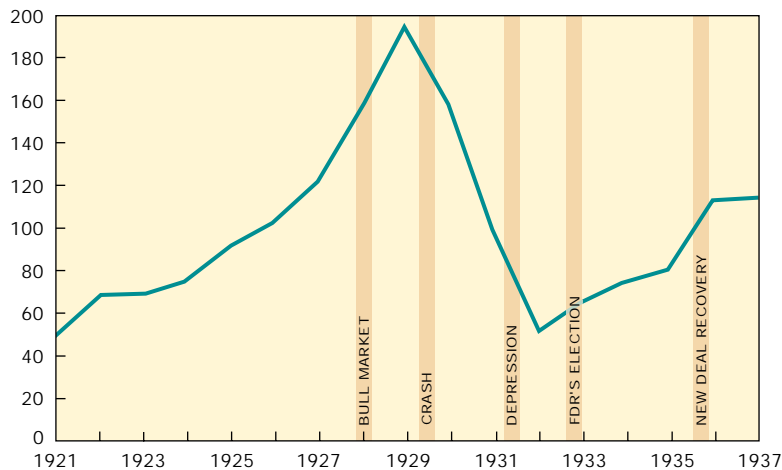
bog of economic isolationism. And economic isolationism, both at home and abroad, was playing directly into the hands of a hate-filled German demagogue, Adolf Hitler.

## **The Great Crash Ends the Golden Twenties**

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When Herbert Hoover confidently took the presidential oath on March 4, 1929, there were few black clouds on the economic horizon. The “long boom” seemed endless, with the painful exception of the debt-blanketed farm belt. America’s productive colossus—stimulated by the automobile, radio, movie, and other new industries—was roaring along at a dizzy speed that suggested a permanent plateau of prosperity. Few people sensed that it might smother its own fires by pouring out too much.

The speculative bubble was actually near the bursting point. Prices on the stock exchange continued to spiral upward and create a fool’s paradise of paper profits, despite Hoover’s early but fruitless efforts to curb speculation through the Federal Reserve Board. A few prophets of disaster were bold enough to sound warnings but were drowned out by the mad chatter of the ticker-tape machine.



Index of Common Stock Prices  
(1926 = 100)

A catastrophic crash came in October 1929. It was partially triggered by the British, who raised their interest rates in an effort to bring back capital lured abroad by American investments. Foreign investors and wary domestic speculators began to dump their “insecurities,” and an orgy of selling followed. Tension built up to the panicky “Black Tuesday” of October 29, 1929, when 16,410,030 shares of stocks were sold in a save-who-may scramble. Wall Street became a wailing wall as gloom and doom replaced boom, and suicides increased alarmingly. A “sick joke” of the time had hotel room clerks ask registrants, “For sleeping or jumping?”

Losses, even in blue-chip securities, were unbelievable. By the end of 1929—two months after the initial crash—stockholders had lost \$40 billion in paper values, or more than the total cost of World War I to the United States.

The stock-market collapse heralded a business depression, at home and abroad, that was the most prolonged and prostrating in American or world experience. No other industrialized nation suffered so severe a setback. By the end of 1930, more than 4 million workers in the United States were jobless; two years later the figure had about tripled. Hungry and despairing workers pounded pavements in search of nonexistent jobs (“We’re firing, not hiring”). Where employees were not discharged, wages and salaries were often slashed. A current jingle ran,

*Mellon pulled the whistle,  
Hoover rang the bell  
Wall Street gave the signal  
And the country went to hell.*

The misery and gloom were incalculable, as forests of dead chimneys stood stark against the sky. Over five thousand banks collapsed in the first three years of the depression, carrying down with them the life savings of tens of thousands of ordinary citizens. Countless thousands of honest, hard-working people lost their homes and farms to the forecloser’s hammer. Bread lines formed, soup kitchens dispensed food, and apple sellers stood shivering on street corners trying to peddle their wares for five cents. Families felt the stress, as jobless fathers nursed their guilt and shame at not being able to provide for their households. Breadless breadwin-

*The Depression spectacle of want in the shadow of surplus moved an observer to write in Current History (1932),*

“We still pray to be given each day our daily bread. Yet there is too much bread, too much wheat and corn, meat and oil and almost every commodity required by man for his subsistence and material happiness. We are not able to purchase the abundance that modern methods of agriculture, mining and manufacture make available in such bountiful quantities. Why is mankind being asked to go hungry and cold and poverty stricken in the midst of plenty?”



ners often blamed themselves for their plight, despite abundant evidence that the economic system, not individual initiative, had broken down. Mothers meanwhile nursed fewer babies, as hard times reached even into the nation's bedrooms, precipitating a decade-long dearth of births. As cash registers gathered cobwebs, the song "My God, How the Money Rolls In" was replaced with "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"

### **Hooked on the Horn of Plenty**

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What caused the Great Depression? One basic explanation was overproduction by both farm and factory. Ironically, the depression of the 1930s was one of abundance, not want. It was the "great glut" or the "plague of plenty."

The nation's ability to produce goods had clearly outrun its capacity to consume or pay for them. Too much money was going into the hands of a few wealthy people, who in turn invested it in factories

and other agencies of production. Not enough was going into salaries and wages, where revitalizing purchasing power could be more quickly felt.

Other maladies were at work. Overexpansion of credit through installment-plan buying overstimulated production. Paying on so-called easy terms caused many consumers to dive in beyond their depth. Normal technological unemployment, resulting from new laborsaving machines, also added its burden to the abnormal unemployment of the "threadbare thirties."

This already bleak picture was further darkened by economic anemia abroad. Britain and the Continent had never fully recovered from the upheaval of World War I. Depression in America was given a further downward push by a chain-reaction financial collapse in Europe, following the failure in 1931 of a prominent Vienna banking house. A drying up of international trade, moreover, had been hastened by the shortsighted Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930. European uncertainties over reparations, war debts, and defaults on loans owed to America caused tensions that reacted unfavorably on the United States.

Many of these conditions had been created or worsened by Uncle Sam's own narrow-visioned policies, but it was now too late to unscramble the omelet.

As if man-made disasters were not enough, a terrible drought scorched the Mississippi Valley in 1930. Thousands of farms were sold at auction for taxes, though in some cases kind neighbors would intimidate prospective buyers, bid one cent, and return the property to its original owner. Farm tenancy or rental—a species of peonage—was spreading at an alarming rate among both whites and blacks.

By 1930 the depression had become a national calamity. Through no fault of their own, a host of industrious citizens had lost everything. They wanted to work—but there was no work. The insidious effect of all this dazed despair on the nation's spirit was incalculable and long-lasting. America's "uniqueness" no longer seemed so unique or its Manifest Destiny so manifest. Hitherto the people had grappled with storms, trees, stones, and other physical obstacles. But the depression was a baffling wraith they could not grasp. Initiative and self-respect were stifled, as panhandlers begged for food or "charity soup." In extreme cases "ragged individualists" slept under "Hoover blankets" (old newspapers), fought over the contents of garbage cans, or cooked their findings in old oil drums in tin-and-paper shantytowns cynically named "Hooverilles."

The very foundations of America's social and political structure trembled.

### **Rugged Times for Rugged Individualists**

Hoover's exalted reputation as a wonder-worker and efficiency engineer crashed about as dismally as the stock market. He doubtless would have shone in the

*Herbert Hoover (1874–1964) spoke approvingly in a campaign speech in 1928 of "the American system of Rugged Individualism." In 1930 he referred to Cleveland's 1887 veto of a bill to appropriate seed grain for the drought-stricken farmers of Texas:*

"I do not believe that the power and duty of the General Government ought to be extended to the relief of individual suffering. . . . The lesson should be constantly enforced that though the people support the Government the Government should not support the people."

prosperity-drenched Coolidge years, when he had foreseen the abolition of poverty and poor-houses. But damming the Great Depression proved to be a task beyond his engineering talents.

The perplexed president was impaled on the horns of a cruel dilemma. As a deservedly famed humanitarian, he was profoundly distressed by the widespread misery about him. Yet as a “rugged individualist,” deeply rooted in an earlier era of free enterprise, he shrank from the heresy of government handouts. Convinced that industry, thrift, and self-reliance were the virtues that had made America great, President Hoover feared that a government doling out doles would weaken, perhaps destroy, the national fiber.

As the depression nightmare steadily worsened, relief by local government agencies broke down. Hoover was finally forced to turn reluctantly from his doctrine of log-cabin individualism and accept the proposition that the welfare of the people in a nationwide catastrophe is a direct concern of the national government.

The president at last worked out a compromise between the old hands-off philosophy and the “soul-destroying” direct dole then being used in

England. He would assist the hard-pressed railroads, banks, and rural credit corporations, in the hope that if financial health were restored at the top of the economic pyramid, unemployment would be relieved at the bottom on a trickle-down basis.

*Wall Streeter Martin Devries, observing President Herbert Hoover's struggle to keep his footing as the tidal wave of the Great Depression washed over him, decided he was a good man stuck in the wrong place, at the wrong time:*

“Hoover happened to be in a bad spot. The Depression came on, and there he was. If Jesus Christ had been there, he'd have had the same problem. It's too bad for poor old Herbie that he happened to be there. This was a world-wide Depression. It wasn't Hoover's fault. In 1932, . . . a monkey could have been elected against him, no question about it.”

Partisan critics sneered at the “Great Humanitarian”—he who had fed the faraway Belgians but would not use federal funds to feed needy Americans. Hostile commentators remarked that he was willing to lend government money to the big bankers, who allegedly had plunged the country into the mess. He would likewise lend money to agricultural organizations to feed pigs—but not people. Pigs, the cynics of the time noted, had no character to undermine.

Much of this criticism was unfair. Although continued suffering seemed to mock the effectiveness of Hoover’s measures, his efforts probably prevented a more serious collapse than did occur. And his expenditures for relief, revolutionary for that day, paved the path for the enormous federal outlays of his New Deal successor, Franklin Roosevelt. Hoover proved that the old bootstrap-pulling techniques would no longer work in a crisis of this magnitude, especially when people lacked boots.

### **Herbert Hoover: Pioneer for the New Deal**

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President Hoover, in line with his “trickle-down” philosophy, at last recommended that Congress vote immense sums for useful public works. Though at heart an antispender, he secured from Congress appropriations totaling \$2.25 billion for such projects.

Most imposing of the public enterprises was the gigantic Hoover Dam on the Colorado River. Voted by Congress in the days of Coolidge, it was begun in 1930 under Hoover and completed in 1936 under Roosevelt. It succeeded in creating a huge man-made lake for purposes of irrigation, flood control, and electric power.

But Hoover sternly fought all schemes that he regarded as “socialistic.” Conspicuous among them was the Muscle Shoals Bill, designed to dam the Tennessee River and ultimately embraced by Franklin Roosevelt’s Tennessee Valley Authority. Hoover emphatically vetoed this measure, primarily because he opposed the government’s selling electricity in competition with its own citizens in private companies.

Early in 1932 Congress, responding to Hoover’s belated appeal, established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC). With an initial working

capital of half a billion dollars, this agency became a government lending bank. It was designed to provide indirect relief by assisting insurance companies, banks, agricultural organizations, railroads, and even hard-pressed state and local governments. But to preserve individualism and character, there would be no loans to individuals from this “billion-dollar soup kitchen.”

“Pump-priming” loans by the RFC were no doubt of widespread benefit, though the organization was established many months too late for maximum usefulness. Projects that it supported were largely self-liquidating, and the government as a banker actually profited to the tune of many millions of dollars. Giant corporations so obviously benefited from this assistance that the RFC was dubbed—rather unfairly—“the millionaires’ dole.” The irony is that the thrifty and individualistic Hoover had sponsored the project, though with initial reluctance. It actually had a strong New Dealish flavor.

Hoover’s administration also provided some indirect benefits for labor. After stormy debate, Congress passed the Norris–La Guardia Anti-Injunction Act in 1932, and Hoover signed it. The measure outlawed “yellow-dog” (antiunion) contracts and forbade the federal courts to issue injunctions to restrain strikes, boycotts, and peaceful picketing.

The truth is that Herbert Hoover, despite criticism of his “heartlessness,” did inaugurate a significant new policy. In previous panics the masses had been forced to “sweat it out.” Slow though Hoover was to abandon this nineteenth-century bias, by the end of his term he had started down the road toward government assistance for needy citizens—a road that Franklin Roosevelt would travel much farther.

Hoover’s woes were increased by a hostile Congress. At critical times during his first two years, the Republican majority proved highly uncooperative. Friction worsened during his last two years. A depression-cursed electorate, rebelling in the congressional elections of 1930, so reduced the Republican majority that Democrats controlled the new House and almost controlled the Senate. Insurgent Republicans could—and did—combine with opposition Democrats to harass Hoover. Some of the president’s troubles were deliberately manufactured by Congress, who, in his words, “played politics with human misery.”



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**Lamprooning Hoover, 1932** The pages of *The American Pageant* are filled with political cartoons for the pungent commentary they provide on historical events. With one image rather than many words, a cartoonist can convey a point of view much the way editorial writers do. This cartoon appeared in the *Washington Daily News* on July 25, 1932, three and one-half months before Republican President Hoover lost the presidential election to his Democratic challenger Franklin D. Roosevelt. The cartoonist foretells Hoover's defeat in November and departure from the White House the following March (not January, as at present), and expresses his support for the Home Loan Bank Bill. With this proposal, Hoover sought to come to the aid of home mortgage lenders in order to forestall them from foreclosing on homeowners. The cartoonist jokes that Hoover supported this bill because he identified with home owners about to

lose their homes, but he also cleverly insinuates that Hoover's banking reform was motivated by electoral opportunism. Surely Hoover sought to win public support in return for his new banking program as he battled for reelection, but the Home Loan Bank Bill also reflected Hoover's growing recognition that the federal government had to take direct action to remedy flaws that had precipitated the crisis of the Great Depression. As Hoover later recorded in his memoirs, "All this seems dull economics, but the poignant American drama revolving around the loss of the old homestead had a million repetitions straight from life, not because of the designing villain but because of a fault in our financial system." How does the cartoonist use caricature to make his point? What accounts for the political cartoon's special power? Are there limitations to this genre? Find another cartoon in the book and subject it to similar analysis.

## Routing the Bonus Army in Washington

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Many veterans of World War I were numbered among the hard-hit victims of the depression. Industry had secured a “bonus”—though a dubious one—in the Hawley-Smoot Tariff. So the thoughts of the former soldiers naturally turned to what the government owed them for their services in 1917–1918, when they had “saved” democracy. A drive developed for the premature payment of the deferred bonus voted by Congress in 1924 and payable in 1945.

Thousands of impoverished veterans, both of war and of unemployment, were now prepared to move on to Washington, there to demand of Congress the immediate payment of their *entire* bonus. The “Bonus Expeditionary Force” (BEF), which mustered about twenty thousand souls, converged on the capital in the summer of 1932. These supplicants promptly set up unsanitary public camps and erected shacks on vacant lots—a gigantic “Hooverville.” They thus created a menace to the public health, while attempting to intimidate Congress by their presence in force. After the pending bonus bill had failed in Congress by a narrow margin, Hoover arranged to pay the return fare of about six thousand bonus marchers. The rest refused to decamp, though ordered to do so.

Following riots that cost two lives, Hoover responded to the demands of the Washington authorities by ordering the army to evacuate the unwanted guests. Although Hoover charged that the “Bonus Army” was led by riffraff and reds, in fact only a sprinkling of them were former convicts and communist agitators. The eviction was carried out by General Douglas MacArthur with bayonets and tear gas, and with far more severity than Hoover had planned. A few of the former soldiers were injured as the torch was put to their pathetic shanties in the inglorious “Battle of Anacostia Flats.” An eleven-month-old “bonus baby” allegedly died from exposure to tear gas.

This brutal episode brought down additional abuse on the once-popular Hoover, who by now was the most loudly booed man in the country. The Democrats, not content with Hoover’s vulnerable record, employed professional “smear” artists to drive him from office. Cynics sneered that the “Great Engineer” had in a few months “ditched, drained, and damned the country.” The existing panic was unfairly branded “the Hoover depres-

sion.” In truth, Hoover had been oversold as a wizard, and the public grumbled when his magician’s wand failed to produce rabbits. The time was ripening for the Democratic party—and Franklin D. Roosevelt—to cash in on Hoover’s calamities.

## Japanese Militarists Attack China

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The Great Depression, which brewed enough distress at home, added immensely to difficulties abroad. Militaristic Japan stole the Far Eastern spotlight. In September 1931 the Japanese imperialists, noting that the Western world was badly mired in a depression, lunged into Manchuria. Alleging provocation, they rapidly overran the coveted Chinese province and proceeded to bolt shut the Open Door in the conquered area.

Peaceful peoples were stunned by this act of naked aggression, which was a flagrant violation of the League of Nations covenant, as well as of various other international agreements solemnly signed by Tokyo. Numerous indignant Americans, though by no means a majority, urged strong measures ranging from boycotts to blockades. Possibly a tight blockade by the League, backed by the United States, would have brought Japan sharply to book.

But the League was handicapped in taking two-fisted action by the nonmembership of the United States. Washington flatly rebuffed initial attempts in 1931 to secure American cooperation in applying economic pressure on Japan. Washington and Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson in the end decided to fire only paper bullets at the Japanese aggressors. The so-called Stimson doctrine, proclaimed in 1932, declared that the United States would not recognize any territorial acquisitions achieved by force. Righteous indignation—or a preach-and-run policy—would substitute for solid initiatives.

This verbal slap on the wrist from America did not deter the march of the Japanese militarists. Smarting under a Chinese boycott, they bombed Shanghai in 1932, with shocking losses to civilians. Outraged Americans launched informal boycotts of Japanese goods, chiefly dime-store knickknacks. But there was no real sentiment for armed intervention among a depression-ridden people, who remained strongly isolationist during the 1930s.

In a broad sense, collective security died and World War II was born in 1931 on the windswept

plains of Manchuria. The League members had the economic and naval power to halt Japan but lacked the courage to act. One reason—though not the only one—was that they could not count on America’s support. Even so, the Republic came closer to stepping into the chill waters of internationalism than American prophets would have dared to predict in the early 1920s.

*Hoover later wrote of his differences with Secretary of State Stimson over economic boycotts,*

“I was soon to realize that my able Secretary was at times more of a warrior than a diplomat. To him the phrase ‘economic sanctions’ was the magic wand of force by which all peace could be summoned from the vasty deep. . . . Ever since Versailles I had held that ‘economic sanctions’ meant war when applied to any large nation.”

### **Hoover Pioneers the Good Neighbor Policy**

Hoover’s arrival in the White House brought a more hopeful turn to relations with America’s southern neighbors. The new president was deeply interested in the often troubled nations below the Rio Grande. Shortly after his election in 1928, he had undertaken a goodwill tour of Latin America—on a U.S. battleship.

World depression softened an age-old aggressive attitude in the United States toward weak Latin neighbors. Following the stock-market collapse of 1929, Americans had less money to invest abroad. As millions of dollars’ worth of investments in Latin America went sour, many Yankees felt as though they were more preyed upon than preying. So-called economic imperialism became much less popular in the United States than it had been in the golden twenties.

As an advocate of international goodwill, Hoover strove to abandon the interventionist twist given to the Monroe Doctrine by Theodore Roosevelt. In 1932 he negotiated a new treaty with the French-speaking republic of Haiti, and this pact, later supplanted by an executive agreement,

provided for the complete withdrawal of American platoons by 1934. Further pleasing omens came early in 1933, when the last marine “leathernecks” sailed away from Nicaragua after an almost continuous stay of some twenty years.

Herbert Hoover, the engineer in politics, thus happily engineered the foundation stones of the “Good Neighbor” policy. Upon them rose an imposing edifice in the days of his successor, Franklin Roosevelt.

## Chronology

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|---|--|
| <p><b>1919</b> American Legion founded<br/>Chicago race riot</p>  | <p><b>1926</b> U.S. troops occupy Nicaragua</p>  |
| <p><b>1920</b> Esch-Cummins Transportation Act<br/>Merchant Marine Act</p>  | <p><b>1928</b> Kellogg-Briand Pact<br/>Hoover defeats Smith for presidency<br/>Hoover takes goodwill tour of Latin America</p>   |
| <p><b>1921</b> Veterans Bureau created<br/>Capper-Volstead Act</p>  | <p><b>1929</b> Agricultural Marketing Act sets up Federal<br/>Farm Board<br/>Stock-market crash</p>  |
| <p><b>1922</b> Five-Power Naval Treaty<br/>Four-Power and Nine-Power Treaties on the<br/>Far East<br/>Fordney-McCumber Tariff Law</p>   | <p><b>1930</b> Hawley-Smoot Tariff</p>   |
| <p><b>1923</b> <i>Adkins v. Children's Hospital</i><br/>Teapot Dome scandal<br/>Harding dies; Coolidge assumes presidency</p>   | <p><b>1931</b> Japanese invade Manchuria</p>   |
| <p><b>1924</b> Adjusted Compensation Act for veterans<br/>Dawes Plan for international finance<br/>U.S. troops leave the Dominican Republic<br/>Coolidge wins three-way presidential election</p> | <p><b>1932</b> Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC)<br/>established<br/>Norris-La Guardia Anti-Injunction Act<br/>“Bonus Army” dispersed from<br/>Washington, D.C.</p> |





# The Great Depression and the New Deal

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1933–1939

*The country needs and . . . demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.*

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, CAMPAIGN SPEECH, 1932

Voters were in an ugly mood as the presidential campaign of 1932 neared. Countless factory chimneys remained ominously cold, while more than 11 million unemployed workers and their families sank ever deeper into the pit of poverty. Herbert Hoover may have won the 1928 election by promising “a chicken in every pot,” but three years later that chicken seemed to have laid a discharge slip in every pay envelope.

Hoover, sick at heart, was renominated by the Republican convention in Chicago without great enthusiasm. The platform indulged in extravagant praise of Republican antidepression policies, while halfheartedly promising to repeal national prohibition and return control of liquor to the states.

The rising star of the Democratic firmament was Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt of New York, a fifth cousin of Theodore Roosevelt. Like the

Rough Rider, he had been born to a wealthy New York family, had graduated from Harvard, had been elected as a kid-gloved politician to the New York legislature, had served as governor of the Empire State, had been nominated for the vice presidency (though not elected), and had served capably as assistant secretary of the navy. Although both men were master politicians, adept with the colorful phrase, FDR was suave and conciliatory, whereas TR was pugnacious and confrontational.

## **FDR: Politician in a Wheelchair**

Infantile paralysis, while putting steel braces on Franklin Roosevelt’s legs, put additional steel into his soul. Until 1921, when the dread disease struck,

childhood and emerged as a champion of the dispossessed—and, ultimately, as the “conscience of the New Deal.” FDR’s political career was as much hers as it was his own. She traveled countless miles with him or on his behalf in all his campaigns, beginning with his run for the New York legislature before World War I, later considering herself “his legs.” She was to become the most active First Lady in history. Through her lobbying of her husband, her speeches, and her syndicated newspaper column, she powerfully influenced the policies of the national government. Always she battled for the impoverished and the oppressed. At one meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, she confounded local authorities and flouted the segregation statutes by deliberately straddling the aisle separating the black and white seating sections. Sadly, her personal relationship with her husband was often rocky, due to his occasional infidelity. Condemned by conservatives and loved by liberals, she was one of the most controversial—and consequential—public figures of the twentieth century.

Franklin Roosevelt’s political appeal was amazing. His commanding presence and his golden speaking voice, despite a sophisticated accent, combined to make him the premier American orator of his generation. He could turn on charm in private conversations as one would turn on a faucet. As a popular depression governor of New York, he had sponsored heavy state spending to relieve human suffering. Though favoring frugality, he believed that money, rather than humanity, was expendable. He revealed a deep concern for the plight of the “forgotten man”—a phrase he used in a 1932 speech—although he was assailed by the rich as a “traitor to his class.”

Exuberant Democrats met in Chicago in June 1932 and speedily nominated Roosevelt. Fellow New Yorker Al Smith felt entitled to a second chance, and a beautiful friendship wilted when he was elbowed aside for Franklin Roosevelt. The Democratic platform came out more forthrightly than the Republican for repeal of prohibition, assailed the so-called Hoover depression, and promised not only a balanced budget but sweeping social and economic reforms. Roosevelt flew daringly through stormy weather to Chicago, where he smashed precedent by accepting the nomination in person. He electrified the delegates and the public with these words: “I pledge you, I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people.”

young Roosevelt—tall (six feet two inches), athletic, and handsome—impressed observers as charming and witty yet at times a superficial and arrogant “lightweight.” But suffering humbled him to the level of common clay. In courageously fighting his way back from complete helplessness to a hobbling mobility, he schooled himself in patience, tolerance, compassion, and strength of will. He once remarked that after trying for two years to wiggle one big toe, all else seemed easy.

Another of Roosevelt’s great personal and political assets was his wife, Eleanor. The niece of Theodore Roosevelt, she was Franklin Roosevelt’s distant cousin as well as his spouse. Tall, ungainly, and toothy, she overcame the misery of an unhappy

*In his successful campaign for the governorship of New York in 1928, Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945) had played down alleged Democratic “socialism”:*

“We often hear it said that government operation of anything under the sun is socialistic. If that is so, our postal service is socialistic, so is the parcel post which has largely taken the place of the old express companies; so are the public highways which took the place of the toll roads.”

### **Presidential Hopefuls of 1932**

In the campaign that followed, Roosevelt seized the offensive with a slashing attack on the Republican Old Dealers. He was especially eager to prove that he was not an invalid (“Roosevelt Is Robust”) and to display his magnificent torso and radiant personality to as many voters as possible.

Roosevelt consistently preached a New Deal for the “forgotten man,” but he was annoyingly vague and somewhat contradictory. Many of his speeches were “ghostwritten” by the “Brains Trust” (popularly the “Brain Trust”), a small group of reform-minded intellectuals. They were predominantly youngish college professors, who, as a kind of kitchen cabinet, later authored much of the New Deal legislation. Roosevelt rashly promised a balanced budget and berated heavy Hooverian deficits, amid cries of “Throw the Spenders Out!” and “Out of the Red with Roosevelt.” All of this was to make ironic reading in later months.

The high spirits of the Democrats found expression in the catchy air “Happy Days Are Here Again.” This theme song fit FDR’s indestructible smile, his jauntily angled cigarette holder, his breezy optimism, and his promises to do something, even at the risk of bold experimentation.

Grim-faced Herbert Hoover remained in the White House, conscientiously battling the depression through short lunches and long hours. Out on the firing line, his supporters halfheartedly assured half-listening voters, “The Worst Is Past,” “It Might Have Been

Worse,” and “Prosperity Is Just Around the Corner.” Hoover never ceased to insist that the uncertainty and fear produced by Roosevelt’s impending victory plunged the nation deeper into the depression.

With the campaign going badly for the Republicans, a weary and despondent Hoover was persuaded to take to the stump. He stoutly reaffirmed his faith in American free enterprise and individual initiative, and gloomily predicted that if the Hawley-Smoot Tariff were repealed, the grass would grow “in the streets of a hundred cities.” Such down-at-the-mouthism contrasted sharply with Roosevelt’s tooth-flashing optimism and sparkling promises.

### **Hoover’s Humiliation in 1932**

Hoover had been swept into office on the rising tide of prosperity; he was swept out of office by the receding tide of depression. The flood of votes totaled 22,809,638 for Roosevelt and 15,758,901 for Hoover; the electoral count stood at 472 to 59. In all, the loser carried only six rock-ribbed Republican states.

One striking feature of the election was the beginning of a distinct shift of blacks, traditionally grateful to the Republican party of Lincoln, over to the Roosevelt camp. As the “last hired and first fired,” black Americans had been among the worst sufferers from the depression. Beginning with the election of 1932, they became, notably in the great urban centers of the North, a vital element in the Democratic party.

Hard times unquestionably ruined the Republicans, for the electoral upheaval in 1932 was as much anti-Hoover as it was pro-Roosevelt. Democrats had only to harness the national grudge and let it pull them to victory. An overwhelming majority appear to have voiced a demand for change: a new deal rather than *the* New Deal, for the latter was only a gleam in the eyes of its sponsors. Any upstanding Democratic candidate probably could have won.

The preinauguration lame duck period now ground slowly to an end. Hoover, though defeated and repudiated, continued to be president for four long months, until March 4, 1933. But he was helpless to embark upon any long-range policies without the cooperation of Roosevelt—and the victorious president-elect proved rather uncooperative. Hoover at length succeeded in arranging two

meetings with him to discuss the war-debt muddle. But Roosevelt, who airily remarked to the press, “It’s not my baby,” fought shy of assuming responsibility without authority. As Hoover privately confessed, he was trying to bind his successor to an anti-inflationary policy that would have made impossible many of the later New Deal experiments. But in politics the winner, not the loser, calls the tune.

With Washington deadlocked, the vast and vaunted American economic machine clanked to a virtual halt. One worker in four tramped the streets, feet weary and hands idle. Banks were locking their doors all over the nation, as people nervously stuffed paper money under their mattresses. Hooverites, then and later, accused Roosevelt of deliberately permitting the depression to worsen, so that he could emerge the more spectacularly as a savior.

### **FDR and the Three *R*’s: Relief, Recovery, Reform**

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Great crises often call forth gifted leaders, and the hand of destiny tapped Roosevelt on the shoulder. On a dreary Inauguration Day, March 4, 1933, his vibrant voice, broadcast nationally from a bullet-proof stand, provided the American people with

inspirational new hope. He denounced the “money changers” who had brought on the calamity and declared that the government must wage war on the Great Depression as it would wage war on an armed foe. His clarion note was, “Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Roosevelt moved decisively. Now that he had full responsibility, he boldly declared a nationwide banking holiday, March 6–10, as a prelude to opening the banks on a sounder basis. He then summoned the overwhelmingly Democratic Congress into special session to cope with the national emergency. For the so-called Hundred Days (March 9–June 16, 1933), members hastily cranked out an unprecedented basketful of remedial legislation. Some of it derived from earlier progressivism, but these new measures mostly sought to deal with a desperate emergency.

Roosevelt’s New Deal programs aimed at three *R*’s—relief, recovery, and reform. Short-range goals were relief and immediate recovery, especially in the first two years. Long-range goals were permanent recovery and reform of current abuses, particularly those that had produced the boom-or-bust catastrophe. The three-*R* objectives often overlapped and got in one another’s way. But amid all the topsyturvy haste, the gigantic New Deal program lurched forward.

Firmly ensconced in the driver's seat, President Roosevelt cracked the whip. A green Congress so fully shared the panicky feeling of the country that it was ready to rubber-stamp bills drafted by White

House advisers—measures that Roosevelt called “must legislation.” More than that, Congress gave the president extraordinary blank-check powers: some of the laws it passed expressly delegated

**Principal New Deal Acts During Hundred Days Congress, 1933\***  
(items in parentheses indicate secondary purposes)

Recovery	Relief	Reform
FDR closes banks, March 6, 1933		
Emergency Banking Relief Act, March 9, 1933		
(Beer Act)	(Beer Act)	Beer and Wine Revenue Act, March 22, 1933
(CCC)	Unemployment Relief Act, March 31, 1933, creates Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	
FDR orders gold surrender, April 5, 1933		
FDR abandons gold standard, April 19, 1933		
(FERA)	Federal Emergency Relief Act, May 12, 1933, creates Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)	
(AAA)	Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), May 12, 1933	
(TVA)	(TVA)	Tennessee Valley Authority Act (TVA), May 18, 1933 Federal Securities Act, May 27, 1933
Gold-payment clause repealed, June 5, 1933		
(HOLC)	Home Owners' Refinancing Act, June 13, 1933, creates Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC)	
National Industrial Recovery Act, June 16, 1933, creates National Recovery Administration (NRA), Public Works Administration (PWA)	(NRA, PWA)	(NRA)
(Glass-Steagall Act)	(Glass-Steagall Act)	Glass-Steagall Banking Reform Act, June 16, 1933, creates Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

\*For later New Deal measures, see p. 784.

restrictions on child labor. A few such reforms had already made limited gains in some of the states. Many of these forward-looking measures had been adopted a generation or so earlier by the more advanced countries of western Europe. In the area of social welfare, the United States, in the eyes of many Europeans, remained a “backward nation.”

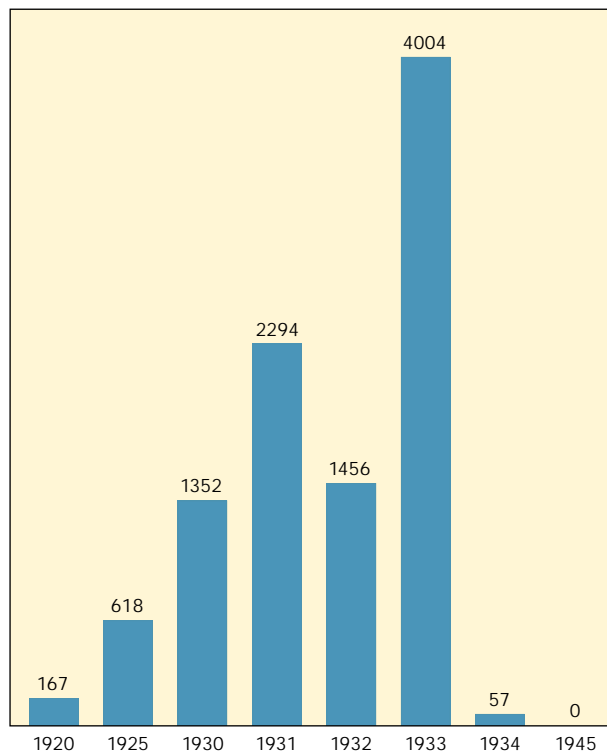
## Roosevelt Tackles Money and Banking

Banking chaos cried aloud for immediate action. Congress pulled itself together and in an incredible eight hours had the Emergency Banking Relief Act of 1933 ready for Roosevelt’s busy pen. The new law invested the president with power to regulate banking transactions and foreign exchange and to reopen solvent banks.

legislative authority to the chief executive. One senator complained that if FDR asked Congress “to commit suicide tomorrow, they’d do it.”

Roosevelt was delighted to exert executive leadership, and Congress responded to it, although he did not always know precisely where he was going. He was inclined to do things by intuition—off the cuff. He was like the quarterback, as he put it, whose next play depends on the outcome of the previous play. So desperate was the mood of an action-starved public that *any* movement, even in the wrong direction, seemed better than no movement at all.

The frantic Hundred Days Congress passed many essentials of the New Deal “three R’s,” though important long-range measures were added in later sessions. These reforms owed much to the legacy of the pre-World War I progressive movement. Many of them were long overdue, sidetracked by the war in Europe and the Old Guard reaction of the 1920s. The New Dealers, sooner or later, embraced such progressive ideas as unemployment insurance, old-age insurance, minimum-wage regulations, conservation and development of natural resources, and



Bank Failures Before and After the Glass-Steagall Banking Reform Act of 1933

Roosevelt, the master showman, next turned to the radio to deliver the first of his thirty famous “fireside chats.” As some 35 million people hung on his soothing words, he gave assurances that it was now safer to keep money in a reopened bank than “under the mattress.” Confidence returned with a gush, and the banks began to unlock their doors.

The Emergency, or Hundred Days, Congress buttressed public reliance on the banking system by enacting the memorable Glass-Steagall Banking Reform Act. This measure provided for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, which insured individual deposits up to \$5,000 (later raised). Thus ended the disgraceful epidemic of bank failures, which dated back to the “wildcat” days of Andrew Jackson.\*

Roosevelt moved swiftly elsewhere on the financial front, seeking to protect the melting gold reserve and to prevent panicky hoarding. He ordered all private holdings of gold to be surrendered to the Treasury in exchange for paper currency and then took the nation off the gold standard. The Emergency Congress responded to his recommendation by canceling the gold-payment clause in all contracts and authorizing repayment in paper money. A “managed currency” was well on its way.

The goal of Roosevelt’s “managed currency” was inflation, which he believed would relieve debtors’ burdens and stimulate new production. Roosevelt’s principal instrument for achieving inflation was gold buying. He instructed the Treasury to purchase gold at increasing prices, ratcheting the dollar price of gold up from \$21 an ounce in 1933 to \$35 an ounce in early 1934, a price that held for nearly four decades. This policy did increase the amount of dollars in circulation, as holders of gold cashed it in at the elevated prices. But this inflationary result also provoked the wrath of “sound-money” critics, who gagged on the “baloney dollar.” The gold-buying scheme came to an end in February 1934, when FDR returned the nation to a limited gold standard for purposes of international trade only. Thereafter (until 1971—see p. 954), the United States pledged itself to pay foreign bills, if requested, in gold at the rate of one ounce of gold for every \$35 due. But domestic circulation of gold continued to be prohibited, and gold coins became collectors’ items.

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\*When FDR was inaugurated in 1933, not a single Canadian bank had failed.

## Creating Jobs for the Jobless

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Overwhelming unemployment, even more than banking, clamored for prompt remedial action. One out of every four workers was jobless when FDR took his inaugural oath—the highest level of unemployment in the nation’s history, before or since. Roosevelt had no hesitancy about using federal money to assist the unemployed and at the same time to “prime the pump” of industrial recovery. (A farmer has to pour a little water into a dry pump—that is, “prime it”—to start the flow.)

The Hundred Days Congress responded to Roosevelt’s spurs when it created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which proved to be perhaps the most popular of all the New Deal “alphabetical agencies.” This law provided employment in fresh-air government camps for about 3 million unformed young men, many of whom might otherwise



**Later Major New Deal Measures, 1933–1939 (items in parentheses indicate secondary purposes)**

<b>Recovery</b>	<b>Relief</b>	<b>Reform</b>
(CWA)	FDR establishes Civil Works Administration (CWA), November 9, 1933	
Gold Reserve Act, January 30, 1934, authorizes FDR's devaluation, January 31, 1934		Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) authorized by Congress, June 6, 1934
(Reciprocal Trade Agreements)	(Reciprocal Trade Agreements)	Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act, June 12, 1934 (see pp. 808–809) Indian Reorganization Act, June 18, 1934
(FHA)	National Housing Act, June 28, 1934, authorizes Federal Housing Administration (FHA)	(FHA)
(Frazier-Lemke Act)	Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act, June 28, 1934	
(Resettlement Administration)	FDR creates Resettlement Administration, April 30, 1935	
(WPA)	FDR creates Works Progress Administration (WPA), May 6, 1935, under act of April 8, 1935	
(Wagner Act)	(Wagner Act)	(Wagner) National Labor Relations Act, July 5, 1935 Social Security Act, August 14, 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act, August 26, 1935
(Soil Conservation Act)	Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, February 29, 1936	
(USHA)	(USHA)	United States Housing Authority (USHA) established by Congress, September 1, 1937
(Second AAA)	Second Agricultural Adjustment Act, February 16, 1938	
(Fair Labor Standards)	(Fair Labor Standards)	Fair Labor Standards Act (Wages and Hours Bill), June 25, 1938 Reorganization Act, April 3, 1939 Hatch Act, August 2, 1939

have been driven by desperation into criminal habits. Their work was useful—including reforestation, fire fighting (forty-seven lost their lives), flood control, and swamp drainage. The recruits were required to help their parents by sending home most of their pay. Both human resources and natural resources were thus conserved, though there were minor complaints of “militarizing” the nation’s youth. Critics charged that CCC “soldiers” would later claim pensions for exposure to poison ivy.

The first major effort of the new Congress to grapple with the millions of adult unemployed was the Federal Emergency Relief Act. Its chief aim was immediate relief rather than long-range recovery. The resulting Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was handed over to zealous Harry L. Hopkins, a painfully thin, shabbily dressed, chain-smoking New York social worker who had earlier won Roosevelt’s friendship and who became one of his most influential advisers. Hopkins’s agency in all granted about \$3 billion to the states for direct dole payments or preferably for wages on work projects.\*

Immediate relief was also given two large and hard-pressed special groups by the Hundred Days Congress. One section of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) made available many millions of dollars to help farmers meet their mortgages. Another law created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC). Designed to refinance mortgages on nonfarm homes, it ultimately assisted about a million badly pinched households. The agency not only bailed out mortgage-holding banks, it also bolted the political loyalties of relieved middle-class homeowners securely to the Democratic party.

Harassed by the continuing plague of unemployment, FDR himself established the Civil Works Administration (CWA) late in 1933. As a branch of the FERA, it also fell under the direction of Hopkins. Designed to provide purely temporary jobs during the cruel winter emergency, it served a useful purpose. Tens of thousands of jobless were employed at leaf raking and other make-work tasks, which were dubbed “boondoggling.” As this kind of labor put a premium on shovel-leaning slow motion, the scheme was widely criticized. “The only thing we have to fear,” scoffers remarked, “is work itself.”

## A Day for Every Demagogue

Direct relief from Washington to needy families helped pull the nation through the ghastly winter of 1933–1934. But the disheartening persistence of unemployment and suffering demonstrated that emergency relief measures had to be not only continued but supplemented. One danger signal was the appearance of various demagogues, notably a magnetic “microphone messiah,” Father Charles Coughlin, a Catholic priest in Michigan who began broadcasting in 1930 and whose slogan was “Social Justice.” His anti-New Deal harangues to some 40 million radio fans finally became so anti-Semitic, fascistic, and demagogic that he was silenced in 1942 by his ecclesiastical superiors.

Also notorious among the new brood of agitators were those who capitalized on popular discontent to make pie-in-the-sky promises. Most conspicuous of these individuals was Senator Huey P. (“Kingfish”) Long of Louisiana, who was said to have more brass than a government mule. He used his abundant rabble-rousing talents to publicize his “Share Our Wealth” program, which promised to

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\*A boast attributed to Hopkins in 1938 was, “We will spend and spend, tax and tax, and elect and elect.”

*In 1935 Father Charles Coughlin (1891–1979) single-handedly defeated President Roosevelt's effort to win Senate ratification of a treaty providing for American membership in the World Court, a judicial body of limited authority established by the League of Nations. What FDR saw as a symbolic embrace of international responsibility Coughlin convinced his radio listeners was a conspiracy of international monied interests against American sovereignty:*

"Our thanks are due to Almighty God in that America retains her sovereignty. Congratulations to the aroused people of the United States who, by more than 200,000 telegrams containing at least 1,000,000 names, demanded that the principles established by Washington and Jefferson shall keep us clear from foreign entanglements and European hatreds."

make "Every Man a King." Every family was to receive \$5,000, supposedly at the expense of the prosperous. H. L. Mencken called Long's chief lieu-

tenant, former clergyman Gerald L. K. Smith, "the gutsiest, goriest, loudest and lustiest, the deadliest and damndest orator ever heard on this or any other earth, the champion boob-bumper of all time." Fear of Long's becoming a fascist dictator ended when he was shot by an assassin in the Louisiana state capitol in 1935.

Another Pied Piper was gaunt Dr. Francis E. Townsend of California, a retired physician whose savings had recently been wiped out. He attracted the trusting support of perhaps 5 million "senior citizens" with his fantastic plan that nonetheless spoke to earthly need. Each oldster sixty years of age or over was to receive \$200 a month, provided that the money be spent within the month. One estimate had the scheme costing one-half of the national income.

Partly to quiet the groundswell of unrest produced by such crackbrained proposals, Congress authorized the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. The objective was employment on useful projects. Launched under the supervision of the ailing but energetic Hopkins, this remarkable agency ultimately spent about \$11 billion on thousands of public buildings, bridges, and hard-surfaced roads. Not every WPA project strengthened the infrastructure: for instance, one controlled crickets in Wyoming, while another built a monkey pen in Oklahoma City. Predictably, missions like these caused critics to sneer that WPA meant "We Provide Alms." But the fact is that over a period of

eight years, nearly 9 million people were given jobs, not handouts.

Agencies of the WPA also found part-time occupations for needy high school and college students and for such unemployed white-collar workers as actors, musicians, and writers. John Steinbeck, future Nobel Prize novelist, counted dogs in his California county. Cynical taxpayers condemned lessons in tap dancing, as well as the painting of murals on post office walls. But much precious talent was nourished, self-respect was preserved, and more than a million pieces of art were created, many of them publicly displayed.

### **A Helping Hand for Industry and Labor**

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A daring attempt to stimulate a nationwide comeback was initiated when the Emergency Congress authorized the National Recovery Administration (NRA). This ingenious scheme was by far the most complex and far-reaching effort by the New Dealers to combine immediate relief with long-range recovery and reform. Triple-barreled, it was designed to assist industry, labor, and the unemployed.

Individual industries—over two hundred in all—were to work out codes of “fair competition,” under which hours of labor would be reduced so that employment could be spread over more people. A ceiling was placed on the maximum hours of labor; a floor was placed under wages to establish minimum levels.

Labor, under the NRA, was granted additional benefits. Workers were formally guaranteed the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of *their own choosing*—not through handpicked agents of the company’s choosing. The hated “yellow-dog,” or antiunion, contract was expressly forbidden, and certain safeguarding restrictions were placed on the use of child labor.

Industrial recovery through the NRA “fair competition” codes would at best be painful, for these called for self-denial by both management and labor. Patriotism was aroused by mass meetings and monster parades, which included 200,000 marchers on New York City’s Fifth Avenue. A handsome blue eagle was designed as the symbol of the NRA, and merchants subscribing to a code displayed it in their windows with the slogan “We Do Our Part.” A newly formed professional football team was christened the

Philadelphia Eagles. Such was the enthusiasm for the NRA that for a brief period, there was a marked upswing in business activity, although Roosevelt had warned, “We cannot ballyhoo our way to prosperity.”

But the high-flying eagle gradually fluttered to earth. Too much self-sacrifice was expected of labor, industry, and the public for such a scheme to work. Critics began to brand NRA “National Run Around” and “Nuts Running America,” symbolized by what Henry Ford called “that damn Roosevelt buzzard.” A new “age of chiselry” dawned as certain unscrupulous businesspeople (“chiselers”) publicly displayed the blue bird on their windows but secretly violated the codes. Complete collapse was imminent when, in 1935, the Supreme Court shot down the dying eagle in the famed *Schechter* “sick chicken” decision. The learned justices unanimously held that Congress could not “delegate legislative powers” to the executive. They further declared that congressional control of interstate commerce could not properly apply to a local fowl business, like that of the Schechter brothers in Brooklyn, New York.

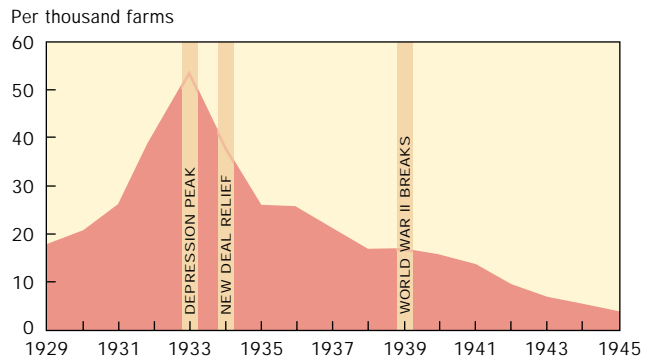
Roosevelt was incensed by this “horse and buggy” interpretation of the Constitution, but actually the Court helped him out of a bad jam.

The same act of Congress that hatched the NRA eagle also authorized the Public Works Administration (PWA), likewise intended both for industrial recovery and for unemployment relief. The agency was headed by the secretary of the interior, acid-tongued Harold L. Ickes, a free-swinging former bull mooser. Long-range recovery was the primary purpose of the new agency, and in time over \$4 billion was spent on some thirty-four thousand projects, which included public buildings, highways, and parkways. One spectacular achievement was the Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River—the largest structure erected by humans since the Great Wall of China. In the depths of the depression, the grand dam seemed the height of folly. It made possible the irrigation of millions of acres of new farmland—at a time when the government was desperately trying to reduce farm surpluses. It created more electrical power than the entire TVA—in a region with little industry and virtually no market for additional power. But with the outbreak of World War II and then postwar prosperity, the dam would come to seem a stroke of genius, transforming the entire region with abundant water and power.

Special stimulants aided the recovery of one segment of business—the liquor industry. The imminent repeal of the prohibition amendment afforded an opportunity to raise needed federal revenue and at the same time to provide a measure of employment. Prodded by Roosevelt, the Hundred Days Congress, in one of its earliest acts, legalized light wine and beer with an alcoholic content (presumably nonintoxicating) not exceeding 3.2 percent by weight, and levied a tax of \$5 on every barrel so manufactured. Disgruntled dries, unwilling to acknowledge the breakdown of law and order begotten by bootlegging, damned Roosevelt as “a 3.2 percent American.” Prohibition was officially repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment late in 1933 (see Appendix), and the saloon doors swung open.

### Paying Farmers Not to Farm

Ever since the war-boom days of 1918, farmers had suffered from low prices and overproduction, especially in grain. During the depression, conditions



Farm Foreclosures and Defaults, 1929–1945

became desperate as innumerable mortgages were foreclosed, as corn was burned for fuel, and as embattled farmers tried to prevent shipment of crops to glutted markets. In Iowa several volatile counties were placed under martial law.

A radical new approach to farm recovery was embraced when the Emergency Congress established the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). Through “artificial scarcity” this agency was to establish “parity prices” for basic commodities. “Parity” was the price set for a product that gave it the same real value, in purchasing power, that it had enjoyed during the period from 1909 to 1914. The AAA would eliminate price-depressing surpluses by paying growers to reduce their crop acreage. The millions of dollars needed for these payments were to be raised by taxing processors of farm products, such as flour millers, who in turn would shift the burden to consumers.

*Novelist John Steinbeck (1902–1968) related in his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) that when the “Okies” and “Arkies” reached California, they found the big growers unwilling to pay more than twenty-five cents an hour for work in the fields. One owner mutters,*

*“A Red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we’re paying twenty-five!”*

Unhappily, the AAA got off to a wobbly start. It was begun after much of the cotton crop for 1933 had been planted, and balky mules, trained otherwise, were forced to plow under countless young plants. Several million squealing pigs were purchased and slaughtered. Much of their meat was distributed to people on relief, but some of it was used for fertilizer. This “sinful” destruction of food, at a time when thousands of citizens were hungry, increased condemnation of the American economic system by many left-leaning voices.

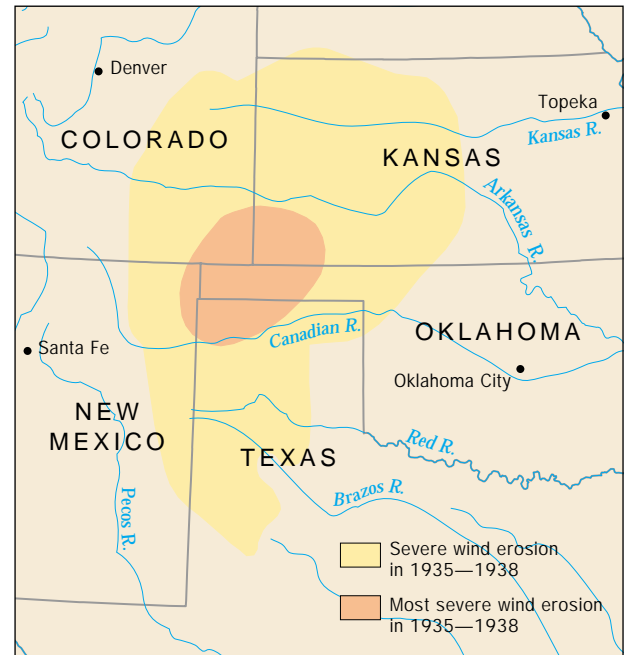
“Subsidized scarcity” did have the effect of raising farm income, but the whole confused enterprise met with acid criticism. Farmers, food processors, consumers, and taxpayers were all to some degree unhappy. Paying the farmers not to farm actually increased unemployment, at a time when other New Deal agencies were striving to decrease it. When the Supreme Court finally killed the AAA in 1936 by declaring its regulatory taxation provisions unconstitutional, foes of the plow-under program rejoiced loudly.

Quickly recovering from this blow, the New Deal Congress hastened to pass the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936. The withdrawal of acreage from production was now achieved by paying farmers to plant soil-conserving crops, like soybeans, or to let their land lie fallow. With the emphasis thus on conservation, the Supreme Court placed the stamp of its approval on the revamped scheme.

The Second Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, passed two years later, was a more comprehensive substitute, although it continued conservation payments. If growers observed acreage restrictions on specified commodities like cotton and wheat, they would be eligible for parity payments. Other provisions of the new AAA were designed to give farmers not only a fairer price but a more substantial share of the national income. Both goals were partially achieved.

## **Dust Bowls and Black Blizzards**

Nature meanwhile had been providing some unplanned scarcity. Late in 1933 a prolonged drought struck the states of the trans-Mississippi Great Plains. Rainless weeks were followed by furious, whining winds, while the sun was darkened by millions of



**The Extent of Erosion in the 1930s** Note the extensive wind erosion in the western Oklahoma “panhandle” region, which was dubbed the “Dust Bowl” in the 1930s. Mechanized farmers had “busted” the sod of the southern plains so thoroughly that they literally broke the back of the land. Tons of dust blew out of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s and blotted the sun from the skies as far away as New York. A Kansas newspaperman reported in 1935 that in his dust-darkened town, “Lady Godiva could ride through streets without even the horse seeing her.”

tons of powdery topsoil torn from homesteads in an area that stretched from eastern Colorado to western Missouri—soon to be dubbed the Dust Bowl. Despondent citizens sat on front porches with protective masks on their faces, watching their farms swirl by. A seven-year-old boy in Kansas suffocated. Overawed victims of the Dust Bowl disaster predicted the end of the world or the second coming of Christ.

Drought and wind triggered the dust storms, but they were not the only culprits. The human hand had also worked its mischief. High grain prices during World War I had enticed farmers to bring countless acres of marginal land under cultivation. Worse, dry-farming techniques and mechanization had revolutionized Great Plains agriculture. The steam tractor and the disk plow tore up infinitely more sod than a team of oxen ever could, leaving the powdery topsoil to be swept away at nature’s whim.

Burned and blown out of the Dust Bowl, tens of thousands of refugees fled their ruined acres (see “Makers of America: The Dust Bowl Migrants,” pp. 792–793). In five years about 350,000 Oklahomans and Arkansans—“Okies” and “Arkies”—trekked to southern California in “junkyards on wheels.” The dismal story of these human tumbleweeds was realistically portrayed in John Steinbeck’s best-selling novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), which proved to be the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the Dust Bowl.

Zealous New Dealers, sympathetic toward the soil-tillers, made various other efforts to relieve their burdens. The Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act, passed in 1934, made possible a suspension of mortgage foreclosures for five years, but it was voided the next year by the Supreme Court. A revised law, limiting the grace period to three years, was unanimously upheld. In 1935 the president set up the Resettlement Administration, charged with the task of removing near-farmless farmers to better land. And more than 200 million young trees were successfully planted on the bare prairies as windbreaks by the young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps, even though one governor jeered at trying to “grow hair on a bald head.”

Native Americans also felt the far-reaching hand of New Deal reform. Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier ardently sought to reverse the

forced-assimilation policies in place since the Dawes Act of 1887 (see p. 597). Inspired by a sojourn among the Pueblo Indians in Taos, New Mexico, Collier promoted the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (the “Indian New Deal”). The new law encouraged tribes to establish local self-government and to preserve their native crafts and traditions. The act also helped to stop the loss of Indian lands and revived tribes’ interest in their identity and culture. Yet not all Indians applauded it. Some denounced the legislation as a “back-to-the-blanket” measure that sought to make museum pieces out of Native Americans. Seventy-seven tribes refused to organize under its provisions, though nearly two hundred others did establish tribal governments.

### **Battling Bankers and Big Business**

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Reformist New Dealers were determined from the outset to curb the “money changers” who had played fast and loose with gullible investors before the Wall Street crash of 1929. The Hundred Days Congress passed the “Truth in Securities Act” (Federal Securities Act), which required promoters to transmit to the investor sworn information regarding the soundness of their stocks and bonds. An old

saying was thus reversed to read, “Let the seller beware,” although the buyer might never read the fine print.

In 1934 Congress took further steps to protect the public against fraud, deception, and inside manipulation. It authorized the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which was designed as a watchdog administrative agency. Stock markets henceforth were to operate more as trading marts and less as gambling casinos.

New Dealers likewise directed their fire at public utility holding companies, those supercorporations. Citizens had seen one of these incredible colossi collapse during the spring of 1932, when the Chicagoan Samuel Insull’s multibillion-dollar financial empire crashed. Possibilities of controlling, with a minimum of capital, a half-dozen or so pyramided layers of big business suggested to Roosevelt “a ninety-six-inch dog being wagged by a four-inch tail.” The Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935 finally delivered a “death sentence” to this type of bloated growth, except where it might be deemed economically needful.

### The TVA Harnesses the Tennessee River

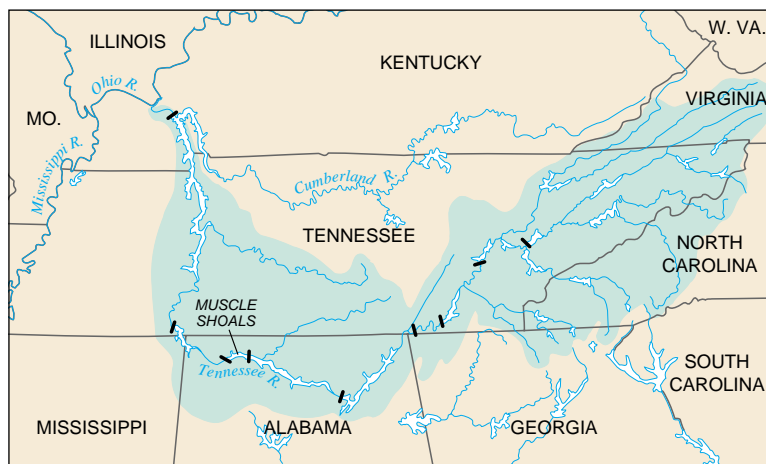
Inevitably, the sprawling electric-power industry attracted the fire of New Deal reformers. Within a few decades, it had risen from nothingness to a behemoth with an investment of \$13 billion. As a public utility, it reached directly and regularly into the pocketbooks of millions of consumers for vitally

needed services. Ardent New Dealers accused it of gouging the public with excessive rates, especially since it owed its success to having secured, often for a song, priceless water-power sites from the public domain.

The tempestuous Tennessee River provided New Dealers with a rare opportunity. With its tributaries, the river drained a badly eroded area about the size of England, and one containing some 2.5 million of the most poverty-stricken people in America. The federal government already owned valuable properties at Muscle Shoals, where it had erected plants for needed nitrates in World War I. By developing the hydroelectric potential of the entire area, Washington could combine the immediate advantage of putting thousands of people to work with a long-term project for reforming the power monopoly.

An act creating the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was passed in 1933 by the Hundred Days Congress. This far-ranging enterprise was largely a result of the steadfast vision and unflagging zeal of Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska, after whom one of the mighty dams was named. From the standpoint of “planned economy,” the TVA was by far the most revolutionary of all the New Deal schemes.

This new agency was determined to discover precisely how much the production and distribution of electricity cost, so that a “yardstick” could be set up to test the fairness of rates charged by private companies. Utility corporations lashed back at this entering wedge of government control, charging that the low cost of TVA power was due to dishonest bookkeeping and the absence of taxes. Critics



**TVA Area** Only the nine dams on the Tennessee River are shown here. More than twenty dams were constructed on the river’s tributaries as part of a massive project to control flooding, generate hydroelectric power, and revitalize the Tennessee Valley region, while also creating jobs for the unemployed. The shaded area represents the area served by TVA electric power.



# MAKERS OF AMERICA

## The Dust Bowl Migrants

**B**lack dust clouds rolled across the southern Great Plains in the 1930s, darkening the skies above a landscape already desolated by the Great Depression. Its soil depleted by erosion, exhausted by over-intensive farming, and parched by drought, the prairie of eastern Colorado, northern Texas, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and western Missouri became a dust bowl. The thirsty land offered up neither crops nor livelihood to the sturdy people whose forebears had staked out homesteads there. The desiccated earth exhaled only black dust and a dry wind that blew hundreds of thousands of people—the so-called Okies and Arkies—out of the Dust Bowl forever.

They headed mainly for California, piling aboard buses, hopping freight trains, or buying space in westbound cars. Most journeyed in their own autos, cramming their meager possessions into old jalopies and sputtering onto the highway. But unlike the aimless, isolated Joad family of John Steinbeck's classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, most Dust Bowl migrants knew where they were headed. Although many had lost everything in the depression, most knew relatives or friends who had migrated to California before the great crash and had sent back word about its abundant promise.

The earliest Okies had migrated under better circumstances in better times, and they often bragged of the good life in California. In the two decades preceding the Great Depression, more than a million people had left the states of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. At least a quarter of them turned toward California, lured by advertisements that painted a life of leisure and plenty amid the palms.

Their ears so long filled with glowing reports from this earlier exodus, the Dust Bowl migrants refused to believe that the depression could sully the bright promise of California. Not even an omi-

nous sign posted by the state of California on the highway just west of Tulsa deterred them. Indeed the billboard proclaimed its warning in vain—"NO JOBS in California . . . If YOU are looking for work—KEEP OUT."

Some Okies and Arkies made their way past the sign to California cities, but many of them favored the San Joaquin Valley, the southern part of central California's agricultural kingdom. The migrants chose it for its familiarity. The valley shared much in common with the southern plains—arid climate, cotton growing, newfound oil deposits, and abundant land.

During the 1930s the San Joaquin Valley also proved all too familiar in its poverty; in 1939 the median income for migrants from the southern

plains hovered just below the official poverty line. Food, shelter, and clothing were scarce; the winter months, without work and without heat, proved nearly unendurable for the migrants. John Steinbeck, writing in a San Francisco newspaper, exposed the tribulations of the Dust Bowl refugees: “First the gasoline gives out. And without gasoline a man cannot go to a job even if he could get one. Then the food goes. And then in the rains, with insufficient food, the children develop colds. . . .”

Eventually the Farm Security Administration—a New Deal agency—set up camps to house the Okies. A fortunate few purchased land and erected makeshift homes, creating tiny “Okieville” or “Little Oklahomas.” During World War II, most Okies escaped the deprivation and uncertainty of seasonal farm labor, securing regular jobs in defense industries. But the “Okieville” remained, to form the bedrock of a still-thriving subculture in California—one that has brought the Dust Bowl’s country and western music, pecan pie, and evangelical religion to the Far West.

*In the early 1980s, Atlanta mayor Andrew Young (b. 1932) observed that the Tennessee Valley Authority created the economic structure for the later civil rights movement:*

*“It was the presence of the cheap electricity, lower interest rates, water projects, that laid the foundation for the New South.”*

complained that the whole dream was “creeping socialism in concrete.”

But the New Dealers, shrugging off such outcries, pointed a prideful finger at the amazing achievements of the TVA. The gigantic project brought to the area not only full employment and the blessings of cheap electric power, but low-cost housing, abundant cheap nitrates, the restoration of eroded soil, reforestation, improved navigation, and flood control. Rivers ran blue instead of brown, and a once-poverty-cursed area was being transformed into one of the most flourishing regions in the United States. Foreigners were greatly impressed with the possibilities of similar schemes in their own lands, and exulting New Dealers agitated for parallel enterprises in the valleys of the Columbia, Colorado, and Missouri Rivers. Federally built dams one day would span all those waterways, impounding more than 30 percent of the total annual runoff from the “roof of America” in the Rocky Mountains. Hydroelectric power from those dams would drive the growth of the urban West, and the waters they diverted would nurture agriculture in the previously bone-dry western deserts. But conservative reaction against the “socialistic” New Deal would confine the TVA’s brand of federally guided resource management and comprehensive regional development to the Tennessee Valley.

### **Housing Reform and Social Security**

The New Deal had meanwhile framed sturdy new policies for housing construction. To speed recovery and better homes, Roosevelt set up the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) as early as 1934. The

building industry was to be stimulated by small loans to householders, both for improving their dwellings and for completing new ones. So popular did the FHA prove to be that it was one of the few “alphabetical agencies” to outlast the age of Roosevelt.

Congress bolstered the program in 1937 by authorizing the United States Housing Authority (USHA)—an agency designed to lend money to states or communities for low-cost construction. Although units for about 650,000 low-income people were started, new building fell tragically short of needs. New Deal efforts to expand the project collided with brick-wall opposition from real estate promoters, builders, and landlords (“slumlords”), to say nothing of anti-New Dealers who attacked what they considered down-the-rathole spending. Nonetheless, for the first time in a century, the slum areas in America ceased growing and even shrank.

Incomparably more important was the success of New Dealers in the field of unemployment insurance and old-age pensions. Their greatest victory was the epochal Social Security Act of 1935—one of the most complicated and far-reaching laws ever to pass Congress. To cushion future depressions, the measure provided for federal-state unemployment insurance. To provide security for old age, specified categories of retired workers were to receive regular payments from Washington. These payments ranged from \$10 to \$85 a month (later raised) and were financed by a payroll tax on both employers and employees. Provision was also made for the blind, the physically handicapped, delinquent children, and other dependents.

Republican opposition to the sweeping new legislation was bitter. “Social Security,” insisted Hoover, “must be builded upon a cult of work, not a cult of leisure.” The GOP national chairman falsely charged that every worker would have to wear a metal dog tag for life.

Social Security was largely inspired by the example of some of the more highly industrialized nations of Europe. In the agricultural America of an earlier day, there had always been farm chores for all ages, and the large family had cared for its own dependents. But in an urbanized economy, at the mercy of boom-or-bust cycles, the government was now recognizing its responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. By 1939 over 45 million people were eligible for Social Security benefits, and in subsequent years further categories of workers were added and the payments to them were periodically increased.

In contrast to Europe, where benefits generally were universal, American workers had to be employed to get coverage.

### **A New Deal for Unskilled Labor**

The NRA blue eagles, with their call for collective bargaining, had been a godsend to organized labor. As New Deal expenditures brought some slackening of unemployment, labor began to feel more secure and hence more self-assertive. A rash of walkouts occurred in the summer of 1934, including a paralyzing general strike in San Francisco (following a “Bloody Thursday”), which was broken only when outraged citizens resorted to vigilante tactics.

When the Supreme Court axed the blue eagle, a Congress sympathetic to labor unions undertook to fill the vacuum. The fruit of its deliberations was the

Wagner, or National Labor Relations, Act of 1935. This trailblazing law created a powerful new National Labor Relations Board for administrative purposes and reasserted the right of labor to engage

*A worker at a Chevrolet plant in Flint, Michigan, wrote after the United Auto Workers-CIO victory in 1937,*

“The inhuman high speed is *no more*. We now have a voice, and have slowed up the speed of the line. And [we] are now treated as human beings, and not as part of the machinery. The high pressure is taken off. . . . It proves clearly that united we stand, divided or alone we fall.”

in self-organization and to bargain collectively through representatives of its own choice. The Wagner Act proved to be one of the real milestones on the rocky road of the U.S. labor movement.

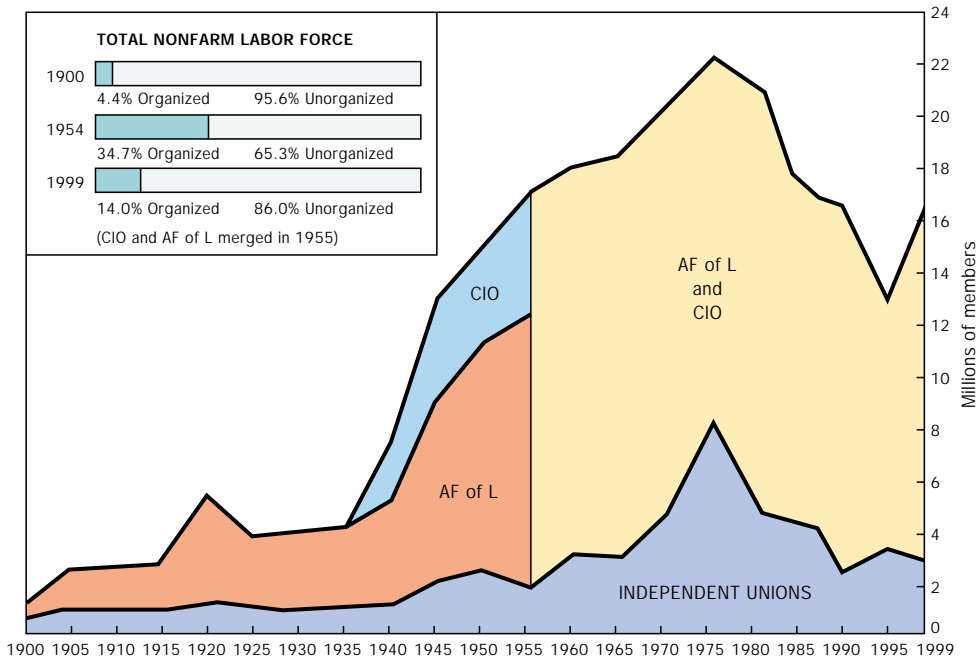
Under the encouragement of a highly sympathetic National Labor Relations Board, a host of unskilled workers began to organize themselves into effective unions. The leader of this drive was beetle-browed, domineering, and melodramatic John L. Lewis, boss of the United Mine Workers. In 1935 he succeeded in forming the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) within the ranks of the skilled-craft American Federation of Labor. But skilled workers, ever since the days of the ill-fated Knights of Labor in the 1880s, had shown only lukewarm sympathy for the cause of unskilled labor, especially blacks. In 1936, following inevitable friction with the CIO, the older federation suspended the upstart unions associated with the newer organization.

Undaunted, the rebellious CIO moved on a concerted scale into the huge automobile industry. Late in 1936 the workers resorted to a revolutionary technique (earlier used in both Europe and America) known as the sit-down strike: they refused to leave the factory building of General Motors at Flint,

Michigan, and thus prevented the importation of strikebreakers. Conservative respecters of private property were scandalized. The CIO finally won a resounding victory when its union, after heated negotiations, was recognized by General Motors as the sole bargaining agency for its employees.

Unskilled workers now pressed their advantage. The United States Steel Company, hitherto an impossible nut for labor to crack, averted a costly strike when it voluntarily granted rights of unionization to its CIO-organized employees. But the “little steel” companies fought back savagely. Citizens were shocked in 1937 by the Memorial Day massacre at the plant of the Republic Steel Company in South Chicago. In a bloody fracas, police fired upon pickets and workers, leaving the area strewn with several score dead and wounded.

A better deal for labor continued when Congress, in 1938, passed the memorable Fair Labor Standards Act (Wages and Hours Bill). Industries involved in interstate commerce were to set up minimum-wage and maximum-hour levels. The eventual goals were forty cents an hour (later raised) and a forty-hour week. Labor by children under sixteen (under eighteen if the occupation was dangerous) was forbidden. These reforms were bitterly



The Rise and Decline of Organized Labor, 1900–1999 The percentage of the total labor force that was organized increased until 1954, and it has declined ever since. (Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

though futilely opposed by many industrialists, especially by those southern textile manufacturers who had profited from low-wage labor. But the exclusion of agricultural, service, and domestic workers meant that blacks, Mexican-Americans, and women—who were concentrated in these fields—did not benefit from the act.

In later New Deal days, labor unionization thrived; “Roosevelt wants you to join a union” was the rallying cry of professional organizers. The president received valuable support at ballot-box time from labor leaders and many appreciative working people. One mill worker remarked that Roosevelt was “the only man we ever had in the White House who would know that my boss is a s.o.b.”

The CIO surged forward, breaking completely with the AF of L in 1938. On that occasion the *Committee* for Industrial Organization was formally reconstituted as the *Congress of Industrial Organizations* (the new CIO), under the high-handed presidency of John L. Lewis. By 1940 the CIO could claim about 4 million members in its constituent unions, including some 200,000 blacks. Nevertheless, bitter and annoying jurisdictional feuding involving strikes continued with the AF of L. At times labor seemed more bent on costly civil war than on its age-old war with management.

### Landon Challenges “the Champ” in 1936

As the presidential campaign of 1936 neared, the New Dealers were on top of the world. They had achieved considerable progress, and millions of “reliefers” were grateful to their bountiful government. The exultant Democrats renominated Roosevelt on a platform squarely endorsing the New Deal.

The Republicans were hard-pressed to find someone to feed to “the Champ.” They finally settled on the colorless but homespun and honest governor of the Sunflower State of Kansas, Alfred M. Landon. Landon himself was a moderate who accepted some New Deal reforms, although not the popular Social Security Act. But the Republican platform vigorously condemned the New Deal of Franklin “Deficit” Roosevelt for its radicalism, experimentation, confusion, and “frightful waste.” Backing Landon, ex-president Hoover called for a “holy crusade for liberty,” echoing the cry of the American Liberty League, a group of wealthy conservatives who had organized in 1934 to fight “socialistic” New Deal schemes.

Roosevelt gave as good as he got. Angry enough to stretch sheet iron, the president took to the

stump and denounced the “economic royalists” who sought to “hide behind the flag and the Constitution.” “I welcome their hatred,” he proclaimed.

A landslide overwhelmed Landon, as the demoralized Republicans carried only two states, Maine and Vermont. This dismal showing caused political wiseacres to make the old adage read, “As Maine goes, so goes Vermont.”\* The popular vote was 27,752,869 to 16,674,665; the electoral count was 523 to 8—the most lopsided in 116 years. Democratic majorities, riding in on Roosevelt’s magic coattails, were again returned to Congress. Jubilant Democrats could now claim more than two-thirds of the seats in the House and a like proportion in the Senate.

The battle of 1936, perhaps the most bitter since Bryan’s defeat in 1896, partially bore out Republican charges of class warfare. Even more than in 1932, the needy economic groups were lined up against the so-called greedy economic groups. CIO units contributed generously to FDR’s campaign chest. Many left-wingers turned to Roosevelt, as the customary third-party protest vote sharply declined. Blacks, several million of whom had also appreciated welcome relief checks, had by now largely shaken off their traditional allegiance to the Republican party. To them, Lincoln was “finally dead.”

FDR won primarily because he appealed to the “forgotten man,” whom he never forgot. Some of the president’s support was only pocketbook-deep: “reliefers” were not going to bite the hand that doled out the government checks. No one, as Al Smith remarked, “shoots at Santa Claus.” But Roosevelt in fact had forged a powerful and enduring coalition of the South, blacks, urbanites, and the poor. He proved especially effective in marshaling the support of the multitudes of “New Immigrants”—mostly the Catholics and Jews who had swarmed into the great cities since the turn of the century. These once-scorned newcomers, with their now-numerous sons and daughters, had at last come politically of age. In the 1920s one out of every twenty-five federal judgeships went to a Catholic; Roosevelt appointed Catholics to one out of every four.

*Three days before the 1936 election, Roosevelt took the moral high ground in his speech at New York’s Madison Square Garden:*

“I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces met their master.”

### **Nine Old Men on the Supreme Bench**

Bowing his head to the sleety blasts, Roosevelt took the presidential oath on January 20, 1937, instead of the traditional March 4. The Twentieth Amendment to the Constitution had been ratified in 1933. (See the Appendix.) It swept away the postelection lame duck session of Congress and shortened by six weeks the awkward period before inauguration.

Flushed with victory, Roosevelt interpreted his reelection as a mandate to continue New Deal reforms. But in his eyes, the cloistered old men on the supreme bench, like fossilized stumbling blocks, stood stubbornly in the pathway of progress. In nine major cases involving the New Deal, the Roosevelt administration had been thwarted seven times. The Court was ultraconservative, and six of the nine oldsters in black were over seventy. As luck would have it, not a single member had been appointed by FDR in his first term.

Roosevelt, his “Dutch up,” viewed with mounting impatience what he regarded as the obstructive conservatism of the Court. Some of these Old Guard appointees were hanging on with a senile grip, partly because they felt it their patriotic duty to curb the “socialistic” tendencies of that radical in the White House. Roosevelt believed that the voters in three successive elections—the presidential elections of 1932 and 1936 and the midterm congressional elections of 1934—had returned a smashing verdict in favor of his program of reform. Democracy, in his view, meant rule by the people. If the American way of life was to be preserved, Roosevelt

\*Maine, which traditionally held its state elections in September, was long regarded as a political weathervane. Hence the expression, “As Maine goes, so goes the nation.”

argued, the Supreme Court ought to get in line with the supreme court of public opinion.

Roosevelt finally hit upon a Court scheme that he regarded as “the answer to a maiden’s prayer.” In fact, it proved to be one of the most costly political misjudgments of his career. When he sprang his brainstorm on a shocked nation early in 1937, he caught the country and Congress completely by surprise. Roosevelt bluntly asked Congress for legislation to permit him to add a new justice to the Supreme Court for every member over seventy who would not retire. The maximum membership could then be fifteen. Roosevelt pointed to the necessity of injecting vigorous new blood, for the Court, he alleged, was far behind in its work. This charge, which turned out to be false, brought heated accusations of dishonesty. At best, Roosevelt was headstrong and not fully aware of the fact that the Court, in popular thinking, had become something of a sacred cow.

## The Court Changes Course

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Congress and the nation were promptly convulsed over the scheme to “pack” the Supreme Court with a “dictator bill,” which one critic called “too damned slick.” Franklin “Double-crossing” Roosevelt was vilified for attempting to break down the delicate checks and balances among the three branches of the government. He was accused of grooming himself as a dictator by trying to browbeat the judiciary. In the eyes of countless citizens, mostly Republicans but including many Democrats, basic liberties seemed to be in jeopardy. “God Bless the Supreme Court” was a fervent prayer.

The Court had meanwhile seen the ax hanging over its head. Whatever his motives, Justice Owen J. Roberts, formerly regarded as a conservative, began to vote on the side of his liberal colleagues. “A switch in time saves nine” was the classic witticism



inspired by this ideological change. By a five to four decision, the Court, in March 1937, upheld the principle of a state minimum wage for women, thereby reversing its stand on a different case a year earlier. In succeeding decisions a Court more sympathetic to the New Deal upheld the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) and the Social Security Act. Roosevelt's "Court-packing" was further undermined when Congress voted full pay for justices over seventy who retired, whereupon one of the oldest conservative members resigned, to be replaced by a New Dealer, Justice Hugo Black.

Congress finally passed a court reform bill, but this watered-down version applied only to lower courts. Roosevelt, the master politician, thus suffered his first major legislative defeat at the hands of his own party in Congress. Americans have never viewed lightly a tampering with the Supreme Court by the president, no matter how popular their chief executive may be. Yet in losing this battle, Roosevelt incidentally won his campaign. The Court, as he had hoped, became markedly more friendly to New Deal reforms. Furthermore, a succession of deaths and resignations enabled him in time to make nine appointments to the tribunal—more than any of his predecessors since George Washington. The clock "unpacked" the Court.

Yet in a sense, FDR lost both the Court battle and the war. He so aroused conservatives of both parties in Congress that few New Deal reforms were passed after 1937, the year of the fight to "pack" the bench. With this catastrophic miscalculation, he

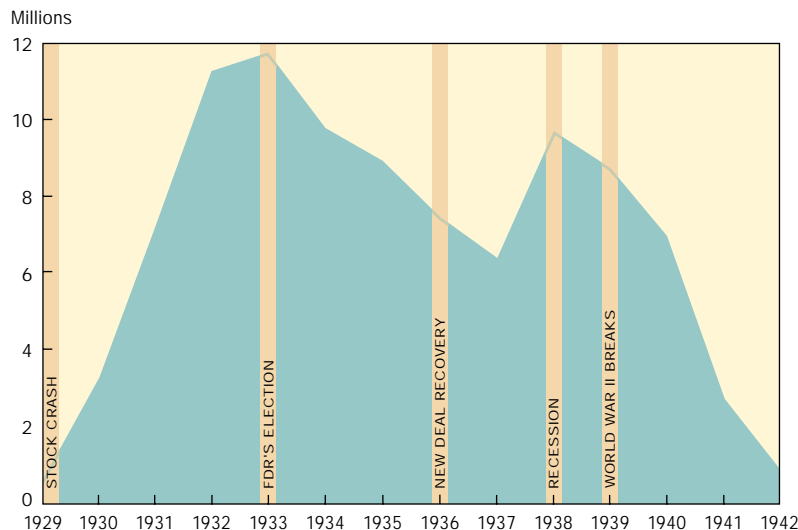
squandered much of the political goodwill that had carried him to such a resounding victory in the 1936 election.

## The Twilight of the New Deal

Roosevelt's first term, from 1933 to 1937, did not banish the depression from the land. Unemployment stubbornly persisted in 1936 at about 15 percent, down from the grim 25 percent of 1933 but still miserably high. Despite the inventiveness of New Deal programs and the billions of dollars in "pump priming," recovery had been dishearteningly modest, though the country seemed to be inching its way back to economic health.

Then in 1937 the economy took another sharp downturn, a surprisingly severe depression-within-the-depression that the president's critics quickly dubbed the "Roosevelt recession." In fact, government policies had caused the nosedive, as new Social Security taxes began to bite into payrolls and as the administration cut back on spending out of continuing reverence for the orthodox economic doctrine of the balanced budget.

Only at this late date did Roosevelt at last frankly and deliberately embrace the recommendations of the British economist John Maynard Keynes. The New Deal had run deficits for several years, but all of them had been rather small and



### Unemployment, 1929–1942

These cold figures can only begin to suggest the widespread human misery caused by mass unemployment. One man wrote to a newspaper in 1932, "I am forty-eight; married twenty-one years; four children, three in school. For the last eight years I was employed as a Pullman conductor. Since September, 1930, they have given me seven months part-time work. Today I am an object of charity. . . . My small, weak, and frail wife and two small children are suffering and I have come to that terrible place where I could easily resort to violence in my desperation."

*A basic objective of the New Deal was featured in Roosevelt's second inaugural address (1937):*

"I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. . . . The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

none was intended. Now, in April 1937, Roosevelt announced a bold program to stimulate the economy by planned deficit spending. Although the deficits were still undersized for the herculean task of conquering the depression, this abrupt policy reversal marked a major turning point in the government's relation to the economy. "Keynesianism" became the new economic orthodoxy and remained so for decades.

Roosevelt had meanwhile been pushing the remaining reform measures of the New Deal. Early

in 1937 he urged Congress—a Congress growing more conservative—to authorize a sweeping reorganization of the national administration in the interests of streamlined efficiency. But the issue became tangled up with his presumed autocratic ambitions in regard to the Supreme Court, and he suffered another stinging defeat. Two years later, in 1939, Congress partially relented and in the Reorganization Act gave him limited powers for administrative reforms, including the key new Executive Office in the White House.

The New Dealers were accused of having the richest campaign chest in history, and in truth government relief checks had a curious habit of coming in bunches just before ballot time. To remedy such practices, which tended to make a farce of free elections, Congress adopted the much-heralded Hatch Act of 1939. This act barred federal administrative officials, except the highest policy-making officers, from active political campaigning and soliciting. It also forbade the use of government funds for political purposes as well as the collection of campaign contributions from people receiving relief payments. The Hatch Act was broadened in 1940 to place limits on campaign contributions and expenditures, but

such clever ways of getting around it were found that on the whole the legislation proved disappointing.

By 1938 the New Deal had clearly lost most of its early momentum. Magician Roosevelt could find few dazzling new reform rabbits to pull out of his tall silk hat. In the congressional elections of 1938, the Republicans, for the first time, cut heavily into the New Deal majorities in Congress, though failing to gain control of either house. The international crisis that came to a boil in 1938–1939 shifted public attention away from domestic reform and no doubt helped save the political hide of the Roosevelt “spendocracy.” The New Deal, for all practical purposes, had shot its bolt.

### **New Deal or Raw Deal?**

Foes of the New Deal condemned its alleged waste, incompetence, confusion, contradictions, and cross-purposes, as well as the chiseling and graft in the alphabetical agencies—“alphabet soup,” sneered Al Smith. Roosevelt had done nothing, cynics said, that an earthquake could not have done better. Critics deplored the employment of “crackpot” college professors, leftist “pinkos,” and outright Communists. Such subversives, it was charged, were trying to make America over in the Bolshevik-Marxist image under “Rooseveltski.” The Hearst newspapers lambasted,

*The Red New Deal with a Soviet seal  
Endorsed by a Moscow hand,  
The strange result of an alien cult  
In a liberty-loving land.*

Roosevelt was further accused by conservatives of being Jewish (“Rosenfield”) and of tapping too many bright young Jewish leftists (“The Jew Deal”) for his “Drain Trust.”

Hardheaded businesspeople, who “had met a payroll,” were shocked by the leap-before-you-look, try-anything-once spirit of Roosevelt, the jolly improviser. They accused him of confusing noise and movement with progress. Others appreciated the president’s do-something approach. Humorist Will Rogers, the rope-twirling “poet lariat” of the era, remarked that if Roosevelt were to burn down the Capitol, people would say, “Well, we at least got a fire started, anyhow.”

“Bureaucratic meddling” and “regimentation” were also bitter complaints of anti-New Dealers; in truth, bureaucracy did blossom. The federal government, with its hundreds of thousands of employees, became incomparably the largest single business in the country, as the states faded further into the background.

Promises of budget balancing, to say nothing of other promises, had flown out the window—so foes of the New Deal pointed out. The national debt had stood at the already enormous figure of \$19,487,000,000 in 1932 and had skyrocketed to \$40,440,000,000 by 1939. America was becoming, its critics charged, a “handout state” trying to squander itself into prosperity—*U.S.* stood for “unlimited spending.” Such lavish benefactions were undermining the old virtues of thrift and initiative. Ordinary Americans, once self-reliant citizens, were getting a bad case of the “gimmies”: their wishbones were becoming larger than their backbones. In the nineteenth century, hard-pressed workers went west; now they went on relief.

Business was bitter. Accusing the New Deal of fomenting class strife, conservatives insisted that the laborer and the farmer—especially the big operator—were being pampered. Why “soak the successful”? Countless businesspeople, especially Republicans, declared that they could pull themselves out of the depression if they could only get the federal government—an interventionist big government—off their backs. Private enterprise, they charged, was being stifled by “planned economy,” “planned bankruptcy,” “creeping socialism,” and the philosophy “Washington can do it better,” with a federal pill for every ill. States’ rights were being ignored, while the government was competing in business with its own citizens, under a “dictatorship of do-gooders.”

The aggressive leadership of Roosevelt—“one-man supergovernment”—also came in for denunciation. Heavy fire was especially directed at his attempts to browbeat the Supreme Court and to create a “dummy Congress.” Roosevelt had even tried in the 1938 elections, with backfiring results, to “purge” members of Congress who would not lock-step with him. The three senators whom he publicly opposed were all triumphantly reelected.

The most damning indictment of the New Deal was that it had failed to cure the depression. Afloat in a sea of red ink, it had merely administered

aspirin, sedatives, and Band-Aids. Many economists came to believe that better results would have been achieved by much greater deficit spending. Despite some \$20 billion poured out in six years of deficit spending and lending, of leaf raking and pump priming, the gap was not closed between production and consumption. There were even more mountainous farm surpluses under Roosevelt than under Hoover. Millions of dispirited men and women were still unemployed in 1939, after six years of drain, strain, and pain. Not until World War II blazed forth in Europe was the unemployment headache solved. The sensational increase in the national debt was caused by World War II, not the New Deal. The national debt was only \$40 billion in 1939 but \$258 billion in 1945.

### **FDR's Balance Sheet**

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New Dealers staunchly defended their record. Admitting that there had been some waste, they pointed out that relief—not economy—had been the primary object of their multifront war on the depression. Conceding also that there had been some graft, they argued that it had been trivial in

view of the immense sums spent and the obvious need for haste.

Apologists for Roosevelt further declared that the New Deal had relieved the worst of the crisis in 1933. It promoted the philosophy of “balancing the human budget” and accepted the principle that the federal government was morally bound to prevent mass hunger and starvation by “managing” the economy. The Washington regime was to be used, not feared. The collapse of America’s economic system was averted, a fairer distribution of the national income was achieved, and the citizens were enabled

*In his acceptance speech at the 1936 Democratic convention, Roosevelt stated,*

“Governments can err; presidents do make mistakes, . . . but better the occasional faults of a Government that lives in a spirit of charity than the consistent omissions of a Government frozen in the ice of its own indifference.”

to regain and retain their self-respect. “Nobody is going to starve” was Roosevelt’s promise.

Though hated by business tycoons, FDR should have been their patron saint, so his admirers claimed. He deflected popular resentments against business and may have saved the American system of free enterprise. Roosevelt’s quarrel was not with capitalism but with capitalists; he purged American capitalism of some of its worst abuses so that it might be saved from itself. He may even have headed off a more radical swing to the left by a mild dose of what was mistakenly reviled as “socialism.” The head of the American Socialist party, when once asked if the New Deal had carried out the Socialist program, reportedly replied that it had indeed—on a stretcher.

Roosevelt, like Jefferson, provided bold reform without a bloody revolution—at a time in history when some foreign nations were suffering armed

uprisings and when many Europeans were predicting either communism or fascism for America. He was upbraided by the left-wing radicals for not going far enough, by the right-wing radicals for going too far. Choosing the middle road, he has been called the greatest American conservative since Hamilton. He was in fact Hamiltonian in his espousal of big government, but Jeffersonian in his concern for the “forgotten man.” Demonstrating anew the value of powerful presidential leadership, he exercised that power to relieve the erosion of the nation’s greatest physical resource—its people. He helped preserve democracy in America in a time when democracies abroad were disappearing down the sinkhole of dictatorship. And in playing this role, he unwittingly girded the nation for its part in the titanic war that loomed on the horizon—a war in which democracy the world over would be at stake.

## Chronology

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| <p><b>1932</b> Roosevelt defeats Hoover for presidency</p>   | <p><b>1935</b> WPA established<br/>Wagner Act<br/>Resettlement Administration<br/>Social Security Act<br/>Public Utility Holding Company Act<br/><i>Schechter</i> “sick-chicken” case<br/>CIO organized</p> |
| <p><b>1933</b> Bank holiday<br/>Emergency Banking Relief Act<br/>Beer and Wine Revenue Act<br/>The Hundred Days Congress enacts AAA, TVA, HOLC, NRA, and PWA<br/>Federal Securities Act<br/>Glass-Steagall Banking Reform Act<br/>CWA established<br/>Twentieth Amendment (changed calendar of congressional sessions and date of presidential inauguration)<br/>Twenty-first Amendment (prohibition repealed)</p> | <p><b>1936</b> Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act<br/>Roosevelt defeats Landon for presidency</p>   |
| <p><b>1934</b> Gold Reserve Act<br/>Securities and Exchange Commission authorized<br/>Indian Reorganization Act<br/>FHA established<br/>Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act</p>  | <p><b>1937</b> USHA established<br/>Roosevelt announces “Court-packing” plan</p>  |
|  | <p><b>1938</b> Second AAA<br/>Fair Labor Standards Act</p>  |
|  | <p><b>1939</b> Reorganization Act<br/>Hatch Act</p>   |

## VARYING VIEWPOINTS

### How Radical Was the New Deal?

The Great Depression was both a great calamity and a great opportunity. How effectively Franklin Roosevelt responded to the calamity and what use he made of the opportunity are the two great questions that have animated historical debate about the New Deal.

Some historians have actually denied that there was much of a connection between the depression and the New Deal. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., for example, who believes in “cycles” of reform and reaction in American history, has written that “there would very likely have been some sort of New Deal in the 1930s even without the Depression.” But most of the first generation of historians who wrote about the New Deal (in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s) agreed with Carl Degler’s judgment that the New Deal was “a revolutionary response to a revolutionary situation.” In this view, though Roosevelt never found a means short of war to bring about economic recovery, he shrewdly utilized the stubborn economic crisis as a means to enact sweeping reforms. A handful of scholars, notably Edgar Eugene Robinson, condemned Roosevelt’s record as a “socialistic” break with American traditions. But until the 1960s, the great majority of historians approved the political values of the new Deal and praised its accomplishments.

Some leftist scholars writing in the 1960s, however, notably Barton J. Bernstein, charged that the New Deal did not reach far enough. This criticism echoed the socialist complaint in the 1930s that the depression represented the total collapse of American capitalism, and that the New Deal had muffed the chance truly to remake American society. Roosevelt had the chance, these historians argue, to redistribute wealth, improve race relations, and bring the giant corporations to heel. Instead, say these critics, the New Deal simply represented a conservative holding action to shore up a sagging and corrupt capitalist order.

Those charges against the New Deal stimulated another generation of scholars in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s to look closely at the concrete institutional, attitudinal, and economic circumstances in which the New Deal unfolded. Historians such as James Patterson, Alan Brinkley, Kenneth Jackson, Harvard Sitkoff, and Lizabeth Cohen—sometimes loosely referred to as the “constraints school”—conclude that the New Deal offered just about as much reform as circumstances allowed and as the majority of Americans wanted. The findings of these historians are impressive: the system of checks and balances limited presidential power; the disproportionate influence of southern Democrats in Congress stalled attempts to move toward racial justice; the federal system, in fact, inhibited all efforts to initiate change from Washington. Most important, a majority of the American people at the time wanted to reform capitalism, not overthrow it. Industrial workers, for example, were not hapless pawns upon whom the New Deal was foisted, frustrating their yearning for more radical change. Instead they sought security and self-determination in ways quite compatible with the New Deal’s programs for unemployment insurance, old-age pensions, and guarantees of labor’s right to organize.


The best proof of the soundness of that conclusion is probably the durability of the political alliance that Roosevelt assembled. The great “New Deal coalition” that dominated American politics for nearly four decades after Roosevelt’s election in 1932 represented a broad consensus in American society about the legitimate limits of government efforts to shape the social and economic order. William Leuchtenburg has offered the most balanced historical assessment in his description of the New Deal as a “half-way revolution,” neither radical nor conservative, but accurately reflecting the American people’s needs and desires in the 1930s—and for a long time thereafter.

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For further reading, see page A23 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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# Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Shadow of War

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1933–1941

*The epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease. . . . There must be positive endeavors to preserve peace.*

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, CHICAGO “QUARANTINE SPEECH,” 1937

Americans in the 1930s tried to turn their backs on the world's problems. Their president at first seemed to share these views. The only battle Roosevelt sought was against the depression. America had its own burdens to shoulder, and the costs of foreign involvement, whether in blood or treasure, simply seemed too great.

But as the clouds of war gathered over Europe, Roosevelt eventually concluded that the United States could no longer remain aloof. Events gradually brought the American people around to his thinking: no nation was safe in an era of international anarchy, and the world could not remain half-enchained and half-free.

## The London Conference

The sixty-six-nation London Economic Conference, meeting in the summer of 1933, revealed how thoroughly Roosevelt's early foreign policy was subordinated to his strategy for domestic economic recovery. The delegates to the London Conference hoped to organize a coordinated international attack on the global depression. They were particularly eager to stabilize the values of the various nations' currencies and the rates at which they could be exchanged. Exchange-rate stabilization was essential to the revival of world trade, which had all but evaporated by 1933.

Roosevelt at first agreed to send an American delegation to the conference, including Secretary of State Cordell Hull. But the president soon began to have second thoughts about the conference's agenda. He wanted to pursue his gold-juggling and other inflationary policies at home as a means of stimulating American recovery. An international agreement to maintain the value of the dollar in terms of other currencies might tie his hands, and at bottom Roosevelt was unwilling to sacrifice the possibility of domestic recovery for the sake of international cooperation. While vacationing on a yacht along the New England coast, he dashed off a radio message to London, scolding the conference for attempting to stabilize currencies and essentially declaring America's withdrawal from the negotiations.

Roosevelt's bombshell announcement yanked the rug from under the London Conference. The delegates adjourned empty-handed, amid cries of American bad faith. Whether the conference could have arrested the worldwide economic slide is debatable, but Roosevelt's every-man-for-himself attitude plunged the planet even deeper into economic crisis. The collapse of the London Conference also strengthened the global trend toward extreme nationalism, making international cooperation ever more difficult as the dangerous decade of the 1930s unfolded. Reflecting the powerful persistence of American isolationism, Roosevelt's action played directly into the hands of the power-mad dictators who were determined to shatter the peace of the world. Americans themselves would eventually pay a high price for the narrow-minded belief that the United States could go it alone in the modern world.

### **Freedom for (from?) the Filipinos and Recognition for the Russians**

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Roosevelt matched isolationism from Europe with withdrawal from Asia. The Great Depression burst the fragile bubble of President McKinley's imperialistic dream in the Far East. With the descent into hard times, American taxpayers were eager to throw overboard their expensive tropical liability in the Philippine Islands. Organized labor demanded the exclusion of low-wage Filipino workers, and American sugar producers clamored for the elimination of Philippine competition.

Remembering its earlier promises of freedom for the Philippines, Congress passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934. The act provided for the independence of the Philippines after a twelve-year period of economic and political tutelage—that is, by 1946. The United States agreed to relinquish its army bases, but naval bases were reserved for future discussion—and retention.

In truth, the American people were not so much giving freedom to the Philippines as they were freeing themselves *from* the Philippines. With a selfish eye to their own welfare, and with apparent disregard for the political situation in Asia, they proposed to leave the Philippines to their fate, while imposing upon the Filipinos economic terms so ungenerous as to threaten the islands with economic prostration. Once again, American isolationists rejoiced. Yet in Tokyo, Japanese militarists were calculating that they had little to fear from an inward-looking America that was abandoning its principal possession in Asia.



At the same time, Roosevelt made at least one internationalist gesture when he formally recognized the Soviet Union in 1933. Over the noisy protests of anticommunist conservatives, as well as Roman Catholics offended by the Kremlin's antireligious policies, Roosevelt extended the hand of diplomatic recognition to the sixteen-year-old Bolshevik regime. He was motivated in part by the hope for trade with Soviet Russia, as well as by the desire to bolster the Soviet Union as a friendly counterweight to the possible threat of German power in Europe and Japanese power in Asia.

### **Becoming a Good Neighbor**

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Closer to home, Roosevelt inaugurated a refreshing new era in relations with Latin America. He proclaimed in his inaugural address, "I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the Good Neighbor." Taken together, Roosevelt's noninvolvement in Europe and withdrawal from Asia, along with this brotherly embrace of his New World neighbors, suggested that the United States was giving up its ambition to be a world power and would content itself instead with being merely a regional power, its interests and activities confined exclusively to the Western Hemisphere.

Old-fashioned intervention by bayonet in the Caribbean had not paid off, except in an evil harvest of resentment, suspicion, and fear. The Great Depression had cooled off Yankee economic aggressiveness, as thousands of investors in Latin American securities became sackholders rather than stockholders. There were now fewer dollars to be protected by the rifles of the hated marines.

With war-thirsty dictators seizing power in Europe and Asia, Roosevelt was eager to line up the Latin Americans to help defend the Western Hemisphere. Embittered neighbors would be potential tools of transoceanic aggressors. President Roosevelt made clear at the outset that he was going to renounce armed intervention, particularly the vexatious corollary of the Monroe Doctrine devised by his cousin Theodore Roosevelt. Late in 1933, at the Seventh Pan-American Conference in Montevideo, Uruguay, the U.S. delegation formally endorsed nonintervention.

Deeds followed words. The last marines departed from Haiti in 1934. In the same year, res-

tive Cuba was released from the hobbles of the Platt Amendment, under which the United States had been free to intervene, although the naval base at Guantanamo was retained. The tiny country of Panama received a similar uplift in 1936, when Washington relaxed its grip on the isthmus nation.

The hope-inspiring Good Neighbor policy, with the accent on consultation and nonintervention, received its acid test in Mexico. When the Mexican government seized Yankee oil properties in 1938, American investors vehemently demanded armed intervention to repossess their confiscated businesses. But Roosevelt successfully resisted the badgering, and a settlement was finally threshed out in 1941, even though the oil companies lost much of their original stake.

Spectacular success crowned Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy. His earnest attempts to usher in a new era of friendliness, though hurting some U.S. bondholders, paid rich dividends in goodwill among the peoples to the south. No other citizen of the United States has ever been held in such high esteem in Latin America during his lifetime. Roosevelt was cheered with tumultuous enthusiasm when, as a "traveling salesman for peace," he journeyed to the special Inter-American Conference at Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1936. The Colossus of the North now seemed less a vulture and more an eagle.

### **Secretary Hull's Reciprocal Trade Agreements**

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Intimately associated with Good Neighborism, and also popular in Latin America, was the reciprocal trade policy of the New Dealers. Its chief architect was idealistic Secretary of State Hull, a high-minded Tennessean of the low-tariff school. Like Roosevelt, he believed that trade was a two-way street, that a nation can sell abroad only as it buys abroad, that tariff barriers choke off foreign trade, and that trade wars beget shooting wars.

Responding to the Hull-Roosevelt leadership, Congress passed the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in 1934. Designed in part to lift American export trade from the depression doldrums, this enlightened measure was aimed at both relief and recovery. At the same time, it activated the low-tariff policies of the New Dealers. (See the tariff chart in the Appendix.)

The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act avoided the dangerous uncertainties of a wholesale tariff revision; it merely whittled down the most objectionable schedules of the Hawley-Smoot law by amending them. Roosevelt was empowered to lower existing rates by as much as 50 percent, provided that the other country involved was willing to respond with similar reductions. The resulting pacts, moreover, were to become effective without the formal approval of the Senate. This novel feature not only ensured speedier action but sidestepped the twin evils of high-stakes logrolling and high-pressure lobbying in Congress.

Secretary Hull, whose zeal for reciprocity was unflagging, succeeded in negotiating pacts with twenty-one countries by the end of 1939. During these same years, U.S. foreign trade increased appreciably, presumably in part as a result of the Hull-Roosevelt policies. Trade agreements undoubtedly bettered economic and political relations with Latin America and proved to be an influence for peace in a war-bent world.

The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act was a landmark piece of legislation. It reversed the traditional high-protective-tariff policy that had per-

sisted almost unbroken since Civil War days and that had so damaged the American and international economies following World War I. It paved the way for the American-led free-trade international economic system that took shape after World War II, a period that witnessed the most robust growth in the history of international trade.

### **Impulses Toward Storm-Cellar Isolationism**

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Post-1918 chaos in Europe, followed by the Great Depression, spawned the ominous spread of totalitarianism. The individual was nothing; the state was everything. The Communist USSR led the way, with the crafty and ruthless Joseph Stalin finally emerging as dictator. Blustery Benito Mussolini, a swaggering Fascist, seized the reins of power in Italy during 1922. And Adolf Hitler, a fanatic with a toothbrush mustache, plotted and harangued his way into control of Germany in 1933 with liberal use of the "big lie."

Hitler was the most dangerous of the dictators, because he combined tremendous power with impulsiveness. A frustrated Austrian painter, with hypnotic talents as an orator and a leader, he had secured control of the Nazi party by making political capital of the Treaty of Versailles and Germany's depression-spawned unemployment. He was thus a misbegotten child of the shortsighted postwar policies of the victorious Allies, including the United States. The desperate German people had fallen in behind the new Pied Piper, for they saw no other hope of escape from the plague of economic chaos and national disgrace. In 1936 the Nazi Hitler and the Fascist Mussolini allied themselves in the Rome-Berlin Axis.

International gangsterism was likewise spreading in the Far East, where imperial Japan was on the make. Like Germany and Italy, Japan was a so-called have-not power. Like them, it resented the ungenerous Treaty of Versailles. Like them, it demanded additional space for its teeming millions, cooped-up in their crowded island nation.

Japanese navalists were not to be denied. Determined to find a place in the Asiatic sun, Tokyo gave notice in 1934 of the termination of the twelve-year-old Washington Naval Treaty. A year later at London, the Japanese torpedoed all hope of effective naval

*The thirst of Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) for national glory in Ethiopia is indicated by his remark in 1940:*

“To make a people great it is necessary to send them to battle even if you have to kick them in the pants.” (The Italians were notoriously unwarlike.)

*In 1934 Mussolini proclaimed in a public speech,*

“We have buried the putrid corpse of liberty.”

disarmament. Upon being denied complete parity, they walked out on the multipower conference and accelerated their construction of giant battleships.

Jut-jawed Mussolini, seeking both glory and empire in Africa, brutally attacked Ethiopia in 1935 with bombers and tanks. The brave defenders, armed with spears and ancient firearms, were speedily crushed. Members of the League of Nations could have caused Mussolini’s war machine to creak to a halt—if they had only dared to embargo oil. But when the League quailed rather than risk global hostilities, it merely signed its own death warrant.

Isolationism, long festering in America, received a strong boost from these alarms abroad. Though disapproving of the dictators, Americans still believed that their encircling seas conferred a kind of mystic immunity. They were continuing to

suffer the disillusionment born of their participation in World War I, which they now regarded as a colossal blunder. They likewise nursed bitter memories of the ungrateful and defaulting debtors. As early as 1934, a spiteful Congress passed the Johnson Debt Default Act, which prevented debt-dodging nations from borrowing further in the United States. If attacked again by aggressors, these delinquents could “stew in their own juices.”

Mired down in the Great Depression, Americans had no real appreciation of the revolutionary forces being harnessed by the dictators. The “have-not” powers were out to become “have” powers. Americans were not so much afraid that totalitarian aggression would cause trouble as they were fearful that they might be drawn into it. Strong nationwide sentiment welled up for a constitutional amendment to forbid a declaration of war by Congress—except in case of invasion—unless there was a favorable popular referendum. With a mixture of seriousness and frivolity, a group of Princeton University students began to agitate in 1936 for a bonus to be paid to the Veterans of Future Wars (VFW) while the prospective frontliners were still alive.

### Congress Legislates Neutrality

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As the gloomy 1930s lengthened, an avalanche of lurid articles and books condemning the munitions manufacturers as war-fomenting “merchants of death” poured from American presses. A Senate

committee, headed by Senator Gerald Nye of North Dakota, was appointed in 1934 to investigate the “blood business.” By sensationalizing evidence regarding America’s entry into World War I, the senatorial probers tended to shift the blame away from the German submarines onto the American bankers and arms manufacturers. Because the munitions makers had obviously made money out of the war, many a naive citizen leaped to the illogical conclusion that these soulless scavengers had *caused* the war in order to make money. This kind of reasoning suggested that if the profits could only be removed from the arms traffic—“one hell of a business”—the country could steer clear of any world conflict that might erupt in the future.

Responding to overwhelming popular pressure, Congress made haste to legislate the nation out of war. Action was spurred by the danger that Mussolini’s Ethiopian assault would plunge the world into a new bloodbath. The Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937, taken together, stipulated that *when the president proclaimed* the existence of a foreign war, certain restrictions would automatically go into effect. No American could legally sail on a belligerent ship, sell or transport munitions to a belligerent, or make loans to a belligerent.

This head-in-the-sand legislation in effect marked an abandonment of the traditional policy of freedom of the seas—a policy for which America had professedly fought two full-fledged wars and several undeclared wars. The Neutrality Acts were specifically tailored to keep the nation out of a conflict like World War I. If they had been in effect at that time, America probably would not have been sucked in—at least not in April 1917. Congress was one war too late with its legislation. What had seemed dishonorable to Wilson seemed honorable and desirable to a later disillusioned generation.

Storm-cellar neutrality proved to be tragically shortsighted. America falsely assumed that the decision for peace or war lay in its own hands, not in those of the satanic forces already unleashed in the world. Prisoner of its own fears, it failed to recognize that it might have used its enormous power to shape international events. Instead it remained at the mercy of events controlled by the dictators.

Statutory neutrality, though of undoubted legality, was of dubious morality. America served notice that it would make no distinction whatever between brutal aggressors and innocent victims. By striving to hold the scales even, it actually overbalanced

them in favor of the dictators, who had armed themselves to the teeth. By declining to use its vast industrial strength to aid its democratic friends and defeat its totalitarian foes, it helped goad the aggressors along their blood-spattered path of conquest.

## America Dooms Loyalist Spain

The Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939—a proving ground and dress rehearsal in miniature for World War II—was a painful object lesson in the folly of neutrality-by-legislation. Spanish rebels, who rose against the left-leaning republican government in Madrid, were headed by fascistic General Francisco Franco. Generously aided by his fellow conspirators Hitler and Mussolini, he undertook to overthrow the established Loyalist regime, which in turn was assisted on a smaller scale by the Soviet Union. This pipeline from communist Moscow chilled the natural sympathies of many Americans, especially Roman Catholics.

*America's policy toward Spain "had been a grave mistake," Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) told his cabinet in early 1939:*

"The policy we should have adopted was to forbid the transportation of munitions of war in American bottoms [ships]. This could have been done and Loyalist Spain would still have been able to come to us for what she needed to fight for her life against Franco—to fight for her life," Roosevelt concluded prophetically, "and for the lives of some of the rest of us as well, as events will very likely prove."

Washington continued official relations with the Loyalist government. In accordance with previous American practice, this regime should have been free to purchase desperately needed munitions from the United States. But Congress, with the encouragement of Roosevelt and with only one dissenting vote, amended the existing neutrality legislation so as to apply an arms embargo to both Loyalists and rebels. "Roosevelt," remarked dictator Franco, "behaved in the manner of a true gentleman." FDR later regretted being so gentlemanly.

Uncle Sam thus sat on the sidelines while Franco, abundantly supplied with arms and men by his fellow dictators, strangled the republican government of Spain. The democracies, including the United States, were so determined to stay out of war that they helped to condemn a fellow democracy to death. In so doing they further encouraged the dictators to take the dangerous road that led over the precipice to World War II.

Such peace-at-any-price-ism was further cursed with illogic. Although determined to stay out of war, America declined to build up its armed forces to a point where it could deter the aggressors. In fact, it allowed its navy to decline in relative strength. It had been led to believe that huge fleets caused huge wars; it was also trying to spare the complaining taxpayer during the grim days of the Great Depression. When President Roosevelt repeatedly called for preparedness, he was branded a warmonger. Not until 1938, the year before World War II exploded, did Congress come to grips with the problem when it passed a billion-dollar naval construction act. The calamitous story was repeated of too little, too late.

## Appeasing Japan and Germany

Sulfurous war clouds had meanwhile been gathering in the tension-taut Far East. In 1937 the Japanese militarists, at the Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing (Peking), touched off the explosion that led to an all-out invasion of China. In a sense this attack was the curtain raiser of World War II.

Roosevelt shrewdly declined to invoke the recently passed neutrality legislation by refusing to call the China incident an officially declared *war*. If he had put the existing restrictions into effect, he would have cut off the trickle of munitions on which the Chinese were desperately dependent. The Japanese, of course, could continue to buy mountains of war supplies in the United States.

In Chicago—unofficial isolationist "capital" of America—President Roosevelt delivered his sensational "Quarantine Speech" in the autumn of 1937. Alarmed by the recent aggressions of Italy and Japan, he called for "positive endeavors" to "quarantine" the aggressors—presumably by economic embargoes.

The speech triggered a cyclone of protest from isolationists and other foes of involvement; they feared that a moral quarantine would lead to a shooting quarantine. Startled by this angry response, Roosevelt retreated and sought less direct means to curb the dictators.

America's isolationist mood intensified, especially in regard to China. In December 1937 Japanese aviators bombed and sank an American gunboat, the *Panay*, in Chinese waters, with a loss of two killed and thirty wounded. In the days of 1898, when the *Maine* went down, this outrage might have provoked war. But after Tokyo hastened to make the necessary apologies and pay a proper indemnity, Americans breathed a deep sigh of relief. Japanese militarists were thus encouraged to vent their anger against the "superior" white race by subjecting American civilians in China, both male and female, to humiliating slappings and strippings.

Adolf Hitler meanwhile grew louder and bolder in Europe. In 1935 he had openly flouted the Treaty of Versailles by introducing compulsory military service in Germany. The next year he brazenly marched into the demilitarized German Rhineland, likewise contrary to the detested treaty, while France and Britain looked on in an agony of indecision. Lashing his following to a frenzy, Hitler undertook to persecute and then exterminate the Jewish

A conference was finally held in Munich, Germany, in September 1938. The Western European democracies, badly unprepared for war, betrayed Czechoslovakia to Germany when they consented to the shearing away of the Sudetenland. They hoped—and these hopes were shared by the American people—that the concessions at the conference table would slake Hitler's thirst for power and bring "peace in our time." Indeed Hitler publicly promised that the Sudetenland "is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe."

"Appeasement" of the dictators, symbolized by the ugly word *Munich*, turned out to be merely surrender on the installment plan. It was like giving a cannibal a finger in the hope of saving an arm. In March 1939, scarcely six months later, Hitler suddenly erased the rest of Czechoslovakia from the map, contrary to his solemn vows. The democratic world was again stunned.

### **Hitler's Belligerency and U.S. Neutrality**

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population in the areas under his control. In the end, he wiped out about 6 million innocent victims, mostly in gas chambers (see *Makers of America: Refugees from the Holocaust*, pp. 814–815). Calling upon his people to sacrifice butter for guns, he whipped the new German air force and mechanized ground divisions into the most devastating military machine the world had yet seen.

Suddenly, in March 1938, Hitler bloodlessly occupied German-speaking Austria, his birthplace. The democratic powers, wringing their hands in despair, prayed that this last grab would satisfy his passion for conquest.

But like a drunken reveler calling for madder music and stronger wine, Hitler could not stop. Intoxicated by his recent gains, he began to make bullying demands for the German-inhabited Sudetenland of neighboring Czechoslovakia. The leaders of Britain and France, eager to appease Hitler, sought frantically to bring the dispute to the conference table. President Roosevelt, also deeply alarmed, kept the wires hot with personal messages to both Hitler and Mussolini urging a peaceful settlement.

Joseph Stalin, the sphinx of the Kremlin, was a key to the peace puzzle. In the summer of 1939, the British and French were busily negotiating with Moscow, hopeful of securing a mutual-defense treaty that would halt Hitler. But mutual suspicions proved insuperable. Then the Soviet Union astounded the world by signing, on August 23, 1939, a nonaggression treaty with the German dictator.

The notorious Hitler-Stalin pact meant that the Nazi German leader now had a green light to make war on Poland and the Western democracies, without fearing a stab in the back from the Soviet Union—his Communist arch-foe. Consternation struck those wishful thinkers in Western Europe who had fondly hoped that Hitler might be egged upon Stalin so that the twin menaces would bleed each other to death. It was as plain as the mustache on Stalin's face that the wily Soviet dictator was plotting to turn his German accomplice against the Western democracies. The two warring camps would then kill each other off—and leave Stalin bestriding Europe like a colossus.

With the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, World War II was only hours away. Hitler now demanded from neighboring Poland a return of the areas wrested from Germany after World War I. Failing to secure satisfaction, he sent his mechanized divisions crashing into Poland at dawn on September 1, 1939.

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## Refugees from the Holocaust

**F**ed by Adolf Hitler's genocidal delusions, anti-Semitism bared its fangs in the 1930s, spreading across Europe as Nazi Germany seized Austria and Czechoslovakia. Eluding the jackboots of Hitler's bloodthirsty SS (*Schutzstaffel*, an elite military and police force), Jews tried to flee from the Nazi juggernaut. Some succeeded, including the world's premier nuclear physicist, Albert Einstein, the Nobel laureate whose plea to Franklin Roosevelt helped initiate the top-secret atomic bomb project; the philosopher Hannah Arendt; the painter Marc Chagall; and the composer Kurt Weill. In all, some 150,000 Jews fled the Third Reich for America in the 1930s—a tiny fraction of the millions of Jews who eventually came under Hitler's heel. Why did America not make room for more?

For one thing, those exiled luminaries who managed to make it out of Germany found a divided Jewish community in America. Before the closing of unrestricted immigration in 1924, Jews had arrived in two stages—a trickle from Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, followed by a flood from Eastern Europe in the decades after 1890. Both groups had migrated as families and without a thought of return to the old country. But beyond that experience and their shared religious heritage, the two waves had relatively little in common, especially when it came to coping with the refugee crisis of the 1930s. The settled and prosperous German-Jewish community, organized in the American Jewish Committee, had fought hard to convince their fellow Americans of their loyalty, and many now feared that bold advocacy for refugees from Hitler's Germany would touch off an outburst of anti-Semitism in America. The notorious "Radio Priest," Father Charles Coughlin, was already preaching venomous pronouncements against the Jews, though his audience remained small—for the time being. The more numerous but less wealthy and influential Eastern

European Jews, organized in the American Jewish Congress, were intent on pressuring the Roosevelt administration to rescue Europe's Jews. This internal discord compromised the political effectiveness of the American Jewish community in the face of the refugee dilemma.

Other factors also helped to keep America's doors shut against Jews seeking refuge in the United

States. The restrictive American immigration law of 1924 set rigid national quotas and made no provisions for seekers of asylum from racial, religious, or political persecution. The Great Depression made it impossible to provide employment for workers already in the United States, much less make room in the job line for newcomers. And opening America's gates to Germany's half-million Jews raised the daunting prospect that such action would unleash a deluge of millions more Jews from countries like Poland and Romania, which were advertising their eagerness to be rid of their Jewish populations. No one, of course, yet knew just how fiendish a destiny Hitler was preparing for Europe's Jews.

Many Jews and Gentiles alike, including Congressman Emmanuel Celler and Senator Robert Wagner, both of New York, nevertheless lobbied Roosevelt's government to extend a welcoming hand to Jews seeking asylum—to no avail. In 1941 Congress rejected a Wagner bill to bring twenty thousand German-Jewish children to the United States outside the quota restrictions. An even more desperate plan to settle refugees in Alaska also foundered.

Once the United States entered the war, the State Department went so far as to suppress early

reports of Hitler's plan to exterminate all European Jewry. After the Führer's sordid final solution became known in America, the War Department rejected pleas to bomb the rail lines leading to the gas chambers. Military officials maintained that a raid on the death camps like Auschwitz would divert essential military resources and needlessly extend the war. Thus only a lucky few escaped the Nazi terror, while 6 million died in one of history's most ghastly testimonials to the human capacity for evil.



*President Roosevelt was roused at 3 A.M. on September 1, 1939, by a telephone call from Ambassador William Bullitt (1891–1967) in Paris:*

“Mr. President, several German divisions are deep in Polish territory. . . . There are reports of bombers over the city of Warsaw.”

“Well, Bill,” FDR replied, “it has come at last. God help us all.”

Britain and France, honoring their commitments to Poland, promptly declared war. At long last they perceived the folly of continued appeasement. But they were powerless to aid Poland, which succumbed in three weeks to Hitler’s smashing strategy of terror. Stalin, as prearranged secretly in his fateful pact with Hitler, came in on the kill for his share of old Russian Poland. Long-dreaded World War II was now fully launched, and the long truce of 1919–1939 had come to an end.

President Roosevelt speedily issued the routine proclamations of neutrality. Americans were overwhelmingly anti-Nazi and anti-Hitler; they fervently hoped that the democracies would win; they fondly believed that the forces of righteousness would triumph, as in 1918. But they were desperately determined to stay out: they were not going to be “suckers” again.

Neutrality promptly became a heated issue in the United States. Ill-prepared Britain and France urgently needed American airplanes and other weapons, but the Neutrality Act of 1937 raised a sternly forbidding hand. Roosevelt summoned Congress in special session, shortly after the invasion of Poland, to consider lifting the arms embargo. After six hectic weeks of debate, a makeshift law emerged.

The Neutrality Act of 1939 provided that henceforth the European democracies might buy American war materials, but only on a “cash-and-carry basis.” This meant that they would have to transport the munitions in their own ships, after paying for them in cash. America would thus avoid loans, war debts, and the torpedoing of American arms-carriers. While Congress thus loosened former restrictions in response to interventionist cries, it added others in response to isolationist fears. Roo-

sevelt was now also authorized to proclaim danger zones into which American merchant ships would be forbidden to enter.

Despite its defects, this unneutral neutrality law clearly favored the democracies against the dictators—and was so intended. As the British and French navies controlled the Atlantic, the European aggressors could not send their ships to buy America’s munitions. The United States not only improved its moral position but simultaneously helped its economic position. Overseas demand for war goods brought a sharp upswing from the recession of 1937–1938 and ultimately solved the decade-long unemployment crisis (see the chart on p. 800).

## The Fall of France

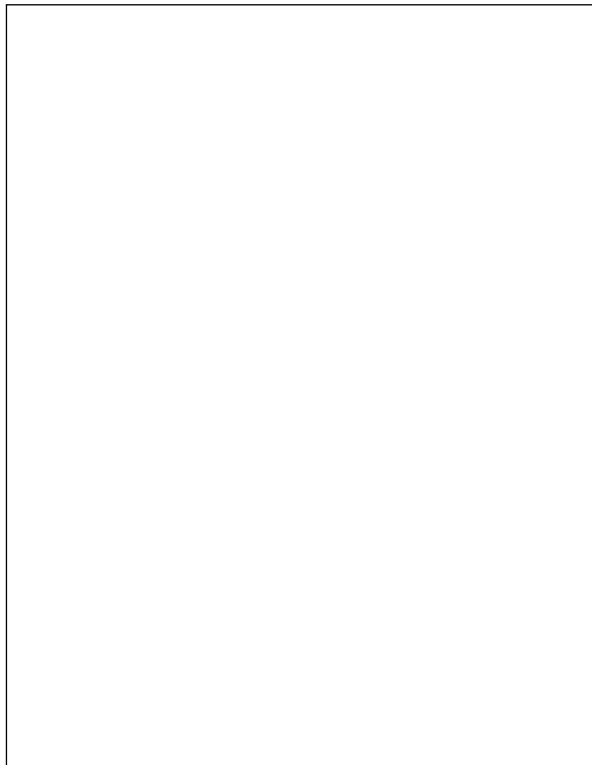
The months following the collapse of Poland, while France and Britain marked time, were known as the “phony war.” An ominous silence fell on Europe, as Hitler shifted his victorious divisions from Poland for a knockout blow at France. Inaction during this anxious period was relieved by the Soviets, who wantonly attacked neighboring Finland in an effort to secure strategic buffer territory. The debt-paying Finns, who had a host of admirers in America, were speedily granted \$30 million by an isolationist Congress for *nonmilitary* supplies. But despite heroic resistance, Finland was finally flattened by the Soviet steamroller.

*Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) promised to win his fellow Germans Lebensraum, or “living space,” and to win it by war if necessary. In his eyes, his nationalist and racist crusade justified every violent means at hand. As he told his commanders,*

“When you start a war, what matters is not who is right, but who wins. Close your hearts to pity. Act with brutality. Eighty million Germans must get what is their due. Their existence must be made secure. The stronger man is in the right.”

An abrupt end to the “phony war” came in April 1940 when Hitler, again without warning, overran his weaker neighbors Denmark and Norway. Hardly pausing for breath, the next month he attacked the Netherlands and Belgium, followed by a paralyzing blow at France. By late June France was forced to surrender, but not until Mussolini had pounced on its rear for a jackal’s share of the loot. In a pell-mell but successful evacuation from the French port of Dunkirk, the British managed to salvage the bulk of their shattered and partially disarmed army. The crisis providentially brought forth an inspired leader in Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the bulldog-jawed orator who nerved his people to fight off the fearful air bombings of their cities.

France’s sudden collapse shocked Americans out of their daydreams. Stouthearted Britons, singing “There’ll Always Be an England,” were all that stood between Hitler and the death of constitutional government in Europe. If Britain went under, Hitler would have at his disposal the workshops, shipyards, and slave labor of Western Europe. He



might even have the powerful British fleet as well. This frightening possibility, which seemed to pose a dire threat to American security, steeled the American people to a tremendous effort.

Roosevelt moved with electrifying energy and dispatch. He called upon an already debt-burdened nation to build huge airfleets and a two-ocean navy, which could also check Japan. Congress, jarred out of its apathy toward preparedness, within a year appropriated the astounding sum of \$37 billion. This figure was more than the total cost of fighting World War I and about five times larger than any New Deal annual budget.

Congress also passed a conscription law, approved September 6, 1940. Under this measure—America’s first peacetime draft—provision was made for training each year 1.2 million troops and 800,000 reserves. The act was later adapted to the requirements of a global war.

The Latin American bulwark likewise needed bracing. The Netherlands, Denmark, and France, all crushed under the German jackboot, had orphaned colonies in the New World. Would these fall into German hands? At the Havana Conference of 1940, the United States agreed to share with its twenty New World neighbors the responsibility of upholding the Monroe Doctrine. This ancient dictum, hitherto unilateral, had been a bludgeon brandished only in the hated Yankee fist. Now multilateral, it was to be wielded by twenty-one pairs of American hands—at least in theory.

### **Bolstering Britain with the Destroyer Deal (1940)**

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Before the fall of France in June 1940, Washington had generally observed a technical neutrality. But now, as Britain alone stood between Hitler and his dream of world domination, the wisdom of neutrality seemed increasingly questionable. Hitler launched air attacks against Britain in August 1940, preparatory to an invasion scheduled for September. For months the Battle of Britain raged in the air over the British Isles. The Royal Air Force’s tenacious defense of its native islands eventually led Hitler to postpone his planned invasion indefinitely.

During the precarious months of the Battle of Britain, debate intensified in the United States over what foreign policy to embrace. Radio broadcasts

from London brought the drama of the nightly German air raids directly into millions of American homes. Sympathy for Britain grew, but it was not yet sufficient to push the United States into war.

Roosevelt faced a historic decision: whether to hunker down in the Western Hemisphere, assume a “Fortress America” defensive posture, and let the rest of the world go it alone; or to bolster beleaguered Britain by all means short of war itself. Both sides had their advocates.

Supporters of aid to Britain formed propaganda groups, the most potent of which was the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. Its argument was double-barreled. To interventionists, it could appeal for direct succor to the British by such slogans as “Britain Is Fighting Our Fight.” To the isolationists, it could appeal for assistance to the democracies by “All Methods Short of War,” so that the terrible conflict would be kept in faraway Europe.

The isolationists, both numerous and sincere, were by no means silent. Determined to avoid American bloodshed at all costs, they organized the America First Committee and proclaimed, “England Will Fight to the Last American.” They contended that America should concentrate what strength it had to defend its own shores, lest a victorious Hitler, after crushing Britain, plot a transoceanic assault. Their basic philosophy was “The Yanks Are Not Coming,” and their most effective speechmaker was the famed aviator Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh, who, ironically, had narrowed the Atlantic in 1927.

Britain was in critical need of destroyers, for German submarines were again threatening to starve it out with attacks on shipping. Roosevelt moved boldly when, on September 2, 1940, he agreed to transfer to Great Britain fifty old-model, four-funnel destroyers left over from World War I. In return, the British promised to hand over to the United States eight valuable defensive base sites, stretching from Newfoundland to South America. These strategically located outposts were to remain under the Stars and Stripes for ninety-nine years.

Transferring fifty destroyers to a foreign navy was a highly questionable disposal of government property, despite a strained interpretation of existing legislation. The exchange was achieved by a simple presidential agreement, without so much as a “by your leave” to Congress. Applause burst from the aid-to-Britain advocates, many of whom had been urging such a step. But condemnation arose

from America Firsters and other isolationists, as well as from antiadministration Republicans. Some of them approved the transfer but decried Roosevelt’s secretive and arbitrary methods. Yet so grave was the crisis that the president was unwilling to submit the scheme to the uncertainties and delays of a full-dress debate in the Congress.

Shifting warships from a neutral United States to a belligerent Britain was, beyond question, a flagrant violation of neutral obligations—at least neutral obligations that had existed before Hitler’s barefaced aggressions rendered foolish such old-fashioned concepts of fair play. Public-opinion polls demonstrated that a majority of Americans were determined, even at the risk of armed hostilities, to provide the battered British with “all aid short of war.”

## FDR Shatters the Two-Term Tradition (1940)

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A distracting presidential election, as fate decreed, came in the midst of this crisis. The two leading Republican aspirants were round-faced and flat-voiced Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, son of the ex-president, and the energetic boy wonder, lawyer-prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey of New York. But in one of the miracles of American political history, the Philadelphia convention was swept off its feet by a colorful latecomer, Wendell L. Willkie, a German-descended son of Hoosier Indiana. This dynamic lawyer—tousled-headed, long-lipped, broad-faced, and large-framed—had until recently been a Democrat and the head of a huge public utilities corporation. A complete novice in politics, he had rocketed from political nothingness in a few short weeks. His great appeal lay in his personality, for he was magnetic, transparently trustful, and honest in a homespun, Lincolnesque way.

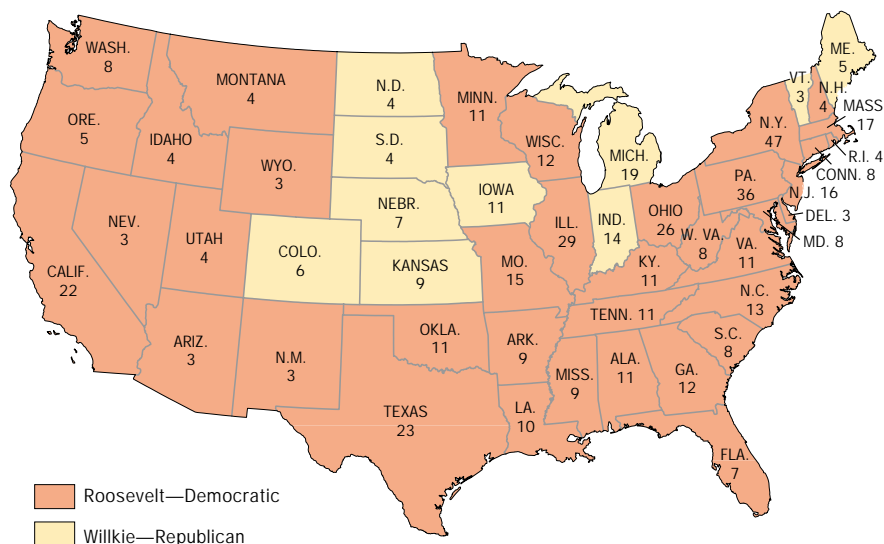
With the galleries in Philadelphia wildly chanting “We Want Willkie,” the delegates finally accepted this political upstart as the only candidate who could possibly beat Roosevelt. The Republican platform condemned FDR’s alleged dictatorship, as well as the costly and confusing zigzags of the New Deal. Willkie, an outspoken liberal, was opposed not so much to the New Deal as to its extravagances and inefficiencies. Democratic critics branded him “the rich man’s Roosevelt” and “the simple barefoot Wall Street lawyer.”

*The old-line Republican bosses were not happy over having a recent Democrat head their ticket. A former senator reportedly told Willkie to his face,*

*“You have been a Democrat all your life. I don’t mind the church converting a whore, but I don’t like her to lead the choir the first night.”*

While the rumor pot boiled, Roosevelt delayed to the last minute the announcement of his decision to challenge the sacred two-term tradition. Despite what he described as his personal yearning for retirement, he avowed that in so grave a crisis he owed his experienced hand to the service of his country and humanity. The Democratic delegates in Chicago, realizing that only with “the Champ” could they defeat Willkie, drafted him by a technically unanimous vote. “Better a Third Term Than a Third-Rater” was the war cry of many Democrats.

Burning with sincerity and energy, Willkie launched out upon a whirlwind, Bryanesque campaign in which he delivered over five hundred speeches. At times his voice became a hoarse croak. The country was already badly split between interventionists and isolationists, and Willkie might have widened the breach dangerously by a violent attack



**Presidential Election of 1940**  
(with electoral vote by state)  
Willkie referred to Roosevelt only as “the third-term candidate.” On election eve FDR hinted that communists and fascists were among Willkie’s supporters. Despite these campaign conflicts, the two men respected each other. FDR later asked Willkie to serve as his emissary abroad and even suggested that they run together on a coalition ticket in 1944.

on Roosevelt’s aid-to-Britain policies. But seeing eye-to-eye with FDR on the necessity of bolstering the beleaguered democracies, he refrained from assailing the president’s interventionism, though objecting to his methods.

In the realm of foreign affairs, there was not much to choose between the two candidates. Both promised to stay out of the war; both promised to strengthen the nation’s defenses. Yet Willkie, with a mop of black hair in his eyes, hit hard at Rooseveltian “dictatorship” and the third term. His enthusiastic followers cried, “Win with Willkie,” “No Fourth Term Either,” and “There’s No Indispensable Man.”

Roosevelt, busy at his desk with mounting problems, made only a few speeches. Stung by taunts that he was leading the nation by the back door into the European slaughterhouse, he repeatedly denied any such intention. His most specific statement was at Boston, where he emphatically declared, “Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars”—a pledge that later came back to plague him. He and his supporters vigorously defended the New Deal as well as all-out preparations for the defense of America and aid to the Allies.

Roosevelt triumphed, although Willkie ran a strong race. The popular total was 27,307,819 to 22,321,018, and the electoral count was 449 to 82. This contest was much less of a walkaway than in 1932 or 1936; Democratic majorities in Congress remained about the same.

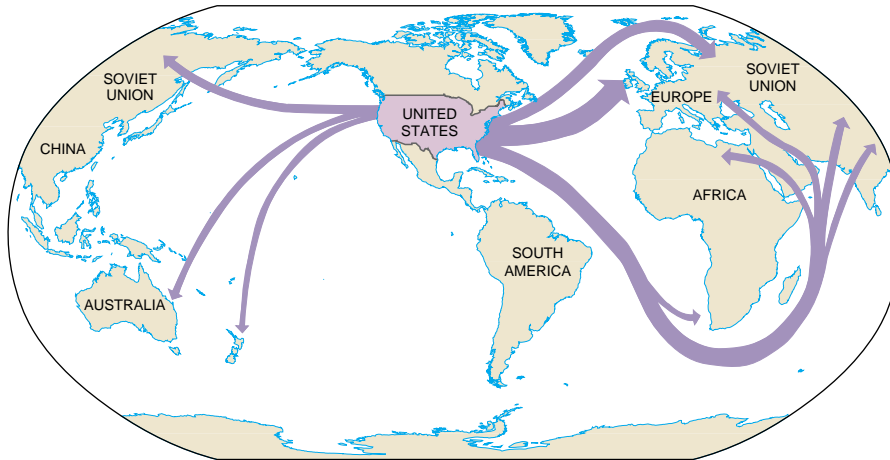
Jubilant Democrats hailed their triumph as a mandate to abolish the two-term tradition. But the

truth is that Roosevelt won in spite of the third-term handicap. Voters generally felt that should war come, the experienced hand of the tried leader was needed at the helm. Less appealing was the completely inexperienced hand of the well-intentioned Willkie, who had never held public office.

The time-honored argument that one should not change horses in the middle of a stream was strong, especially in an era of war-pumped prosperity. Roosevelt might not have won if there had not been a war crisis. On the other hand, he probably would not have run if foreign perils had not loomed so ominously. In a sense, his opponent was Adolf Hitler, not Willkie.

## Congress Passes the Landmark Lend-Lease Law

By late 1940 embattled Britain was nearing the end of its financial tether; its credits in America were being rapidly consumed by insatiable war orders. But Roosevelt, who had bitter memories of the wrangling over the Allied debts of World War I, was determined, as he put it, to eliminate “the silly, foolish, old dollar sign.” He finally hit on the scheme of lending or leasing American arms to the reeling democracies. When the shooting was over, to use his comparison, the guns and tanks could be returned, just as one’s next-door neighbor would return a garden hose when a threatening fire was put out. But isolationist Senator



**Main Flow of Lend-Lease Aid** (width of arrows indicates relative amount) The proud but desperate British prime minister, Winston Churchill, declared in early 1941, “Give us the tools and we will finish the job.” Lend-lease eventually provided the British and other Allies with \$50 billion worth of “tools.”

Taft (who was reputed to have the finest mind in Washington until he made it up) retorted that lending arms was like lending chewing gum: “You don’t want it back.” Who wants a chewed-up tank?

The Lend-Lease Bill, patriotically numbered 1776, was entitled “An Act Further to Promote the Defense of the United States.” Sprung on the country after the election was safely over, it was praised by the administration as a device that would keep the nation out of the war rather than drag it in. The underlying concept was “Send guns, not sons” or “Billions, not bodies.” America, so President Roosevelt promised, would be the “arsenal of democracy.” It would send a limitless supply of arms to the victims of aggression, who in turn would finish the job and keep the war on their side of the Atlantic. Accounts would be settled by returning the used weapons or their equivalents to the United States when the war was ended.

Lend-lease was heatedly debated throughout the land and in Congress. Most of the opposition came, as might be expected, from isolationists and anti-Roosevelt Republicans. The scheme was assailed as “the blank-check bill” and, in the words of isolationist Senator Burton Wheeler, as “the new Triple-A [Agricultural Adjustment Act] bill”—a measure designed to “plow under every fourth American boy.” Nevertheless, lend-lease was finally approved in March 1941 by sweeping majorities in both houses of Congress.

Lend-lease was one of the most momentous laws ever to pass Congress; it was a challenge hurled squarely into the teeth of the Axis dictators. America pledged itself, to the extent of its vast resources, to

bolster those nations that were indirectly defending it by fighting aggression. When the gigantic operation ended in 1945, America had sent about \$50 billion worth of arms and equipment—much more than the cost to the country of World War I—to those nations fighting aggressors. The passing of lend-lease was in effect an economic declaration of war; now a shooting declaration could not be very far around the corner.

By its very nature, the Lend-Lease Bill marked the abandonment of any pretense of neutrality. It was no destroyer deal arranged privately by President Roosevelt. The bill was universally debated, over drugstore counters and cracker barrels, from California all the way to Maine, and the sovereign citizen at last spoke through convincing majorities in Congress. Most people probably realized that they were tossing the old concepts of neutrality out the window. But they also recognized that they would play a suicidal game if they bound themselves by the oxcart rules of the nineteenth century—especially while the Axis aggressors themselves openly spurned international obligations. Lend-lease would admittedly involve a grave risk of war, but most Americans were prepared to take that chance rather than see Britain collapse and then face the diabolical dictators alone.

Lend-lease had the somewhat incidental result of gearing U.S. factories for all-out war production. The enormously increased capacity thus achieved helped save America’s own skin when, at long last, the shooting war burst around its head.

Hitler evidently recognized lend-lease as an unofficial declaration of war. Until then, Germany

had avoided attacking U.S. ships; memories of America's decisive intervention in 1917–1918 were still fresh in German minds. But after the passing of lend-lease, there was less point in trying to curry favor with the United States. On May 21, 1941, the *Robin Moor*, an unarmed American merchantman, was torpedoed and destroyed by a German submarine in the South Atlantic, outside a war zone. The sinkings had started, but on a limited scale.

### **Hitler's Assault on the Soviet Union Spawns the Atlantic Charter**

Two globe-shaking events marked the course of World War II before the assault on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. One was the fall of France in June 1940; the other was Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, almost exactly one year later, in June 1941.

The scheming dictators Hitler and Stalin had been uneasy yoke-fellows under the ill-begotten Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939. As masters of the double cross, neither trusted the other. They engaged in prolonged dickering in a secret attempt to divide potential territorial spoils between them, but Stalin balked at dominant German control of the Balkans.

Hitler thereupon decided to crush his coconspirator, seize the oil and other resources of the Soviet Union, and then have two free hands to snuff out Britain. He assumed that his invincible armies would subdue Stalin's "Mongol half-wits" in a few short weeks.

Out of a clear sky, on June 22, 1941, Hitler launched a devastating attack on his Soviet neighbor. This timely assault was an incredible stroke of good fortune for the democratic world—or so it seemed at the time. The two fiends could now slit each other's throats on the icy steppes of Russia. Or they would if the Soviets did not quickly collapse, as many military experts predicted.

*Senator (later president) Harry S Truman (1884–1972) expressed a common reaction to Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941:*

"If we see that Germany is winning, we ought to help Russia, and if we see Russia is winning, we ought to help Germany, and that way let them kill as many as possible."

Sound American strategy seemed to dictate speedy aid to Moscow while it was still afloat. Roosevelt immediately promised assistance and backed up his words by making some military supplies available. Several months later, interpreting the lend-lease law to mean that the defense of the USSR was now essential for the defense of the United States, he extended \$1 billion in lend-lease—the first installment on an ultimate total of \$11 billion. Meanwhile, the valor of the red army, combined with the white paralysis of an early Russian winter, had halted Hitler's invaders at the gates of Moscow.

With the surrender of the Soviet Union still a dread possibility, the drama-charged Atlantic Conference was held in August 1941. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, with cigar embedded in his cherubic face, secretly met with Roosevelt on a warship off the foggy coast of Newfoundland. This was the first of a series of history-making conferences between the two statesmen for the discussion of common problems, including the menace of Japan in the Far East.

The most memorable offspring of this get-together was the eight-point Atlantic Charter. It was

formally accepted by Roosevelt and Churchill and endorsed by the Soviet Union later that year. Suggestive of Wilson's Fourteen Points, the new covenant outlined the aspirations of the democracies for a better world at war's end.

Surprisingly, the Atlantic Charter was rather specific. While opposing imperialistic annexations, it promised that there would be no territorial changes contrary to the wishes of the inhabitants (self-determination). It further affirmed the right of a people to choose their own form of government and, in particular, to regain the governments abolished by the dictators. Among various other goals, the charter declared for disarmament and a peace of security, pending a "permanent system of general security" (a new League of Nations).

Liberals the world over took heart from the Atlantic Charter, as they had taken heart from Wilson's comparable Fourteen Points. It was especially gratifying to subject populations, like the Poles, who were then ground under the iron heel of a conqueror. But the agreement was roundly condemned in the United States by isolationists and others hostile to Roosevelt. What right, they charged, had "neutral" America to confer with belligerent Britain on common policies? Such critics missed the point: the nation was in fact no longer neutral.

## **U.S. Destroyers and Hitler's U-boats Clash**

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Lend-lease shipments of arms to Britain on British ships were bound to be sunk by German wolf-pack submarines. If the intent was to get the munitions to England, not to dump them into the ocean, the freighters would have to be escorted by U.S. warships. Britain simply did not have enough destroyers. The dangerous possibility of being "convoyed into war" had been mentioned in Congress during the lengthy debate on lend-lease, but administration spokespeople had brushed the idea aside. Their strategy was to make only one commitment at a time.

Roosevelt made the fateful decision to convoy in July 1941. By virtue of his authority as commander in chief of the armed forces, the president issued orders to the navy to escort lend-lease shipments as far as Iceland. The British would then shepherd them the rest of the way.



Inevitable clashes with submarines ensued on the Iceland run, even though Hitler's orders were to strike at American warships only in self-defense. In September 1941 the U.S. destroyer *Greer*, provocatively trailing a German U-boat, was attacked by the undersea craft, without damage to either side. Roosevelt then proclaimed a shoot-on-sight policy. On October 17 the escorting destroyer *Kearny*, while engaged in a battle with U-boats, lost eleven men when it was crippled but not sent to the bottom. Two weeks later the destroyer *Reuben James* was torpedoed and sunk off southwestern Iceland, with the loss of more than a hundred officers and enlisted men.

Neutrality was still inscribed on the statute books, but not in American hearts. Congress, responding to public pressures and confronted with a shooting war, voted in mid-November 1941 to pull the teeth from the now-useless Neutrality Act of 1939. Merchant ships could henceforth be legally armed, and they could enter the combat zones with munitions for Britain. Americans braced themselves for wholesale attacks by Hitler's submarines.

### **Surprise Assault on Pearl Harbor**

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The blowup came not in the Atlantic, but in the far-away Pacific. This explosion should have surprised no close observer, for Japan, since September 1940, had been a formal military ally of Nazi Germany—America's shooting foe in the North Atlantic.

Japan's position in the Far East had grown more perilous by the hour. It was still mired down in the costly and exhausting "China incident," from which it could extract neither honor nor victory. Its war machine was fatally dependent on immense shipments of steel, scrap iron, oil, and aviation gasoline from the United States. Such assistance to the Japanese aggressor was highly unpopular in America. But Roosevelt had resolutely held off an embargo, lest he goad the Tokyo warlords into a descent upon the oil-rich but defense-poor Dutch East Indies.

Washington, late in 1940, finally imposed the first of its embargoes on Japan-bound supplies. This blow was followed in mid-1941 by a freezing of Japanese assets in the United States and a cessation of all shipments of gasoline and other sinews of war. As the oil gauge dropped, the squeeze on Japan grew

steadily more nerve-racking. Japanese leaders were faced with two painful alternatives. They could either knuckle under to the Americans or break out of the embargo ring by a desperate attack on the oil supplies and other riches of Southeast Asia.

Final tense negotiations with Japan took place in Washington during November and early December of 1941. The State Department insisted that the Japanese clear out of China, but to sweeten the pill offered to renew trade relations on a limited basis. Japanese imperialists, after waging a bitter war against the Chinese for more than four years, were unwilling to lose face by withdrawing at the behest of the United States. Faced with capitulation or continued conquest, they chose the sword.

Officials in Washington, having "cracked" the top-secret code of the Japanese, knew that Tokyo's decision was for war. But the United States, as a democracy committed to public debate and action by Congress, could not shoot first. Roosevelt, misled by Japanese ship movements in the Far East, evidently expected the blow to fall on British Malaya or on the Philippines. No one in high authority in Washington seems to have believed that the Japanese were either strong enough or foolhardy enough to strike Hawaii.

But the paralyzing blow struck Pearl Harbor, while Tokyo was deliberately prolonging negotiations in Washington. Japanese bombers, winging in from distant aircraft carriers, attacked without warning on the "Black Sunday" morning of December 7, 1941. It was a date, as Roosevelt told Congress, "which will live in infamy." About three thousand casualties were inflicted on American personnel, many aircraft were destroyed, the battleship fleet was virtually wiped out when all eight of the craft were sunk or otherwise immobilized, and numerous small vessels were damaged or destroyed. Fortunately for America, the three priceless aircraft carriers happened to be outside the harbor.

An angered Congress the next day officially recognized the war that had been "thrust" upon the United States. The roll call in the Senate and House fell only one vote short of unanimity. Germany and Italy, allies of Japan, spared Congress the indecision of debate by declaring war on December 11, 1941. This challenge was formally accepted on the same day by a unanimous vote of both Senate and House. The unofficial war, already of many months' duration, was now official.

## America's Transformation from Bystander to Belligerent

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Japan's hara-kiri gamble in Hawaii paid off only in the short run. True, the Pacific fleet was largely destroyed or immobilized, but the sneak attack aroused and united America as almost nothing else could have done. To the very day of the blowup, a strong majority of Americans still wanted to keep out of war. But the bombs that pulverized Pearl Harbor blasted the isolationists into silence. The only thing left to do, growled isolationist Senator Wheeler, was "to lick hell out of them."

But Pearl Harbor was not the full answer to the question of why the United States went to war. This treacherous attack was but the last explosion in a long chain reaction. Following the fall of France, Americans were confronted with a devil's dilemma. They desired above all to stay out of the conflict, yet they did not want Britain to be knocked out. They wished to halt Japan's conquests in the Far East—conquests that menaced not only American trade and security but international peace as well. To keep

Britain from collapsing, the Roosevelt administration felt compelled to extend the unneutral aid that invited attacks from German submarines. To keep Japan from expanding, Washington undertook to cut off vital Japanese supplies with embargoes that invited possible retaliation. Rather than let democracy die and dictatorship rule supreme, most citizens were evidently determined to support a policy that might lead to war. It did.

*Roosevelt's war message to Congress began with these famous words:*

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan."

## Chronology

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|--|--|
| <p><b>1933</b> FDR torpedoes the London Economic Conference<br/>United States recognizes the Soviet Union<br/>FDR declares Good Neighbor policy toward Latin America</p> | <p><b>1938</b> Hitler seizes Austria<br/>Munich Conference</p>   |
| <p><b>1934</b> Tydings-McDuffie Act provides for Philippine independence on July 4, 1946<br/>Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act</p>   | <p><b>1939</b> Hitler seizes all of Czechoslovakia<br/>Nazi-Soviet pact<br/>World War II begins in Europe with Hitler's invasion of Poland<br/>U.S. Neutrality Act of 1939</p>   |
| <p><b>1935</b> Mussolini invades Ethiopia<br/>U.S. Neutrality Act of 1935</p>  | <p><b>1940</b> Fall of France<br/>Hitler invades Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium<br/>United States invokes first peacetime draft<br/>Havana Conference<br/>Battle of Britain<br/>Bases-for-destroyers deal with Britain<br/>FDR defeats Willkie for presidency</p> |
| <p><b>1936</b> U.S. Neutrality Act of 1936</p>   | <p><b>1941</b> Lend-Lease Act<br/>Hitler attacks the Soviet Union<br/>Atlantic Charter<br/>Japan attacks Pearl Harbor</p>  |
| <p><b>1936-</b><br/><b>1939</b> Spanish Civil War</p>  |  |
| <p><b>1937</b> U.S. Neutrality Act of 1937<br/><i>Panay</i> incident<br/>Japan invades China</p>   |  |

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For further reading, see page A24 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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# America in World War II

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1941–1945

*Never before have we had so little time in which to do so much.*

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, 1942

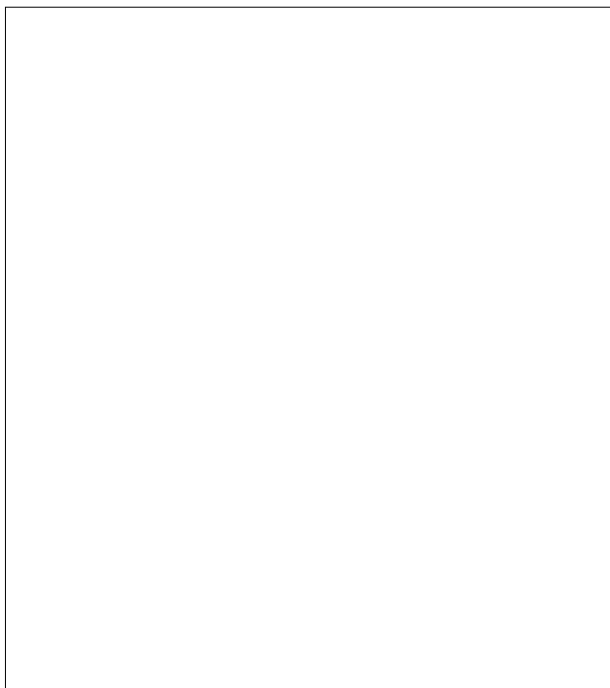
**T**he United States was plunged into the inferno of World War II with the most stupefying and humiliating military defeat in its history. In the dismal months that ensued, the democratic world teetered on the edge of disaster.

Japan's fanatics forgot that whoever stabs a king must stab to kill. A wounded but still potent American giant pulled itself out of the mud of Pearl Harbor, grimly determined to avenge the bloody treachery. "Get Japan first" was the cry that rose from millions of infuriated Americans, especially on the Pacific Coast. These outraged souls regarded America's share in the global conflict as a private war of vengeance in the Pacific, with the European front a kind of holding operation.

But Washington, in the so-called ABC-1 agreement with the British, had earlier and wisely adopted the grand strategy of "getting Germany

first." If America diverted its main strength to the Pacific, Hitler might crush both the Soviet Union and Britain and then emerge unconquerable in Fortress Europe. But if Germany was knocked out first, the combined Allied forces could be concentrated on Japan, and its daring game of conquest would be up. Meanwhile, just enough American strength would be sent to the Pacific to prevent Japan from digging in too deeply.

The get-Germany-first strategy was the solid foundation on which all American military strategy was built. But it encountered much ignorant criticism from two-fisted Americans who thirsted for revenge against Japan. Aggrieved protests were also registered by shorthanded American commanders in the Pacific and by Chinese and Australian allies. But President Roosevelt, a competent strategist in his own right, wisely resisted these pressures.



### **The Allies Trade Space for Time**

Given time, the Allies seemed bound to triumph. But would they be given time? True, they had on their side the great mass of the world's population, but the wolf is never intimidated by the number of the sheep. The United States was the mightiest military power on earth—potentially. But wars are won with bullets, not blueprints. Indeed America came perilously close to losing the war to the well-armed aggressors before it could begin to throw its full weight onto the scales.

Time, in a sense, was the most needed munition. Expense was no limitation. The overpowering problem confronting America was to retool itself for all-out war production, while praying that the dictators would not meanwhile crush the democracies. Haste was all the more imperative because the highly skilled German scientists might turn up with unbeatable secret weapons, including rocket bombs and perhaps even atomic arms.

America's task was far more complex and back-breaking than during World War I. It had to feed, clothe, and arm itself, as well as transport its forces to regions as far separated as Britain and Burma. More than that, it had to send a vast amount of food and munitions to its hard-pressed allies, who stretched all the way from the USSR to Australia. Could the American people, reputedly “gone soft,” measure up to this Herculean task? Was democracy “rotten” and “decadent,” as the dictators sneeringly proclaimed?

### **The Shock of War**

National unity was no worry, thanks to the electrifying blow by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor. American Communists had denounced the Anglo-French “imperialist” war before Hitler attacked Stalin in 1941, but they now clamored for an unmitigated assault on the Axis powers. The handful of strutting pro-Hitlerites in the United States melted away, while millions of Italian-Americans and German-Americans loyally supported the nation's war program. In contrast to World War I, when the patriotism of millions of immigrants was hotly questioned, World War II actually speeded the assimilation of many ethnic groups into American society. Immigration had been choked off for almost two decades before 1941, and America's ethnic communities were now composed of well-settled members, whose votes were crucial to Franklin Roosevelt's Democratic party. Consequently, there was virtually no government witch-hunting of minority groups, as had happened in World War I.

*American song titles after Pearl Harbor combined nationalism with unabashed racism: “We Are the Sons of the Rising Guns,” “Oh, You Little Son of an Oriental,” “To Be Specific, It's Our Pacific,” “The Sun Will Soon Be Setting on the Land of the Rising Sun,” “The Japs Don't Stand a Chinaman's Chance,” and “We're Gonna Find a Fellow Who Is Yellow and Beat Him Red, White, and Blue.”*

A painful exception was the plight of some 110,000 Japanese-Americans, concentrated on the Pacific Coast (see “Makers of America: The Japanese,” pp. 830–831). The Washington top command, fearing that they might act as saboteurs for Japan in case of invasion, forcibly herded them together in concentration camps, though about two-thirds of them were American-born U.S. citizens. This brutal precaution was both unnecessary and unfair, as the loyalty and combat record of Japanese-Americans proved to be admirable. But a wave of post-Pearl Harbor hysteria, backed by the long historical swell of anti-Japanese prejudice on the West Coast, temporarily robbed many Americans of their good sense—and their sense of justice. The internment camps deprived these uprooted Americans of dignity and basic rights; the internees also lost hundreds of millions of dollars in property and foregone earnings. The wartime Supreme Court in 1944 upheld the constitutionality of the Japanese relocation in *Korematsu v. U.S.* But more than four decades later, in 1988, the U.S. government officially apologized for its actions and approved the payment of reparations of \$20,000 to each camp survivor.

*Monica Sone (b. 1919), a college-age Japanese-American woman in Seattle, recorded the shock she and her brother felt when they learned of Executive Order No. 9066, which authorized the War Department to remove Japanese—aliens and citizens alike—from their homes:*

“In anger, Henry and I read and reread the Executive Order. Henry crumbled the newspaper in his hand and threw it against the wall. ‘Doesn’t my citizenship mean a single blessed thing to anyone? Why doesn’t somebody make up my mind for me? First they want me in the army. Now they’re going to slap an alien 4-C on me because of my ancestry. . . .’ Once more I felt like a despised, pathetic two-headed freak, a Japanese and an American, neither of which seemed to be doing me any good.”

The war prompted other changes in the American mood. Many programs of the once-popular New Deal—including the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and the National Youth Administration—were wiped out by the conservative Congress elected in 1942. Roosevelt declared in 1943 that “Dr. New Deal” was going into retirement, to be replaced by “Dr. Win-the-War.” His announcement acknowledged not only the urgency of the war effort but the power of the revitalized conservative forces in the country. The era of New Deal reform was over.

World War II was no idealistic crusade, as World War I had been. The Washington government did make some effort to propagandize at home and abroad with the Atlantic Charter, but the accent was on action. Opinion polls in 1942 revealed that nine out of ten Americans could cite no provisions of the Atlantic Charter. A majority then, and a near-majority two years later, confessed to having “no

# MAKERS OF AMERICA

## The Japanese

In 1853 the American commodore Matthew Perry sailed four gunboats into Japan's Uraga Bay and demanded that the nation open itself to diplomatic and commercial exchange with the United States. Perry's arrival ended two centuries of Japan's self-imposed isolation and eventually led to the overthrow of the last Japanese shogun (military ruler) and the restoration of the emperor. Within two decades of Perry's arrival, Japan's new "Meiji" government had launched the nation on an ambitious program of industrialization and militarization designed to make it the economic and political equal of the Western powers.

As Japan rapidly modernized, its citizens increasingly took ship for America. A steep land tax imposed by the Meiji government to pay for its reforms drove more than 300,000 Japanese farmers off their land. In 1884 the Meiji government permitted Hawaiian planters to recruit contract laborers from among this displaced population. By the 1890s many Japanese were sailing beyond Hawaii to the ports of Long Beach, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Between 1885 and 1924, roughly 200,000 Japanese migrated to Hawaii, and around 180,000 more ventured to the U.S. mainland. They were a select group: because the Meiji government saw overseas Japanese as representatives of their homeland, it strictly regulated emigration. Thus Japanese immigrants to America arrived with more money than their European counterparts. Also, because of Japan's system of compulsory education, Japanese immigrants on average were better educated and more literate than European immigrants.

Women as well as men migrated. The Japanese government, wanting to avoid the problems of an itinerant bachelor society that it observed among the Chinese in the United States, actively promoted women's migration. Although most Japanese immigrants were young men in their twenties and thirties, thousands of women also ventured to Hawaii

and the mainland as contract laborers or "picture brides," so called because their courtship had consisted exclusively of an exchange of photographs with their prospective husbands.

Like many Chinese and European immigrants, most Japanese who came to America expected to stay only temporarily. They planned to work hard for wages that were high by Japanese standards and then to return home and buy land. In Hawaii most Japanese labored on the vast sugar cane plantations. On the mainland they initially found migratory work on the railroads or in fish, fruit, or vegetable canneries. A separate Japanese economy of restaurants, stores, and boardinghouses soon sprang up in cities to serve the immigrants' needs.

From such humble beginnings, many Japanese—particularly those on the Pacific Coast—

quickly moved into farming. In the late nineteenth century, the spread of irrigation shifted California agriculture from grain to fruits and vegetables, and the invention of the refrigerated railcar opened hungry new markets in the East. The Japanese, with centuries of experience in intensive farming, arrived just in time to take advantage of these developments. As early as 1910, Japanese farmers produced 70 percent of California's strawberries, and by 1940 they grew 95 percent of the state's snap beans and more than half of its tomatoes. One Japanese farmer, known as the Potato King, sent his children to Harvard and Stanford Universities and died in 1926 with an estate valued at \$15 million.

But the very success of the Japanese proved a lightning rod for trouble. On the West Coast, Japanese immigrants had long endured racist barbs and social segregation. Increasingly, white workers and farmers, jealous of Japanese success, pushed for immigration restrictions. Bowing to this pressure, President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 negotiated the "Gentlemen's Agreement," under which the Japanese government voluntarily agreed to limit emigration. In 1913 the California legislature denied Japanese immigrants already living in the United States the right to own land.

Legally barred from becoming citizens, Japanese immigrants (the "Issei," from the Japanese word for *first*) became more determined than ever

that their American-born children (the "Nissei," from the Japanese word for *second*) would reap the full benefits of their birthright. Japanese parents encouraged their children to learn English, to excel in school, and to get a college education. Many Nissei grew up in two worlds, a fact they often recognized by Americanizing their Japanese names. Although education and acculturation did not protect the Nissei from the hysteria of World War II, those assets did give them a springboard to success in the postwar era.



clear idea what the war is about.” All Americans knew was that they had a dirty job on their hands and that the only way out was forward. They went about their bloody task with astonishing efficiency.

### **Building the War Machine**

The war crisis caused the drooping American economy to snap to attention. Massive military orders—over \$100 billion in 1942 alone—almost instantly soaked up the idle industrial capacity of the still-lingering Great Depression. Orchestrated by the War

Production Board, American factories poured forth an avalanche of weaponry: 40 billion bullets, 300,000 aircraft, 76,000 ships, 86,000 tanks, and 2.6 million machine guns. Miracle-man shipbuilder Henry J. Kaiser was dubbed “Sir Launchalot” for his prodigies of ship construction; one of his ships was fully assembled in fourteen days, complete with life jackets and coat hangers.

The War Production Board halted the manufacture of nonessential items such as passenger cars. It assigned priorities for transportation and access to raw materials. When the Japanese invasion of British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies snapped America’s lifeline of natural rubber, the government imposed a national speed limit and gasoline rationing in order to conserve rubber and built fifty-one synthetic-rubber plants. By war’s end they were far outproducing the prewar supply.

Farmers, too, rolled up their sleeves and increased their output. The armed forces drained the farms of workers, but heavy new investment in agricultural machinery and improved fertilizers more than made up the difference. In 1944 and 1945, blue-jeaned farmers hauled in record-breaking billion-bushel wheat harvests.

These wonders of production also brought economic strains. Full employment and scarce consumer goods fueled a sharp inflationary surge in 1942. The Office of Price Administration eventually brought ascending prices under control with extensive regulations. Rationing held down the consumption of critical goods such as meat and butter, though some “black marketeers” and “meatleggers” cheated the system. The War Labor Board (WLB) imposed ceilings on wage increases.

Labor unions, whose membership grew from about 10 million to more than 13 million workers during the war, fiercely resented the government-dictated wage ceilings. Despite the no-strike pledges of most of the major unions, a rash of labor walkouts plagued the war effort. Prominent among the strikers were the United Mine Workers, who several times were called off the job by their crusty and iron-willed chieftain, John L. Lewis.

Threats of lost production through strikes became so worrisome that Congress, in June 1943, passed the Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act. This act authorized the federal government to seize and operate tied-up industries. Strikes against any government-operated industry were made a criminal offense. Under the act, Washington took over the coal mines and, for a brief period, the railroads. Yet

work stoppages, although dangerous, actually accounted for less than 1 percent of the total working hours of the United States' wartime laboring force—a record better than blockaded Britain's. American workers, on the whole, were commendably committed to the war effort.

### **Manpower and Womanpower**

The armed services enlisted nearly 15 million men in World War II and some 216,000 women, who were employed for noncombat duties. Best known of these “women in arms” were the WAACs (army), WAVES (navy), and SPARs (Coast Guard). As the draft net was tightened after Pearl Harbor, millions of young men were plucked from their homes and clothed in “GI” (government issue) outfits. As the arsenal of democracy, the United States exempted certain key categories of industrial and agricultural workers from the draft, in order to keep its mighty industrial and food-producing machines humming.

*Poster appeals and slogans urging women to enlist in the WAACs (Women's Army Auxiliary Corps) were “Speed Them Back, Join the WAAC,” “I'd Rather Be with Them—Than Waiting for Them,” “Back the Attack, Be a WAAC! For America Is Calling,” and (a song throwback to World War I) “The WAACs and WAVES Will Win the War, Parlez Vous.”*

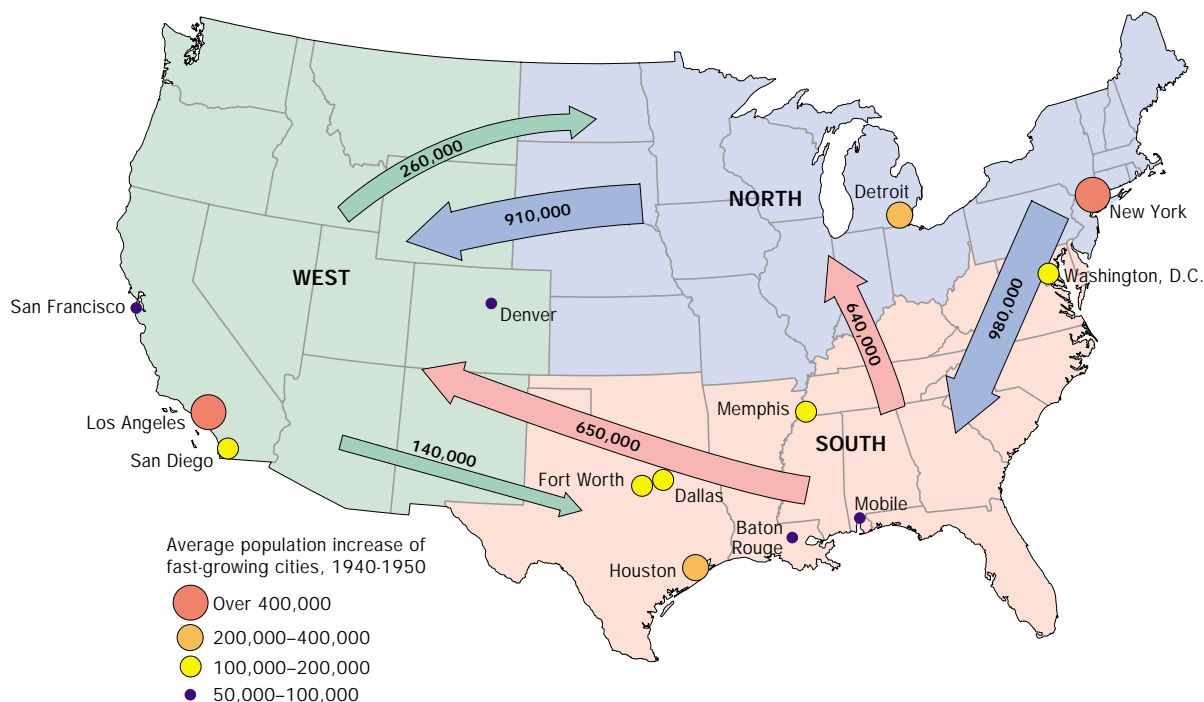
But even with these exemptions, the draft left the nation's farms and factories so short of personnel that new workers had to be found. An agreement with Mexico in 1942 brought thousands of Mexican agricultural workers, called *braceros*, across the border to harvest the fruit and grain crops of the West. The *bracero* program outlived the war by some twenty years, becoming a fixed feature of the agricultural economy in many western states.

Even more dramatic was the march of women onto the factory floor. More than 6 million women took up jobs outside the home; over half of them had never before worked for wages. Many of them were mothers, and the government was obliged to set up some 3,000 day-care centers to care for “Rosie the Riveter’s” children while she drilled the fuselage of a heavy bomber or joined the links of a tank track. When the war ended, Rosie and many of her sisters were in no hurry to put down their tools. They wanted to keep on working and often did. The war thus foreshadowed an eventual revolution in the roles of women in American society.

Yet the war’s immediate impact on women’s lives has frequently been exaggerated. The great majority of American women—especially those with husbands present in the home or with small children to care for—did not work for wages in the wartime economy but continued in their traditional roles. In both Britain and the Soviet Union, a far greater percentage of women, including mothers,

were pressed into industrial employment as the gods of war laid a much heavier hand on those societies than they did on the United States. A poll in 1943 revealed that a majority of American women would not take a job in a war plant if it were offered.

At war’s end, two-thirds of women war workers left the labor force. Many of these were forced out of their jobs by employers and unions eager to re-employ returning servicemen. But half of them told census takers that they quit their jobs voluntarily because of family obligations. The immediate post-war period witnessed not a permanent widening of women’s employment opportunities, but a widespread rush into suburban domesticity and the mothering of the “baby boomers” who were born by the tens of millions in the decade and a half after 1945. America was destined to experience a thoroughgoing revolution in women’s status later in the postwar period, but that epochal change was only beginning to gather momentum in the war years.



**Internal Migration in the United States During World War II** Few events in American history have moved the American people about so massively as World War II. The West and the South boomed, and several war-industry cities grew explosively. A majority of migrants from the South were blacks; 1.6 million African-Americans left the region in the 1940s. (Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

## Wartime Migrations

The war also proved to be a demographic cauldron, churning and shifting the American population. Many of the 15 million men and women in uniform, having seen new sights and glimpsed new horizons, chose not to go home again at war's end. War industries sucked people into boomtowns like Los Angeles, Detroit, Seattle, and Baton Rouge. California's population grew by nearly 2 million. The South experienced especially dramatic changes. Franklin Roosevelt had called the South "the nation's number one economic problem" in 1938; when war came, he seized the opportunity to accelerate the region's economic development. The states of the old Confederacy received a disproportionate share of defense contracts, including nearly \$6 billion of federally financed industrial facilities. Here were the seeds of the postwar blossoming of the "Sunbelt."

Despite this economic stimulus in the South, some 1.6 million blacks left the land of their ancient enslavement to seek jobs in the war plants of the West and North. Forever after, race relations constituted a national, not a regional, issue. Explosive tensions developed over employment, housing, and segregated facilities. Black leader A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, threatened a massive "Negro March on

*An African-American soldier angrily complained about segregation in the armed forces during World War II:*

"Why is it we Negro soldiers who are as much a part of Uncle Sam's great military machine as any cannot be treated with equality and the respect due us? The same respect which white soldiers expect and demand from us? . . . There is great need for drastic change in this man's Army! How can we be trained to protect America, which is called a *free* nation, when all around us rears the ugly head of segregation?"

Washington" in 1941 to demand equal opportunities for blacks in war jobs and in the armed forces. Roosevelt's response was to issue an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries. In addition, the president established the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to monitor compliance with his edict. Blacks were also drafted into the armed forces, though they were still generally assigned to service branches rather than combat units and subjected to petty degradations such

as segregated blood banks for the wounded. But in general the war helped to embolden blacks in their long struggle for equality. They rallied behind the slogan “Double V”—victory over the dictators abroad and over racism at home. Membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) shot up almost to the half-million mark, and a new militant organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), was founded in 1942.

The northward migration of African-Americans accelerated after the war, thanks to the advent of the mechanical cotton picker—an invention whose impact rivaled that of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin. Introduced in 1944, this new mechanical marvel did the work of fifty people at about one-eighth the cost. Overnight, the Cotton South’s historic need for cheap labor disappeared. Their muscle no longer required in Dixie, some 5 million black tenant farmers and sharecroppers headed north in the three decades after the war. Theirs was one of the great migrations in American history, comparable in size to the immigrant floods from Ireland, Italy, and Poland. Within a single generation, a near majority of African-Americans gave up their historic home-

land and their rural way of life. By 1970 half of all blacks lived outside of the South, and *urban* had become almost a synonym for *black*. The speed and scale of these changes jolted the migrants and sometimes convulsed the communities that received them.

The war also prompted an exodus of Native Americans from the reservations. Thousands of Indian men and women found war work in the major cities, and thousands more answered Uncle Sam’s call to arms. More than 90 percent of Indians resided on reservations in 1940; six decades later more than half lived in cities, with a large concentration in southern California.

Some twenty-five thousand Native American men served in the armed forces. Comanches in Europe and Navajos in the Pacific made especially valuable contributions as “code talkers.” They transmitted radio messages in their native languages, which were incomprehensible to the Germans and the Japanese.

The sudden rubbing against one another of unfamiliar peoples produced some distressingly violent friction. In 1943 young “zoot-suit”-clad Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles were viciously attacked by Anglo sailors who cruised the streets in taxicabs, searching for victims. Order was restored

only after the Mexican ambassador made an emotional plea, pointing out that such outbreaks were grist for Nazi propaganda mills. At almost the same time, an even more brutal race riot that killed twenty-five blacks and nine whites erupted in Detroit.

## Holding the Home Front

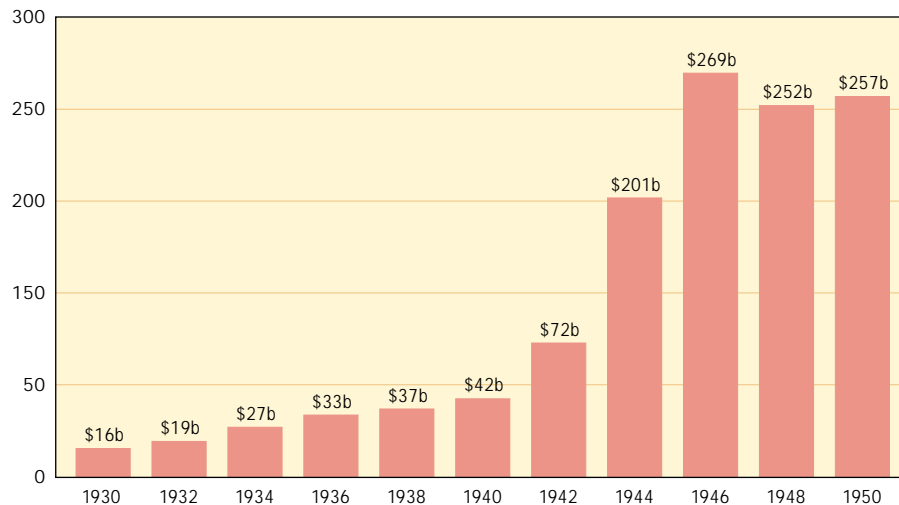
Despite these ugly episodes, Americans on the home front suffered little from the war, compared to the peoples of the other fighting nations. By war's end much of the planet was a smoking ruin. But in America the war invigorated the economy and lifted the country out of a decade-long depression. The gross national product vaulted from less than \$100 billion in 1940 to more than \$200 billion in 1945. Corporate profits rose from about \$6 billion in 1940 to almost twice that amount four years later. ("If you are going to try to go to war in a capitalist country," said Secretary of War Henry Stimson, "you have to let business make money out of the process, or business won't work.") Despite wage ceilings, overtime pay fattened pay envelopes. Disposable personal income, even after payment of wartime taxes, more than doubled. On December 7, 1944, the third anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Macy's department store rang up the biggest sales day in its history. Americans had never had it so good—and they wanted it a lot better. When price controls were

finally lifted in 1946, America's pent-up lust to consume pushed prices up 33 percent in less than two years. The rest of the world, meanwhile, was still clawing its way out from under the rubble of war.

The hand of government touched more American lives more intimately during the war than ever before. The war, perhaps even more than the New Deal, pointed the way to the post-1945 era of big-government interventionism. Every household felt the constraints of the rationing system. Millions of men and women worked for Uncle Sam in the armed forces. Millions more worked for him in the defense industries, where their employers and unions were monitored by the FEPC and the WLB, and their personal needs were cared for by government-sponsored housing projects, day-care facilities, and health plans. The Office of Scientific Research and Development channeled hundreds of millions of dollars into university-based scientific research, establishing the partnership between the government and universities that underwrote America's technological and economic leadership in the postwar era.

The flood of war dollars—not the relatively modest rivulet of New Deal spending—at last swept the plague of unemployment from the land. War, not enlightened social policy, cured the depression. As the postwar economy continued to depend dangerously on military spending for its health, many observers looked back to the years 1941–1945 as the origins of a "warfare-welfare state."

Billions of dollars



### The National Debt, 1930–1950

Contrary to much popular mythology, it was World War II, not the New Deal, that first ballooned the national debt. The debt accumulated to still greater amounts in the 1980s and 1990s (see table, p. 986). (Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States*.)

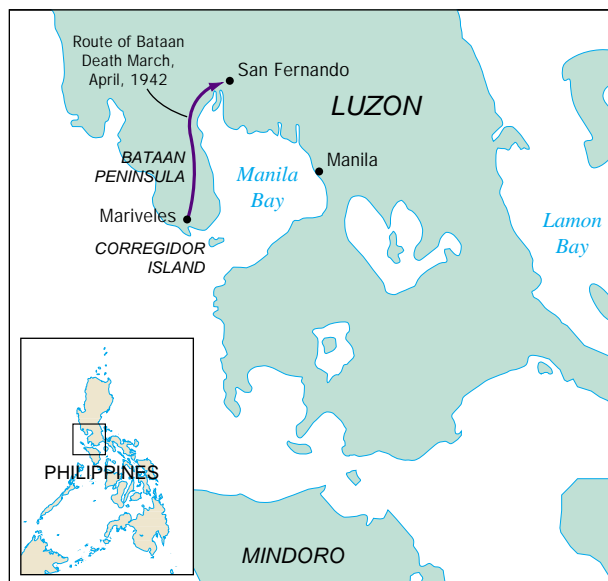
The conflict was phenomenally expensive. The wartime bill amounted to more than \$330 billion—ten times the direct cost of World War I and twice as much as *all* previous federal spending since 1776. Roosevelt would have preferred to follow a pay-as-you-go policy to finance the war, but the costs were simply too gigantic. The income-tax net was expanded to catch about four times as many people as before, and maximum tax rates rose as high as 90 percent. But despite such drastic measures, only about two-fifths of the war costs were paid from current revenues. The remainder was borrowed. The national debt skyrocketed from \$49 billion in 1941 to \$259 billion in 1945. When production finally slipped into high gear, the war was costing about \$10 million an hour. This was the price of victory over such implacable enemies.

### The Rising Sun in the Pacific

Early successes of the efficient Japanese militarists were breathtaking: they realized that they would have to win quickly or lose slowly. Seldom, if ever, has so much territory been conquered so rapidly with so little loss.

Simultaneously with the assault on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched widespread and uniformly successful attacks on various Far Eastern bastions. These included the American outposts of Guam, Wake, and the Philippines. In a dismayingly short time, the Japanese invader seized not only the British-Chinese port of Hong Kong but also British Malaya, with its critically important supplies of rubber and tin.

Nor did the Japanese tide stop there. The over-ambitious soldiers of the emperor, plunging into the snake-infested jungles of Burma, cut the famed Burma Road. This was the route over which the United States had been trucking a trickle of munitions to the armies of the Chinese generalissimo Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), who was still resisting the Japanese invader in China. Thereafter, intrepid American aviators were forced to fly a handful of war supplies to Jiang “over the hump” of the towering Himalaya mountains from the India-Burma theater. Meanwhile, the Japanese had lunged southward against the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. The jungle-matted islands speedily fell to the assailants after the combined British, Australian, Dutch, and



Corregidor and Bataan

American naval and air forces had been smashed at an early date by their numerically superior foe.

Better news came from the Philippines, which succeeded dramatically in slowing down the mikado’s warriors for five months. The Japanese promptly landed a small but effective army, and General Douglas MacArthur, the eloquent and egotistical American commander, withdrew to a strong defensive position at Bataan, not far from Manila. There about twenty thousand American troops, supported by a much larger force of ill-trained Filipinos, held off violent Japanese attacks until April 9, 1942. The defenders, reduced to eating mules and monkeys, heroically traded their lives for time in the face of hopeless odds. They grimly joked while vainly hoping for reinforcements:

*We’re the battling bastards of Bataan;  
No Mamma, no Papa, no Uncle Sam. . . .*

Before the inevitable American surrender, General MacArthur was ordered by Washington to depart secretly for Australia, there to head the resistance against the Japanese. Leaving by motorboat and airplane, he proclaimed, “I shall return.” After the battered remnants of his army had hoisted the white flag, they were treated with vicious cruelty in the infamous eighty-mile Bataan Death March to prisoner-of-war camps. The island fortress of Corregidor, in Manila harbor, held out until May 6,

1942, when it too surrendered and left Japanese forces in complete control of the Philippine archipelago.

### **Japan's High Tide at Midway**

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The aggressive warriors from Japan, making hay while the Rising Sun shone, pushed relentlessly southward. They invaded the turtle-shaped island of New Guinea, north of Australia, and landed on the Solomon Islands, from which they threatened Australia itself. Their onrush was finally checked by a crucial naval battle fought in the Coral Sea, in May 1942. An American carrier task force, with Aus-

tralian support, inflicted heavy losses on the victory-flushed Japanese. For the first time in history, the fighting was all done by carrier-based aircraft, and neither fleet saw or fired a shot directly at the other.

Japan next undertook to seize Midway Island, more than a thousand miles northwest of Honolulu. From this strategic base, it could launch devastating assaults on Pearl Harbor and perhaps force the weakened American Pacific fleet into destructive combat—possibly even compel the United States to negotiate a cease-fire in the Pacific. An epochal naval battle was fought near Midway on June 3–6, 1942. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, a high-grade naval strategist, directed a smaller but skillfully maneuvered carrier force, under Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, against the powerful invading fleet. The fighting was all done by aircraft, and the Japanese broke off action after losing four vitally important carriers.

Midway was a pivotal victory. Combined with the Battle of the Coral Sea, the U.S. success at Midway halted Japan's juggernaut. But the thrust of the Japanese into the eastern Pacific did net them America's fog-girt islands of Kiska and Attu, in the Aleutian archipelago, off Alaska. This easy conquest aroused fear of an invasion of the United States from the northwest. Much American strength was consequently diverted to the defense of Alaska, including the construction of the "Alcan" Highway through Canada.

Yet the Japanese imperialists, overextended in 1942, suffered from "victory disease." Their appetites were bigger than their stomachs. If they had only dug in and consolidated their gains, they would have been much more difficult to dislodge once the tide turned.

### **American Leapfrogging Toward Tokyo**

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Following the heartening victory at Midway, the United States for the first time was able to seize the initiative in the Pacific. In August 1942 American ground forces gained a toehold on Guadalcanal Island, in the Solomons, in an effort to protect the lifeline from America to Australia through the Southwest Pacific. An early naval defeat inflicted by the Japanese shortened American supplies dangerously, and for weeks the U.S. troops held on to the



malarial island only by their fingernails. After several desperate sea battles for naval control, the Japanese troops evacuated Guadalcanal in February 1943. Japanese losses were 20,000, compared to 1,700 for the Americans. That casualty ratio of more than ten to one, Japanese to American, persisted throughout the Pacific war.

American and Australian forces, under General MacArthur, meanwhile had been hanging on courageously to the southeastern tip of New Guinea, the last buffer protecting Australia. The scales of war gradually began to tip as the American navy, including submarines, inflicted lethal losses on Japanese supply ships and troop carriers. Conquest of the north coast of New Guinea was completed by August 1944, after General MacArthur had fought his way westward through tropical jungle hells. This hard-won victory was the first leg on his long return journey to the Philippines.

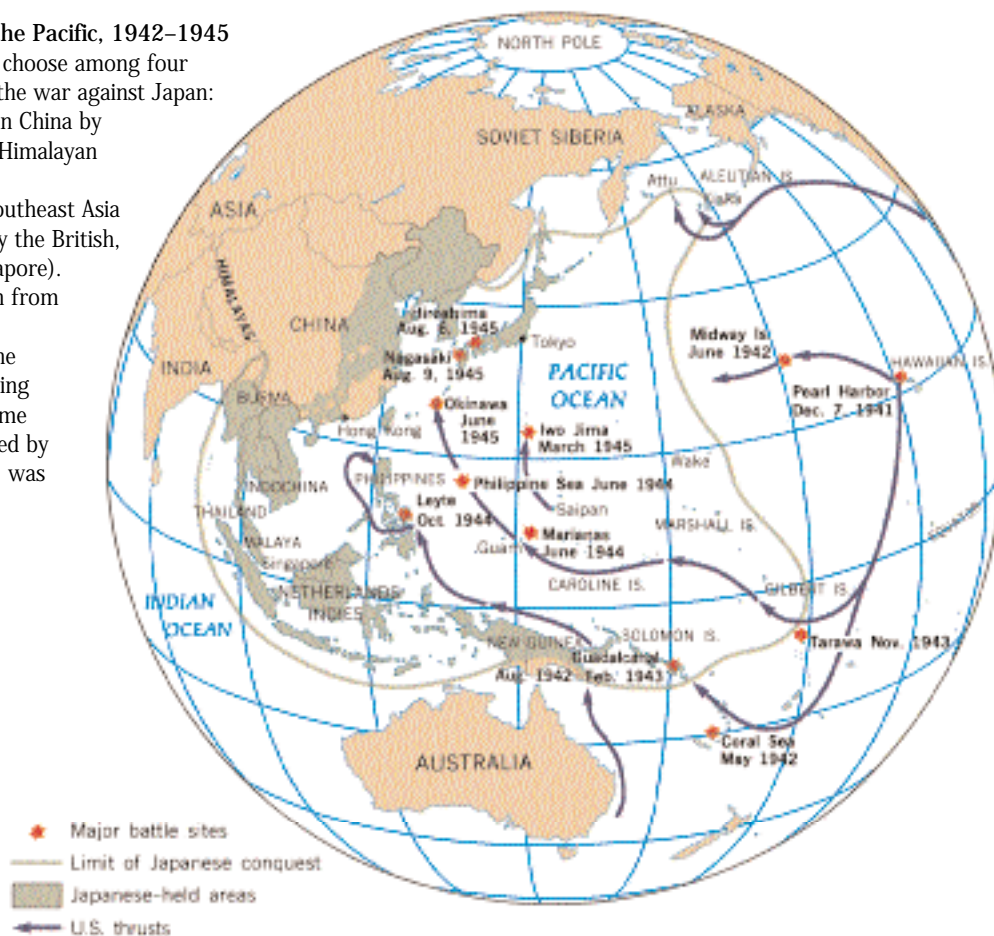
The U.S. Navy, with marines and army divisions doing the meat-grinder fighting, had meanwhile been “leapfrogging” the Japanese-held islands in the Pacific. Old-fashioned strategy dictated that the American forces, as they drove toward Tokyo, should reduce the fortified Japanese outposts on their flank. This course would have taken many blood-stained months, for the holed-in defenders were prepared to die to the last man in their caves. The new strategy of island hopping called for bypassing some of the most heavily fortified Japanese posts, capturing nearby islands, setting up airfields on them, and then neutralizing the enemy bases through heavy bombing. Deprived of essential supplies from the homeland, Japan’s outposts would slowly wither on the vine—as they did.

Brilliant success crowned the American attacks on the Japanese island strongholds in the Pacific, where Admiral Nimitz skillfully coordinated the

#### United States Thrusts in the Pacific, 1942–1945

American strategists had to choose among four proposed plans for waging the war against Japan:

1. Defeating the Japanese in China by funneling supplies over the Himalayan “hump” from India.
2. Carrying the war into Southeast Asia (a proposal much favored by the British, who could thus regain Singapore).
3. Heavy bombing of Japan from Chinese air bases.
4. “Island hopping” from the South Pacific to within striking distance of the Japanese home islands. This strategy, favored by General Douglas MacArthur, was the one finally emphasized.



efforts of naval, air, and ground units. In May and August of 1943, Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians were easily retaken. In November 1943 “bloody Tarawa” and Makin, both in the Gilbert Islands, fell after suicidal resistance. In January and February 1944, the key outposts of the Marshall Islands group succumbed after savage fighting.

Especially prized were the Marianas, including America’s conquered Guam. From bases in the Marianas, the United States’ new B-29 superbombers could carry out round-trip bombing raids on Japan’s home islands. The assault on the Marianas opened on June 19, 1944, with what American pilots called the “Great Marianas Turkey Shoot.” A combination of the combat superiority of the recently developed American “Hellcat” fighter plane and the new technology of the antiaircraft proximity fuse destroyed nearly 250 Japanese aircraft, with a loss of only 29 American planes. The following day, in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, U.S. naval forces sank several Japanese carriers. The Japanese navy never recovered from these massive losses of planes, pilots, and ships.

After fanatical resistance, including a mass suicide leap of surviving Japanese soldiers and civilians from “Suicide Cliff” on Saipan, the major islands of the Marianas fell to the U.S. attackers in July and August 1944. With these unsinkable aircraft carriers now available, virtual round-the-clock bombing of Japan began in November 1944.

## **The Allied Halting of Hitler**

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Early setbacks for America in the Pacific were paralleled in the Atlantic. Hitler had entered the war with a formidable fleet of ultramodern submarines, which ultimately operated in “wolf packs” with frightful effect, especially in the North Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. During ten months of 1942 more than 500 merchant ships were reported lost—111 in June alone—as ship destruction far outran construction.

The tide of subsea battle turned with agonizing slowness. Old techniques, such as escorting convoys of merchant vessels and dropping depth bombs from destroyers, were strengthened by air patrol, the newly invented technology of radar, and the bombing of submarine bases. “Keep ‘Em Sailing” was the motto of oil-begrimed merchant seamen,

*British prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965) observed in a speech (May 1943),*

“The proud German Army has by its sudden collapse, sudden crumbling and breaking up . . . once again proved the truth of the saying, ‘The Hun [German] is always either at your throat or at your feet.’”

hundreds of whom perished as unsung heroes in icy seas. Eventually Allied antisubmarine tactics improved substantially, thanks especially to British code-breakers, who had cracked the Germans’ “Enigma” codes and could therefore pinpoint the locations of the U-boats lurking in the North Atlantic.

Not until the spring of 1943 did the Allies clearly have the upper hand against the U-boat. If they had not won the Battle of the Atlantic, Britain would have been forced under, and a second front could not have been launched from its island springboard. Victory over the undersea raiders was nerve-rackingly narrow. When the war ended, Hitler was about to mass-produce a fearsome new submarine—one that could remain underwater indefinitely and cruise at seventeen knots when submerged.

Meanwhile, the turning point of the land-air war against Hitler had come late in 1942. The British had launched a thousand-plane raid on Cologne in May. In August 1942 they were joined by the American air force and were cascading bombs on German cities. The Germans under Marshal Erwin Rommel—the “Desert Fox”—had driven eastward across the hot sands of North Africa into Egypt, perilously close to the Suez Canal. A breakthrough would have spelled disaster for the Allies. But late in October 1942, British general Bernard Montgomery delivered a withering attack at El Alamein, west of Cairo. With the aid of several hundred hastily shipped American Sherman tanks, he speedily drove the enemy back to Tunisia, more than a thousand miles away.

On the Soviet front, the unexpected successes of the red army gave a new lift to the Allied cause. In September 1942 the Russians stalled the German steamroller at rubble-strewn Stalingrad, graveyard

of Hitler's hopes. More than a score of invading divisions, caught in an icy noose, later surrendered or were "mopped up." In November 1942 the resilient Russians unleashed a crushing counteroffensive, which was never seriously reversed. A year later Stalin had regained about two-thirds of the blood-soaked Soviet motherland wrested from him by the German invader.

### **A Second Front from North Africa to Rome**

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Soviet losses were already staggering in 1942: millions of soldiers and civilians lay dead, and Hitler's armies had overrun most of the western USSR. Anglo-American losses at this time could be counted only in the thousands. By war's end, the grave had closed over some 20 million Soviets, and a great swath of their country, equivalent in the United States to the area from Chicago to the Atlantic seaboard, had been laid waste. Small wonder that Kremlin leaders clamored for a second front to divert the German strength westward.

Many Americans, including FDR, were eager to begin a diversionary invasion of France in 1942 or 1943. They feared that the Soviets, unable to hold out forever against Germany, might make a separate peace as they had in 1918 and leave the Western Allies to face Hitler's fury alone.

But British military planners, remembering their appalling losses in 1914–1918, were not enthusiastic about a frontal assault on German-held France. It might end in disaster. They preferred to attack Hitler's Fortress Europe through the "soft underbelly" of the Mediterranean. Faced with British boot-dragging and a woeful lack of resources, the Americans reluctantly agreed to postpone a massive invasion of Europe.

An assault on French-held North Africa was a compromise second front. The highly secret attack, launched in November 1942, was headed by a gifted and easy-smiling American general, Dwight D. ("Ike") Eisenhower, a master of organization and conciliation. As a joint Allied operation ultimately involving some 400,000 men (British, Canadian, French, and chiefly American) and about 850 ships, the invasion was the mightiest waterborne effort up to that time in history. After savage fighting, the

remnants of the German-Italian army were finally trapped in Tunisia and surrendered in May 1943.

New blows were now planned by the Allies. At Casablanca, in newly occupied French Morocco, President Roosevelt, who had boldly flown the Atlantic, met in a historic conference with Winston Churchill in January 1943. The Big Two agreed to step up the Pacific war, invade Sicily, increase pressure on Italy, and insist upon an "unconditional surrender" of the enemy, a phrase earlier popularized by General Ulysses S. Grant during the Civil War. Such an unyielding policy would presumably hearten the ultrasuspicious Soviets, who professed to fear separate Allied peace negotiations. It would also forestall charges of broken armistice terms, such as had come after 1918. Paradoxically, the tough-sounding unconditional surrender declaration was an admission of the weakness of the Western Allies. Still unable in 1943 to mount the kind of second front their Soviet partner desperately demanded, the British and the Americans had little but words to offer Stalin.

"Unconditional surrender" proved to be one of the most controversial moves of the war. The main

criticism was that it steeled the enemy to fight to a last-bunker resistance, while discouraging antiwar groups in Germany from revolting. Although there was some truth in these charges, no one can prove that “unconditional surrender” either shortened or lengthened the war. But by helping to destroy the German government utterly, the harsh policy immensely complicated the problems of postwar reconstruction.

The Allied forces, victorious in Africa, now turned against the not-so-soft underbelly of Europe. Sicily fell in August 1943 after sporadic but sometimes bitter resistance. Shortly before the conquest of the island, Mussolini was deposed, and Italy surrendered unconditionally soon thereafter, in September 1943. President Roosevelt, referring to the three original Axis countries—Germany, Italy, and Japan—joked grimly that it was now one down and two to go.

But if Italy dropped out of the war, the Germans did not drop out of Italy. Hitler’s well-trained troops stubbornly resisted the Allied invaders now pouring into the toe of the Italian boot. They also unleashed their fury against the Italians, who had turned their coats and declared war on Germany in October 1943. “Sunny Italy” proceeded to belie its name, for in the snow-covered and mud-caked mountains of its elongated peninsula occurred some of the filthiest, bloodiest, and most frustrating fighting of the war.

For many months Italy appeared to be a dead end, as the Allied advance was halted by a seemingly impregnable German defense centered on the ancient monastery of Monte Cassino. After a touch-and-go assault on the Anzio beachhead, Rome was finally taken on June 4, 1944. The tremendous cross-channel invasion of France begun two days later turned Italy into a kind of sideshow, but the Allies, limited in manpower, continued to fight their way slowly and painfully into northern Italy. On May 2, 1945, only five days before Germany’s official surrender, several hundred thousand Axis troops in Italy laid down their arms and became prisoners of war. While the Italian second front opened the Mediterranean and diverted some German divisions from the blazing Soviet and French battle lines, it also may have delayed the main Allied invasion of Europe, from England across the English Channel to France, by many months—allowing more time for the Soviet army to advance into Eastern Europe.

### **D-Day: June 6, 1944**

The Soviets had never ceased their clamor for an all-out second front, and the time rapidly approached for Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin to meet in person to coordinate the promised effort. Marshal Joseph Stalin, with a careful eye on Soviet military operations, balked at leaving Moscow. President Roosevelt, who jauntily remarked in private, “I can handle that old buzzard,” was eager to confer with him. The president seemed confident that Rooseveltian charm could woo the hardened conspirator of the Kremlin from his nasty communist ways.

Teheran, the capital of Iran (Persia), was finally chosen as the meeting place. To this ancient city Roosevelt riskily flew, after a stopover conference in




World War II in Europe and North Africa, 1939–1945

Cairo with Britain's Churchill and China's Jiang Jieshi regarding the war against Japan. At Teheran the discussions among Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill—from November 28 to December 1, 1943—progressed smoothly. Perhaps the most important achievement was agreement on broad plans, especially those for launching Soviet attacks on Germany from the east simultaneously with the prospective Allied assault from the west.

Preparations for the cross-channel invasion of France were gigantic. Britain's fast-anchored isle virtually groaned with munitions, supplies, and troops, as nearly 3 million fighting men were readied. Because the United States was to provide most of the Allied warriors, the overall command was entrusted to an American, General Eisenhower. He

had already distinguished himself in the North African and Mediterranean Campaigns, not only for his military capacity but also for his gifts as a conciliator of clashing Allied interests.

French Normandy, less heavily defended than other parts of the European coast, was pinpointed for the invasion assault. On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the enormous operation, which involved some forty-six hundred vessels, unwound. Stiff resistance was encountered from the Germans, who had been misled by a feint into expecting the blow to fall farther north. The Allies had already achieved mastery of the air over France. They were thus able to block reinforcements by crippling the railroads, while worsening German fuel shortages by bombing gasoline-producing plants.



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**Franklin Roosevelt at Teheran, 1943** In late 1943 the “Big Three” wartime leaders—Britain’s prime minister Winston Churchill, American president Franklin Roosevelt, and Soviet leader Marshal Joseph Stalin—gathered together for the first time. They met amidst growing Soviet frustration with the British and the Americans for their failure thus far to open a “second front” against Germany in western Europe, while the Soviets continued to suffer horrendous losses in the savage fighting in eastern Europe. American military planners were eager to open a second front as soon as possible, but the British, who would necessarily have to supply most of the troops until America was fully mobilized, balked. Tension among the three leaders over the second front plan—code-named OVERLORD, the operation that resulted in the Anglo-American invasion of Normandy on “D-Day,” June 6, 1944—is evident in this transcript of

their discussions in the Iranian city of Teheran on November 28, 1943. The excerpts printed here are actually taken from two separate accounts: one composed by the American diplomat and Roosevelt’s official translator Charles Bohlen, the other written by a military officer on behalf of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both versions are published in *Foreign Relations of the United States*, a compilation of American diplomatic records since 1861. The Soviets and the British also kept their own records of the Teheran meetings, giving historians remarkably rich sources with which to reconstruct the crucial negotiations and decisions that shaped wartime diplomacy. Why might the history of diplomacy be so lavishly documented? At this meeting, what were the principal objectives that each leader pursued? How did each man address his task? In what ways was the future of the war—and the post-war world—here foreshadowed?

**FIRST PLENARY MEETING,  
NOVEMBER 28, 1943, 4 P. M., CONFERENCE  
ROOM, SOVIET EMBASSY**

Bohlen Minutes

SECRET

THE PRESIDENT said as the youngest of the three present he ventured to welcome his elders. He said he wished to welcome the new members to the family circle and tell them that meetings of this character were conducted as between friends with complete frankness on all sides with nothing that was said to be made public. . . .

Chief of Staff Minutes

MARSHAL STALIN asked who will be the commander in this Operation Overlord. (THE PRESIDENT and PRIME MINISTER interpolated this was not yet decided.) MARSHAL STALIN continued, “Then nothing will come out of these operations.” . . .

THE PRESIDENT said we again come back to the problem of the timing for OVERLORD. It was believed that it would be good for OVERLORD to take place about 1 May, or certainly not later than 15 May or 20 May, if possible.

THE PRIME MINISTER said that he could not agree to that. . . .

. . . He said he (the Prime Minister) was going to do everything in the power of His Majesty’s Government to begin OVERLORD at the earliest possible moment. However, he did not think that the

many great possibilities in the Mediterranean should be ruthlessly cast aside as valueless merely on the question of a month’s delay in OVERLORD.

MARSHAL STALIN said all the Mediterranean operations are diversions. . . .

THE PRESIDENT said he found that his staff places emphasis on OVERLORD. While on the other hand the Prime Minister and his staff also emphasize OVERLORD, nevertheless the United States does not feel that OVERLORD should be put off.

THE PRESIDENT questioned whether it would not be possible for the *ad hoc* committee to go ahead with their deliberations without any further directive and to produce an answer by tomorrow morning.

MARSHAL STALIN questioned, “What can such a committee do?” He said, “We Chiefs of State have more power and more authority than a committee. General Brooke cannot force our opinions and there are many questions which can be decided only by us.” He said he would like to ask if the British are thinking seriously of OVERLORD only in order to satisfy the U.S.S.R.

THE PRIME MINISTER replied that if the conditions specified at Moscow regarding OVERLORD should exist, he firmly believed it would be England’s duty to hurl every ounce of strength she had across the Channel at the Germans.

THE PRESIDENT observed that in an hour a very good dinner would be awaiting all and people would be very hungry. He suggested that the staffs should meet tomorrow morning and discuss the matter. . . .

The Allied beachhead, at first clung to with fingertips, was gradually enlarged, consolidated, and reinforced. After desperate fighting, the invaders finally broke out of the German iron ring that enclosed the Normandy landing zone. Most spectacular were the lunges across France by American armored divisions, brilliantly commanded by bluster and profane General George S. (“Blood ‘n’ Guts”) Patton. The retreat of the German defenders was hastened when an American-French force landed in August 1944 on the southern coast of France and swept northward. With the assistance of the French “underground,” Paris was liberated in August 1944, amid exuberant manifestations of joy and gratitude.

Allied forces rolled irresistibly toward Germany, and many of the Americans encountered places, like Château-Thierry, familiar to their fathers in

1918. “Lafayette, we are here again,” quipped some of the American soldiers. The first important German city (Aachen) fell to the Americans in October 1944, and the days of Hitler’s “thousand-year *Reich*” were numbered.

### **FDR: The Fourth-Termite of 1944**

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The presidential campaign of 1944, which was bound to divert energy from the war program, came most awkwardly as the awful conflict roared to its climax. But the normal electoral processes continued to function, despite some loose talk of suspending them “for the duration.”

Victory-starved Republicans met in Chicago with hopeful enthusiasm. They quickly nominated

the short, mustachioed, and dapper Thomas E. Dewey, popular vote-getting governor of New York. Regarded as a liberal, he had already made a national reputation as a prosecutor of grafters and racketeers in New York City. His shortness and youth—he was only forty-two—had caused one veteran New Dealer to sneer that the candidate had cast his diaper into the ring. To offset Dewey's mild internationalism, the convention nominated for the vice presidency a strong isolationist, handsome and white-maned Senator John W. Bricker of Ohio. Yet the platform called for an unstinted prosecution of the war and for the creation of a new international organization to maintain peace.

FDR, aging under the strain, was the "indispensable man" of the Democrats. No other major figure was available, and the war was apparently grinding to its finale. He was nominated at Chicago on the first ballot by acclamation. But in a sense he was the "forgotten man" of the convention, for in

view of his age, an unusual amount of attention was focused on the vice presidency.

The scramble for the vice-presidential plum turned into something of a free-for-all. Henry A. Wallace, onetime "plow 'em under" secretary of agriculture, had served four years as vice president and desired a renomination. But conservative Democrats distrusted him as an ill-balanced and unpredictable liberal. A "ditch Wallace" move developed tremendous momentum, despite the popularity of Wallace with large numbers of voters and many of the delegates. With Roosevelt's blessing, the vice-presidential nomination finally went to smiling and self-assured Senator Harry S Truman of Missouri ("the new Missouri Compromise"). Hitherto inconspicuous, he had recently attained national visibility as the efficient chairman of a Senate committee conducting an investigation of wasteful war expenditures. Nobody had much against him or on him.



## Roosevelt Defeats Dewey

A dynamic Dewey took the offensive, for Roosevelt was too consumed with directing the war to spare much time for speechmaking. The vigorous young “crime buster,” with his beautiful baritone voice and polished diction, denounced the tired and quarrelsome “old men” in Washington. He proclaimed repeatedly that after “twelve long years” of New Dealism, it was “time for a change.” As for the war, Dewey would not alter the basic strategy but would fight it better—a type of “me-tooism” ridiculed by the Democrats. The fourth-term issue did not figure prominently, now that the ice had been broken by Roosevelt’s third term. But “Dewey-eyed” Republicans half-humorously professed to fear fifth and sixth terms by the “lifer” in the White House.

In the closing weeks of the campaign, Roosevelt left his desk for the stump. He was stung by certain Republican charges, including criticism that he had sent a U.S. Navy destroyer to retrieve his pet Scottie dog, Fala. He was also eager to show himself, even in chilling rains, to spike well-founded rumors of failing health.

Substantial assistance came from the new political action committee of the CIO, which was organized to get around the law banning the direct use of union funds for political purposes. Zealous CIO members, branded as communists by the Republicans, rang countless doorbells and asked, with pointed reference to the recent depression, “What were you doing in 1932?” At times Roosevelt seemed to be running again against Hoover. As in every one of his previous three campaigns, FDR was opposed by a majority of the newspapers, which were owned chiefly by Republicans. Roosevelt, as customary, won a sweeping victory: 432 to 99 in the Electoral College; 25,606,585 to 22,014,745 in the popular vote. Elated, he quipped that “the first twelve years are the hardest.”

Roosevelt won primarily because the war was going well. A winning pitcher is not ordinarily pulled from the game. Foreign policy was a decisive factor with untold thousands of voters, who concluded that Roosevelt’s experienced hand was needed in fashioning a future organization for world peace. The dapper Dewey, cruelly dubbed “the little man on top of the wedding cake,” had spoken smoothly of international cooperation, but his isolationist running mate, Bricker, had implanted serious doubts. The

*During the bitter campaign of 1944, Roosevelt’s pre-Pearl Harbor policies came under sharp attack from Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce (1903–1987) (the “Blonde Bombshell”), who violently blasted Roosevelt: “[He] lied us into war because he did not have the political courage to lead us into it.”*

Republican party was still suffering from the taint of isolationism fastened on it by the Hardingites.

## The Last Days of Hitler

By mid-December 1944, the month after Roosevelt’s fourth-term victory, Germany seemed to be wobbling on its last legs. The Soviet surge had penetrated eastern Germany. Allied aerial “blockbuster” bombs, making the “rubble bounce” with around-the-clock attacks, were falling like giant explosive hailstones on cities, factories, and transportation arteries. The German western front seemed about to buckle under the sledgehammer blows of the United States and its Allies.

Hitler then staked everything on one last throw of his reserves. Secretly concentrating a powerful force, he hurled it, on December 16, 1944, against the thinly held American lines in the heavily befogged and snow-shrouded Ardennes Forest. His objective was the Belgian port of Antwerp, key to the Allied supply operation. Caught off guard, the outmanned Americans were driven back, creating a deep “bulge” in the Allied line. The ten-day penetration was finally halted after the 101st Airborne Division had stood firm at the vital bastion of Bastogne. The commander, Brigadier General A. C. McAuliffe, defiantly answered the German demand for surrender with one word: “Nuts.” Reinforcements were rushed up, and the last-gasp Hitlerian offensive was at length bloodily stemmed in the Battle of the Bulge.

In March 1945, forward-driving American troops reached Germany’s Rhine River, where, by incredibly good luck, they found one strategic bridge undemolished. Pressing their advantage,

General Eisenhower's troops reached the Elbe River in April 1945. There, a short distance south of Berlin, American and Soviet advance guards dramatically clasped hands amid cries of "*Amerikanskie tovarishchi*" (American comrades). The conquering Americans were horrified to find blood-spattered and still-stinking concentration camps, where the German Nazis had engaged in scientific mass murder of "undesirables," including an estimated 6 million Jews. The Washington government had long been informed about Hitler's campaign of genocide against the Jews and had been reprehensibly slow to take steps against it. Roosevelt's administration had bolted the door against large numbers of Jewish refugees, and his military commanders declined even to bomb the rail lines that carried the victims to the camps. But until the war's end, the full dimensions of the "Holocaust" had not been known. When the details were revealed, the whole world was aghast.

The vengeful Soviets, clawing their way forward from the east, reached Berlin in April 1945. After desperate house-to-house fighting, followed by an

Battle of the Bulge,  
December 1944–January 1945



orgy of pillage and rape, they captured the bomb-shattered city. Adolf Hitler, after a hasty marriage to his mistress, committed suicide in an underground bunker on April 30, 1945.

Tragedy had meanwhile struck the United States. President Roosevelt, while relaxing at Warm Springs, Georgia, suddenly died from a massive cerebral hemorrhage on April 12, 1945. The crushing burden of twelve depression and war years in the White House had finally taken its toll. Knots of confused, leaderless citizens gathered to discuss the future anxiously, as a bewildered, unbriefed Vice President Truman took the helm.

On May 7, 1945, what was left of the German government surrendered unconditionally. May 8 was officially proclaimed V-E (Victory in Europe) Day and was greeted with frenzied rejoicing in the Allied countries.

## Japan Dies Hard

Japan's rickety bamboo empire meanwhile was tottering to its fall. American submarines—"the silent service"—were sending the Japanese merchant

marine to the bottom so fast they were running out of prey. All told, these undersea craft destroyed 1,042 ships, or about 50 percent of Japan's entire life-sustaining merchant fleet.

Giant bomber attacks were more spectacular. Launched from Saipan and other captured Mariana islands, they were reducing the enemy's fragile cities to cinders. The massive fire-bomb raid on Tokyo, March 9–10, 1945, was annihilating. It destroyed over 250,000 buildings, gutted a quarter of the city, and killed an estimated 83,000 people—a loss comparable to that later inflicted by atomic bombs.

General MacArthur was also on the move. Completing the conquest of jungle-draped New Guinea, he headed northwest for the Philippines, en route to Japan, with 600 ships and 250,000 men. In a scene well staged for the photographers, he splashed ashore at Leyte Island on October 20, 1944, with the summons, "People of the Philippines, I have returned. . . Rally to me."

Japan's navy—still menacing—now made one last-chance effort to destroy MacArthur by wiping out his transports and supply ships. A gigantic clash at Leyte Gulf, fought on the sea and in the air, was actually three battles (October 23–26, 1944). The Americans won all of them, though the crucial

engagement was almost lost when Admiral William F. ("Bull") Halsey was decoyed away by a feint.

Japan was through as a sea power: it had lost about sixty ships in the greatest naval battle of all time. American fleets, numbering more than four thousand vessels, now commanded the western Pacific. Several battleships, raised from the mud of Pearl Harbor, were exacting belated but sweet revenge.

Overrunning Leyte, MacArthur next landed on the main Philippine island of Luzon in January 1945. Manila was his major objective; the ravaged city fell in March, but the Philippines were not conquered until July. Victory was purchased only after bitter fighting against holed-in Japanese, who took a toll of over sixty thousand American casualties.

America's steel vise was tightening mercilessly around Japan. The tiny island of Iwo Jima, needed as a haven for damaged American bombers returning from Japan, was captured in March 1945. This desperate twenty-five-day assault cost over four thousand American dead.

Okinawa, a well-defended Japanese island, was next on the list: it was needed for closer bases from which to blast and burn enemy cities and industries. Fighting dragged on from April to June of 1945.

Japanese soldiers, fighting with incredible courage from their caves, finally sold Okinawa for fifty thousand American casualties, while suffering far heavier losses themselves.

The American navy, which covered the invasion of Okinawa, sustained severe damage. Japanese suicide pilots (“kamikazes”) in an exhibition of mass hara-kiri for their god-emperor, crashed their bomb-laden planes onto the decks of the invading fleet. All told, the death squads sank over thirty ships and badly damaged scores more.

### **The Atomic Bombs**

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Strategists in Washington were meanwhile planning an all-out invasion of the main islands of Japan—an invasion that presumably would cost hundreds of thousands of American (and even more Japanese) casualties. Tokyo, recognizing imminent defeat, had secretly sent peace feelers to Moscow, which had not yet entered the Far Eastern war. The Americans, having broken the secret Japanese radio codes,

knew of these feelers. But bomb-scorched Japan still showed no outward willingness to surrender *unconditionally* to the Allies.

The Potsdam conference, held near Berlin in July 1945, sounded the death knell of the Japanese. There President Truman, still new on his job, met in a seventeen-day parley with Joseph Stalin and the British leaders. The conferees issued a stern ultimatum to Japan: surrender or be destroyed. American bombers showered the dire warning on Japan in tens of thousands of leaflets, but no encouraging response was forthcoming.

America had a fantastic ace up its sleeve. Early in 1940, after Hitler’s wanton assault on Poland, Roosevelt was persuaded by American and exiled scientists, notably German-born Albert Einstein, to push ahead with preparations for unlocking the secret of an atomic bomb. Congress, at Roosevelt’s blank-check request, blindly made available nearly \$2 billion. Many military minds were skeptical of this “damned professor’s nonsense,” but fears that the Germans might first acquire such an awesome weapon provided a powerful spur to action. Ironically, Germany eventually abandoned its own

atomic project as too costly. And as it happened, the war against Germany ended before the American weapon was ready. In a cruel twist of fate, Japan—not Germany, the original target—suffered the fate of being the first nation subjected to atomic bombardment.

The huge atomic project was pushed feverishly forward, as American know-how and industrial power were combined with the most advanced scientific knowledge. Much technical skill was provided by British and refugee scientists, who had fled to America to escape the torture chambers of the dictators. Finally, in the desert near Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945, the experts detonated the first awesome and devastating atomic device.

With Japan still refusing to surrender, the Potsdam threat was fulfilled. On August 6, 1945, a lone American bomber dropped one atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. In a blinding flash of death, followed by a funnel-shaped cloud, about 180,000 people were left killed, wounded, or missing. Some 70,000 of them died instantaneously. Sixty thousand more soon perished from burns and radiation disease.

Two days later, on August 8, Stalin entered the war against Japan, exactly on the deadline date pre-

viously agreed upon with his allies. Soviet armies speedily overran the depleted Japanese defenses in Manchuria and Korea in a six-day “victory parade” that involved several thousand Russian casualties. Stalin was evidently determined to be in on the kill, lest he lose a voice in the final division of Japan’s holdings.

Fanatically resisting Japanese, though facing atomization, still did not surrender. American aviators, on August 9, dropped a second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. The explosion took a horrible toll of about eighty thousand people killed or missing.

The Japanese nation could endure no more. On August 10, 1945, Tokyo sued for peace on one condition: that Hirohito, the bespectacled Son of Heaven, be allowed to remain on his ancestral throne as nominal emperor. Despite their “unconditional surrender” policy, the Allies accepted this condition on August 14, 1945. The Japanese, though losing face, were able to save both their exalted ruler and what was left of their native land.

The formal end came, with dramatic force, on September 2, 1945. Official surrender ceremonies were conducted by General MacArthur on the battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. At the same time,

Americans at home hysterically celebrated V-J Day—Victory in Japan Day—after the most horrible war in history had ended in mushrooming atomic clouds.

### **The Allies Triumphant**

World War II proved to be terribly costly. American forces suffered some 1 million casualties, about one-third of which were deaths. Compared with other wars, the proportion killed by wounds and disease was sharply reduced, owing in part to the use of blood plasma and “miracle” drugs, notably penicillin. Yet heavy though American losses were, the Soviet allies suffered casualties many times greater—perhaps 20 million people killed.

America was fortunate in emerging with its mainland virtually unscathed. Two Japanese submarines, using shells and bombers, had rather harmlessly attacked the California and Oregon coast, and a few balloons, incendiary and otherwise, had drifted across the Pacific. But that was about all.

Much of the rest of the world was utterly destroyed and destitute. America alone was untouched and healthy—oiled and muscled like a prize bull, standing astride the world’s ruined landscape.

This complex conflict was the best-fought war in America’s history. Though unprepared for it at the outset, the nation was better prepared than for the others, partly because it had begun to buckle on its armor about a year and a half before the war officially began. It was actually fighting German submarines in the Atlantic months before the explosion in the Pacific at Pearl Harbor. In the end the United States showed itself to be resourceful, tough, adaptable—able to accommodate itself to the tactics of an enemy who was relentless and ruthless.

American military leadership proved to be of the highest order. A new crop of war heroes emerged in brilliant generals like Eisenhower, MacArthur, and Marshall (chief of staff) and in imaginative admirals like Nimitz and Spruance. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, as kindred spirits, collaborated closely in planning strategy. “It is fun to be in the same decade with you,” FDR once cabled Churchill.

Industrial leaders were no less skilled, for marvels of production were performed almost daily. Assembly lines proved as important as battle lines, and victory went again to the side with the most smokestacks. The enemy was almost literally smothered by bayonets, bullets, bazookas, and bombs. Hitler and his Axis coconspirators had chosen to make war with machines, and the ingenious Yankees could ask for nothing better. They demonstrated again, as they had in World War I, that the American way of war was simply more—more men, more weapons, more machines, more technology, and more money than any enemy could hope to match. From 1940 to 1945, the output of American factories was simply phenomenal. As Winston Churchill remarked, “Nothing succeeds like excess.”

Hermann Goering, a Nazi leader, had sneered, “The Americans can’t build planes—only electric iceboxes and razor blades.” Democracy had given its answer, as the dictators, despite long preparation, were overthrown and discredited. It is true that an unusual amount of direct control was exercised over the individual by the Washington authorities during the war emergency. But the American people preserved their precious liberties without serious impairment.

## Chronology

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|--|---|
| <p><b>1941</b> United States declares war on Japan<br/>Germany declares war on United States<br/>Randolph plans black march on Washington<br/>Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) established</p>                                | <p><b>1943</b> Japanese driven from Guadalcanal<br/>Teheran conference</p>  |
| <p><b>1942</b> Japanese-Americans sent to internment camps<br/>Japan conquers the Philippines<br/>Battle of the Coral Sea<br/>Battle of Midway<br/>United States invades North Africa<br/>Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founded</p> | <p><b>1944</b> <i>Korematsu v. U.S.</i><br/>D-Day invasion of France<br/>Battle of Marianas<br/>Roosevelt defeats Dewey for presidency</p>  |
| <p><b>1943</b> Allies hold Casablanca conference<br/>Allies invade Italy<br/>Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act<br/>“Zoot-suit” riots in Los Angeles<br/>Race riot in Detroit</p>  | <p><b>1944-</b></p> <p><b>1945</b> Battle of the Bulge</p> <p><b>1945</b> Roosevelt dies; Truman assumes presidency<br/>Germany surrenders<br/>Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa<br/>Potsdam conference<br/>Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki<br/>Japan surrenders</p> |

## World War II: Triumph or Tragedy?

After World War II ended in 1945, many historians were convinced that the tragedy could have been averted if only the United States had awakened earlier from its isolationist illusions. These scholars condemned the policies and attitudes of the 1930s as a “retreat from responsibility.” Much of the historical writing in the postwar period contained the strong flavor of medicine to ward off another infection by the isolationist virus.

This approach fell into disfavor during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, when many U.S. policymakers defended their actions in Southeast Asia by making dubious comparisons to the decade before World War II. Some scholars responded by arguing that the “lessons” of the 1930s—especially about the need to avoid “appeasement” and to take quick and decisive action against “aggressors”—could not properly be applied to any and all subsequent situations. Ho Chi Minh, they pointed out, was not Hitler, and Vietnam was not Nazi Germany. One controversial product of this line of thinking was Bruce Russett’s *No Clear and Present Danger* (1972), which argued that the United States had no clearly defined national interests at stake in 1941, and that both the nation and the world might have been better off without U.S. intervention. This analysis paralleled “revisionist” commentaries written in the 1930s about U.S. participation in World World I.

Although few scholars fully accept Russett’s conclusions, more recently writing on American entry into World War II has tended to avoid finding in that episode lessons for posterity. Attention has focused, rather, on the wisdom or folly of specific policies, such as Washington’s hard line toward Tokyo throughout 1941, when the possibility of a negotiated settlement perhaps existed. P. W. Schroeder’s *The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, 1941* (1958) makes that point with particular force. Other issues include Franklin Roosevelt’s diplomatic role. Was the president a bold internationalist struggling heroically against an isolationist Congress and public opinion, or did he share much of the traditional isolationist credo? Robert Dallek’s encyclopedic study of Roosevelt’s foreign policy portrays Roosevelt as a shrewd and calculating international-

ist, whereas Donald Cameron Watt’s *How War Came* (1989) depicts him as a myopic and ill-informed leader who overestimated his own peacemaking abilities and, like most other Americans, only belatedly awakened to the menace of totalitarianism.

No decision of the war era has provoked sharper controversy than the atomic bombings of Japan in August 1945. Lingering moral questions about the nuclear incineration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have long threatened to tarnish the crown of military victory. America is the only nation ever to have used an atomic weapon in war, and some critics have even claimed to find elements of racism in the fact that the bombs were dropped on people of a nonwhite race. The fact is, however, that Germany surrendered before the bombs were ready; had the war in Europe lasted just a few months longer, some German city would probably have suffered the fate of Hiroshima.

Some scholars, notably Gar Alperovitz, have further charged that the atomic holocausts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not the last shots of World War II, but the first salvos in the emerging Cold War. Alperovitz argues that the Japanese were already defeated in the summer of 1945 and were in fact attempting to arrange a *conditional* surrender. President Truman ignored those attempts and unleashed his horrible new weapons, so the argument goes, not simply to defeat Japan but to frighten the Soviets into submission to America’s will, and to keep them out of the final stages of the war—and postwar reconstruction—in Asia.

Could the use of the atomic bombs have been avoided? As Martin J. Shewin’s studies have shown, few policymakers at the time seriously asked that question. American leaders wanted to end the war as quickly as possible. Intimidating the Soviets might have been a “bonus” to using the bomb against Japan, but influencing Soviet behavior was never the *primary* reason for the fateful decision. American military strategists had always assumed the atomic bomb would be dropped as soon as it was available. That moment came on August 6, 1945. Yet misgivings and remorse about the atomic conclusion of World War II have plagued the American conscience ever since.

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For further reading, see page A24 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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## PART SIX

# MAKING MODERN AMERICA



## 1945 to the Present

**W**orld War II broke the back of the Great Depression in the United States and also ended the century-and-a-half-old American tradition of isolationism in foreign affairs. Alone among the warring powers, the United States managed to emerge from the great conflict physically unscarred, economically healthy, and diplomatically strengthened. Yet if Americans faced a world full of promise at the war's end, it was also a world full of dangers, none more disconcerting than Soviet communism. These two themes of promise and menace mingled uneasily throughout the nearly five decades of the Cold War era, from the end of World War II in 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

At home unprecedented prosperity in the post-war quarter-century nourished a robust sense of national self-confidence and fed a revolution of ris-

ing expectations. Invigorated by the prospect of endlessly spreading affluence, Americans in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s had record numbers of babies, aspired to ever-higher standards of living, generously expanded the welfare state (especially for the elderly), widened opportunities for women, welcomed immigrants, and even found the will to grapple at long last with the nation's grossest legacy of injustice, its treatment of African-Americans. With the exception of Dwight Eisenhower's presidency in the 1950s, Americans elected liberal Democratic presidents (Harry Truman in 1948, John F.

Kennedy in 1960, and Lyndon Johnson in 1964). The Democratic party, the party of the liberal New Deal at home and of an activist foreign policy abroad, comfortably remained the nation's majority party. Americans trusted their government and had faith in the American dream that their children would lead a

richer life than their parents had done. Anything and everything seemed possible.

The rising curve of ascending expectations, propelled by exploding economic growth, bounded upward throughout the 1950s. It peaked in the 1960s, an exceptionally stormy decade during which faith in government, in the wisdom of

American foreign policy, and in the American dream itself, began to sour. Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" reforms, billed as the completion of the unfinished work of the New Deal, foundered on the rocks of fiscal limitations and stubborn racial resentments. Johnson, the most ambitious reformer in the White House since Franklin Roosevelt, eventually saw his presidency destroyed by the furies unleashed over the Vietnam War.

When economic growth flattened in the 1970s, the horizon of hopes for the future seemed to sink as well. The nation entered a frustrating period of stalled expectations, increasingly rancorous racial tensions, disillusion with government, and political stalemate, although in one important arena idealism survived. As "second-wave feminism" gathered steam, women burst through barriers that had long excluded them from male domains operating everywhere from the factory floor to the U.S. Army to the Ivy League. Not content with private victories, they also called on the government for help—to ensure women equal opportunity as workers, fair treatment as consumers, and the right to choose an abortion.

With the exceptions of Jimmy Carter in the 1970s and Bill Clinton in the 1990s, Americans after 1968 elected conservative Republicans to the White House (Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972, Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, George Bush in 1988), but continued to elect Democratic congresses. As the twenty-first century dawned, a newly invigorated conservative Republican party was bidding to achieve long-term majority status, while the Democratic party teetered

on a tightrope between its liberal policies and the conservative demands of the day for tax cuts and welfare reform.

Abroad the fierce competition with the Soviet Union, and after 1949 with Communist China as well, colored most every aspect of America's foreign relations and shaped domestic life, too. Un-

reasoning fear of communists at home unleashed the destructive force of McCarthyism in the 1950s—a modern-day witch hunt in which careers were capsize and lives ruined by reckless accusations of communist sympathizing. The FBI encroached on sacred American liberties in its zeal to uncover communist "subversives."

The Cold War remained cold, in the sense that no shooting conflict broke out between the great power rivals. But the United States did fight two shooting wars, in Korea in the 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s. Vietnam, the only foreign war in which the United States has ever been defeated, cruelly convulsed American society, ending not only Lyndon Johnson's presidency but the thirty-five year era of the Democratic party's political dominance as well. Vietnam also touched off the most vicious inflationary cycle in American history, and embittered and disillusioned an entire generation.

Uncle Sam in the Cold War era built a fearsome arsenal of nuclear weapons, great air and missile fleets to deliver them, a two-ocean navy, and, for a time, a large army raised by conscription. Whether the huge expenditures necessary to maintain that gigantic defense establishment stimulated or distorted the economy is a question that remains controversial. Either way, big reductions in defense spending after the end of the Cold War in 1989 helped reshape the American economy and its work force as the new century opened, as did burgeoning new information technologies like the personal computer and the Internet.

# The Cold War Begins

1945–1952

*America stands at this moment at the summit of the world.*

WINSTON CHURCHILL, 1945

The American people, 140 million strong, cheered their nation's victories in Europe and Asia at the conclusion of World War II. But when the shouting faded away, many Americans began to worry about their future. Four fiery years of global war had not entirely driven from their minds the painful memories of twelve desperate years of the Great Depression. Still more ominously, victory celebrations had barely ended before America's crumbling relations with its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, threatened a new and even more terrible international conflict.

## Postwar Economic Anxieties

The decade of the 1930s had left deep scars. Joblessness and insecurity had pushed up the suicide rate and dampened the marriage rate. Babies went unborn as pinched budgets and sagging self-esteem

wrought a sexual depression in American bedrooms. The war had banished the blight of depression, but would the respite last? Grim-faced observers were warning that the war had only temporarily lifted the pall of economic stagnation and that peace would bring the return of hard times. Homeward-bound GIs, so the gloomy predictions ran, would step out of the army's chow lines and back into the breadlines of the unemployed.

The faltering economy in the initial postwar years threatened to confirm the worst predictions of the doomsayers who foresaw another Great Depression. Real gross national product (GNP) slumped sickeningly in 1946 and 1947 from its wartime peak. With the removal of wartime price controls, prices giddily levitated by 33 percent in 1946–1947. An epidemic of strikes swept the country. During 1946 alone some 4.6 million laborers laid down their tools, fearful that soon they could barely afford the autos and other goods they were manufacturing.

The growing muscle of organized labor deeply annoyed many conservatives. They had their revenge against labor's New Deal gains in 1947, when a Republican-controlled Congress (the first in fourteen years) passed the Taft-Hartley Act over President Truman's vigorous veto. Labor leaders condemned the Taft-Hartley Act as a "slave-labor law." It outlawed the "closed" (all-union) shop, made unions liable for damages that resulted from jurisdictional disputes among themselves, and required union leaders to take a noncommunist oath.

Taft-Hartley was only one of several obstacles that slowed the growth of organized labor in the years after World War II. In the heady days of the New Deal, unions had spread swiftly in the industrialized Northeast, especially in huge manufacturing industries like steel and automobiles. But labor's postwar efforts to organize in the historically anti-union regions of the South and West proved frustrating. The CIO's "Operation Dixie," aimed at unionizing southern textile workers and steelworkers, failed miserably in 1948 to overcome lingering fears of racial mixing. And workers in the rapidly growing service sector of the economy—many of them middle-aged women, often working only part-time in small shops, widely separated from one another—proved much more difficult to organize than the thousands of assembly-line workers who in the 1930s had poured into the auto and steel unions.

Union membership would peak in the 1950s and then begin a long, unremitting decline.

The Democratic administration meanwhile took some steps of its own to forestall an economic downturn. It sold war factories and other government installations to private businesses at fire-sale prices. It secured passage in 1946 of the Employment Act, making it government policy "to promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power." The act created a three-member Council of Economic Advisers to provide the president with the data and the recommendations to make that policy a reality.

Most dramatic was the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—better known as the GI Bill of Rights, or the GI Bill. Enacted partly out of fear that the employment markets would never be able to absorb 15 million returning veterans at war's end, the GI Bill made generous provisions for sending the former soldiers to school. In the postwar decade, some 8 million veterans advanced their education at Uncle Sam's expense. The majority attended technical and vocational schools, but colleges and universities were crowded to the blackboards as more than 2 million ex-GIs stormed the halls of higher learning. The total eventually spent for education was some \$14.5 billion in taxpayer dollars. The act also enabled the Veterans Administration (VA) to guarantee about \$16 billion in loans

for veterans to buy homes, farms, and small businesses. By raising educational levels and stimulating the construction industry, the GI Bill powerfully nurtured the robust and long-lived economic expansion that eventually took hold in the late 1940s and that profoundly shaped the entire history of the postwar era.

### **The Long Economic Boom, 1950–1970**

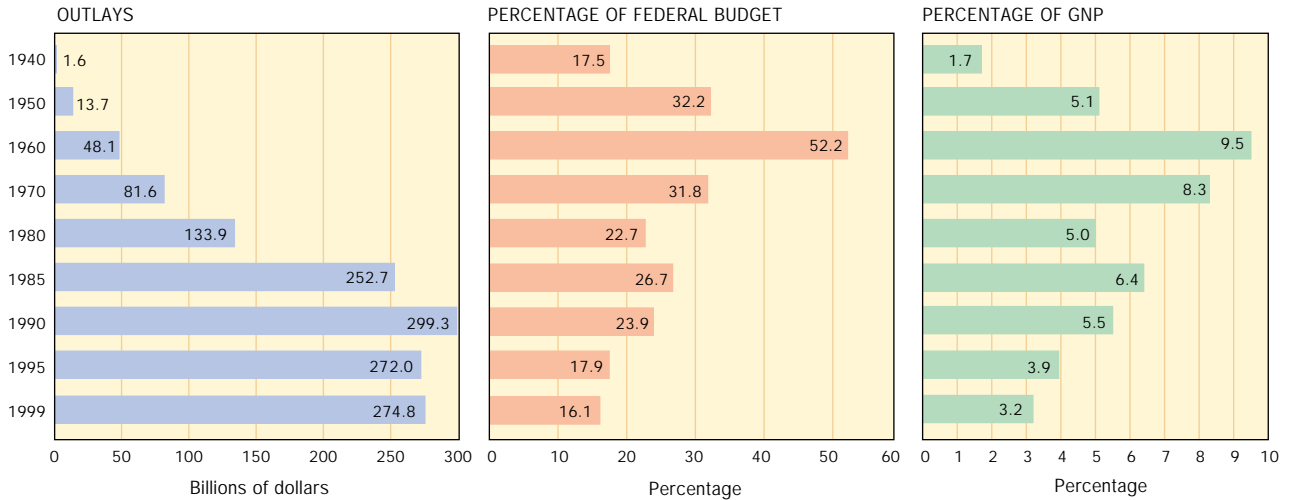
Gross national product began to climb haltingly in 1948. Then, beginning about 1950, the American economy surged onto a dazzling plateau of sustained growth that was to last virtually uninterrupted for two decades. America's economic performance became the envy of the world. National income nearly doubled in the 1950s and almost doubled again in the 1960s, shooting

through the trillion-dollar mark in 1973. Americans, some 6 percent of the world's people, were enjoying about 40 percent of the planet's wealth.

Nothing loomed larger in the history of the post–World War II era than this fantastic eruption of affluence. It did not enrich all Americans, and it did not touch all people evenly, but it transformed the lives of a majority of citizens and molded the agenda of politics and society for at least two generations. Prosperity underwrote social mobility; it paved the way for the eventual success of the civil rights movement; it funded vast new welfare programs, like Medicare; and it gave Americans the confidence to exercise unprecedented international leadership in the Cold War era.

As the gusher of postwar prosperity poured forth its riches, Americans drank deeply from the gilded goblet. Millions of depression-pinched souls sought to make up for the sufferings of the 1930s. They determined to “get theirs” while the getting was good. A people who had once considered a chicken in every pot the standard of comfort and security now hungered for two cars in every garage, swimming pools in their backyards, vacation homes, and gas-guzzling recreational vehicles. The size of the “middle class,” defined as households earning between \$3,000 and \$10,000 a year, doubled from pre–Great Depression days and included 60 percent of the American people by the mid-1950s. By the end of that decade, the vast majority of American families owned their own car and washing machine, and nearly 90 percent owned a television set—a gadget invented in the 1920s but virtually unknown until the late 1940s. In another revolution of sweeping consequences, almost 60 percent of American families owned their own homes by 1960, compared with less than 40 percent in the 1920s.

Of all the beneficiaries of postwar prosperity, none reaped greater rewards than women. More than ever, urban offices and shops provided a bonanza of employment for female workers. The great majority of new jobs created in the postwar era went to women, as the service sector of the economy dramatically outgrew the old industrial and manufacturing sectors. Women accounted for a quarter of the American work force at the end of World War II and for nearly half the labor pool five decades later. Yet even as women continued their march into the workplace in the 1940s and 1950s, popular culture glorified the traditional feminine



National Defense Budget, 1940–1999  
 (Sources: *Budget, Historical Tables, and Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

roles of homemaker and mother. The clash between the demands of suburban housewifery and the realities of employment eventually sparked a feminist revolt in the 1960s.

### The Roots of Postwar Prosperity

What propelled this unprecedented economic explosion? The Second World War itself provided a powerful stimulus. While other countries had been ravaged by years of fighting, the United States had used the war crisis to fire up its smokeless factories and rebuild its depression-plagued economy. Invigorated by battle, America had almost effortlessly come to dominate the ruined global landscape of the postwar period.

Ominously, much of the glittering prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s rested on the underpinnings of colossal military budgets, leading some critics to speak of a “permanent war economy.” The economic upturn of 1950 was fueled by massive appropriations for the Korean War, and defense spending accounted for some 10 percent of the GNP throughout the ensuing decade. Pentagon dollars primed the pumps of high-technology industries such as aerospace, plastics, and electronics—areas in which the United States reigned supreme over all foreign competitors. The military budget also financed much scientific research and development (“R and

D”—hence the name of one of the most famous “think tanks,” the Rand Corporation). More than ever before, unlocking the secrets of nature was the key to unleashing economic growth.

Cheap energy also fed the economic boom. American and European companies controlled the flow of abundant petroleum from the sandy expanses of the Middle East, and they kept prices low. Americans doubled their consumption of inexpensive and seemingly inexhaustible oil in the quarter-century after the war. Anticipating a limitless future of low-cost fuels, they flung out endless ribbons of highways, installed air-conditioning in their homes, and engineered a sixfold increase in the country’s electricity-generating capacity between 1945 and 1970. Spidery grids of electrical cables carried the pent-up power of oil, gas, coal, and falling water to activate the tools of workers on the factory floor.

With the forces of nature increasingly harnessed in their hands, workers chalked up spectacular gains in productivity—the amount of output per hour of work. In the two decades after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, productivity increased at an average rate of more than 3 percent per year. Gains in productivity were also enhanced by the rising educational level of the work force. By 1970 nearly 90 percent of the school-age population was enrolled in educational institutions—a dramatic contrast with the opening years of the century, when only half of this age group had attended

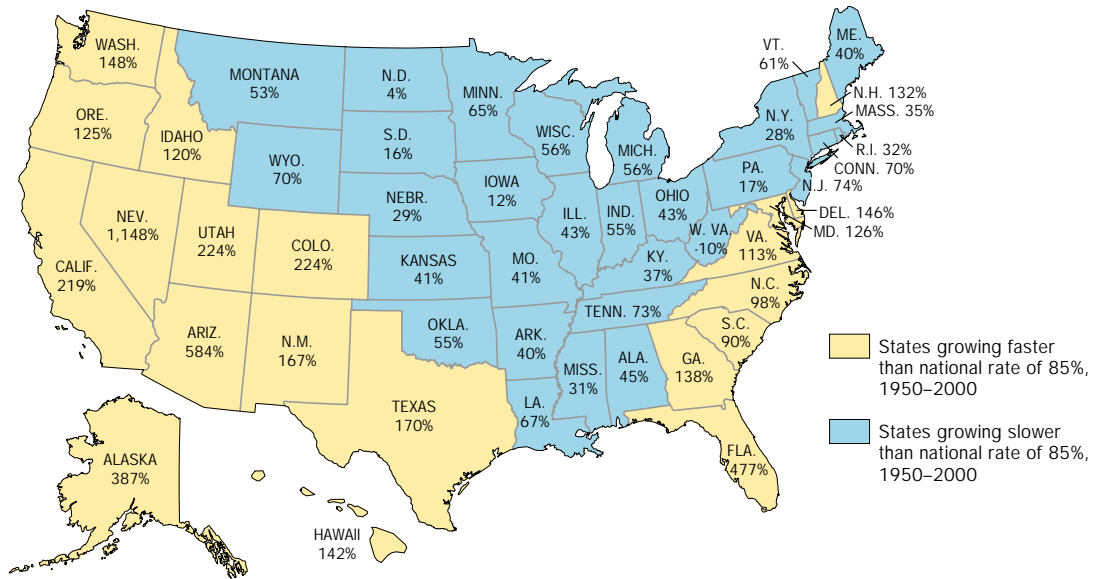
school. Better educated and better equipped, American workers in 1970 could produce nearly twice as much in an hour's labor as they had in 1950. Productivity was the key to prosperity. Rising productivity in the 1950s and 1960s virtually doubled the average American's standard of living in the postwar quarter-century.

Also contributing to the vigor of the postwar economy were some momentous changes in the nation's basic economic structure. Conspicuous was the accelerating shift of the work force out of agriculture, which achieved productivity gains virtually unmatched by any other economic sector. The family farm nearly became an antique artifact as consolidation produced giant agribusinesses able to employ costly machinery. Thanks largely to mechanization and to rich new fertilizers—as well as to government subsidies and price supports—one farmworker by the century's end could produce food for over fifty people, compared with about fifteen people in the 1940s. Farmers whose forebears had busted sod with oxen or horses now plowed their fields in air-conditioned tractor cabs, listening on their stereophonic radios to weather forecasts or the latest Chicago commodities market quotations. Once the mighty backbone of the agricultural Republic, and still some 15 percent of the labor force at the end of World War II, farmers made up a slim 2 percent of the American population by the 1990s—yet they fed much of the world.

## The Smiling Sunbelt

The convulsive economic changes of the post-1945 period shook and shifted the American people, amplifying the population redistribution set in motion by World War II. As immigrants and westward-trekking pioneers, Americans had always been a people on the move, but they were astonishingly footloose in the postwar years. For some three decades after 1945, an average of 30 million people changed residences every year. Families especially felt the strain, as distance divided parents from children, and brothers and sisters from one another. One sign of this sort of stress was the phenomenal popularity of advice books on child-rearing, especially Dr. Benjamin Spock's *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. First published in 1945, it instructed millions of parents during the ensuing decades in the kind of homely wisdom that was once transmitted naturally from grandparent to parent, and from parent to child. In fluid postwar neighborhoods, friendships were also hard to sustain. Mobility could exact a high human cost in loneliness and isolation.

Especially striking was the growth of the “Sunbelt”—a fifteen-state area stretching in a smiling crescent from Virginia through Florida and Texas to Arizona and California. This region increased its population at a rate nearly double that of the old



**Population Increase, 1950-2000**

States with figures higher than 85 percent were growing faster than the national average. Note that much of the growth was in the “Sunbelt,” a loose geographical concept, as some Deep South states had very little population growth, whereas the mountain and Pacific states were booming. (Sources: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, *Historical Abstract of the United States*, and *U.S. Census*, relevant years.)

industrial zones of the Northeast (the “Frostbelt”). In the 1950s California alone accounted for one-fifth of the entire nation’s population growth and by 1963 had outdistanced New York as the most populous state—a position it still held at the start of the

twenty-first century, with more than 30 million people, or one out of every eight Americans.

The South and Southwest were a new frontier for Americans after World War II. These modern pioneers came in search of jobs, a better climate, and lower



taxes. Jobs they found in abundance, especially in the California electronics industry, in the aerospace complexes in Florida and Texas, and in the huge military installations that powerful southern congressional representatives secured for their districts.

A Niagara of federal dollars accounted for much of the Sunbelt's prosperity, though, ironically, southern and western politicians led the cry against government spending. By the 1990s the South and West were annually receiving some \$125 billion more in federal funds than the Northeast and Midwest. A new economic war between the states seemed to be shaping up. Northeasterners and their allies from the hard-hit heavy-industry region of the Ohio Valley (the "Rustbelt") tried to rally political support with the sarcastic slogan "The North shall rise again."

These dramatic shifts of population and wealth further broke the historic grip of the North on the nation's political life. Every elected occupant of the White House since 1964 has hailed from the Sunbelt, and the region's congressional representation rose as its population grew. With their frontier ethic of unbridled individualism and their devotion to unregulated economic growth, the Sunbelters were redrawing the Republic's political map.

### **The Rush to the Suburbs**

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In all regions America's modern migrants—if they were white—fled from the cities to the burgeoning new suburbs (see "Makers of America: The Suburbanites," pp. 868–869). Government policies encouraged this momentous movement. Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) home-loan guarantees made it more economically attractive to own a home in the suburbs than to rent an apartment in the city. Tax deductions for interest payments on home mortgages provided additional financial incentive. And government-built highways that sped commuters from suburban homes to city jobs further facilitated this mass migration. By 1960 one of every four Americans dwelt in suburbia, and the same leafy neighborhoods held more than half the nation's population as the century neared its end.

The construction industry boomed in the 1950s and 1960s to satisfy this demand. Pioneered by innovators like the Levitt brothers, whose first "Levittown" sprouted on New York's Long Island in the

1940s, builders revolutionized the techniques of home construction. Erecting hundreds or even thousands of dwellings in a single project, specialized crews working from standardized plans laid foundations, while others raised factory-assembled framing modules, put on roofs, strung wires, installed plumbing, and finished the walls in record time and with cost-cutting efficiency. Snooty critics wailed about the aesthetic monotony of the suburban "tract" developments, but eager homebuyers nevertheless moved into them by the millions.

"White flight" to the leafy green suburbs left the inner cities—especially those in the Northeast and Midwest—black, brown, and broke. Migrating blacks from the South filled up the urban neighborhoods that were abandoned by the departing white middle class (see "Makers of America: The Great African-American Migration," pp. 892–893). In effect, the incoming blacks imported the grinding poverty of the rural South into the inner cores of northern cities. Taxpaying businesses fled with their affluent customers from downtown shops to suburban shopping malls (another post-World War II invention).

Government policies sometimes aggravated this spreading pattern of residential segregation. FHA administrators, citing the "risk" of making loans to blacks and other "unharmonious racial or nationality groups," often refused them mortgages for private home purchases, thus limiting black mobility out of the inner cities and driving many minorities into public housing projects. Even public housing programs frequently followed a so-called neighborhood composition rule, which effectively built housing for blacks in neighborhoods that were already identified as predominantly black—thus solidifying racial separation.

### **The Postwar Baby Boom**

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Of all the upheavals in postwar America, none was more dramatic than the "baby boom"—the huge leap in the birthrate in the decade and a half after 1945. Confident young men and women tied the nuptial knot in record numbers at war's end, and they began immediately to fill the nation's empty cradles. They thus touched off a demographic explosion that added more than 50 million bawling babies to the nation's population by the end of the 1950s. The soaring birthrate finally crested in 1957



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**Advertising Prosperity, 1956** This Ford advertisement in a popular magazine encouraged readers to buy a second car. By the mid-1950s, once manufacturers had met the demand for cars, homes, appliances, and other consumer goods that a decade and a half of depression and world war had pent up, they worried about how to keep expanding their markets. “Planned obsolescence”—changing design frequently enough to necessitate replacement purchasing—was one strategy. Altering expectations about what con-

sumers needed was another. This advertisement suggests that the up-to-date family, living in its modern-style suburban home, had no choice but to own two cars, one for the male breadwinner’s business, the other for the wife’s “ferrying the family.” What kinds of gender role prescriptions are reinforced in this advertisement? What assumptions has Ford made about prospective buyers of its cars? How much can mass advertising tell us about the actual values of Americans living at a particular time?

and was followed by a deepening birth dearth. By 1973 fertility rates had dropped below the point necessary to maintain existing population figures. If the downward trend persisted, only further immigration would lift the U.S. population above its 1996 level of some 264 million.

This boom-or-bust cycle of births begot a bulging wave along the American population curve. As the oversize postwar generation grew to maturity, it was destined—like the fabled pig passing through the python—to strain and distort many aspects of American life. Elementary-school enrollments, for example, swelled to nearly 34 million pupils in 1970. Then began a steady decline, as the onward-marching age group left in its wake closed schools and unemployed teachers.

The maturing babies of the postwar boom sent economic shock waves undulating through the decades. As tykes and toddlers in the 1940s and 1950s, they made up a lucrative market for manufacturers of canned food and other baby products. As teenagers in the 1960s, the same youngsters spent an estimated \$20 billion a year for clothes and recorded rock music—and their sheer numbers laid the basis of the much-ballyhooed “youth culture” of that tumultuous decade. In the 1970s the consumer tastes of the aging baby boomers changed again, and the most popular jeans maker began marketing pants with a fuller cut for those former “kids” who could no longer squeeze into their size-thirty Levi’s. In the 1980s the horde of baby boomers bumped and jostled one another in the job market, struggling to get a foothold on the crowded ladder of social mobility. In the 1990s the boom generation began to enter middle age, raising its own “secondary boom” of children—a faint demographic echo of the postwar population explosion. The impact of the huge postwar generation will continue to ripple through American society well into the twenty-first century, when its members pass eventually into retirement, placing enormous strains on the Social Security system.

### **Truman: The “Gutty” Man from Missouri**

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Presiding over the opening of the postwar period was an “accidental president”—Harry S Truman. “The moon, the stars, and all the planets” had fallen

on him, he remarked when he was called upon to shoulder the dead Roosevelt’s awesome burdens of leadership. Trim and owlshly bespectacled, with his graying hair and friendly, toothy grin, Truman was called “the average man’s average man.” Even his height—five feet eight inches—was average. The first president in many years without a college education, he had farmed, served as an artillery officer in France during World War I, and failed as a haberdasher. He then tried his hand at precinct-level Missouri politics, through which he rose from a judgeship to the U.S. Senate. Though a protégé of a notorious political machine in Kansas City, he had managed to keep his own hands clean.

The problems of the postwar period were staggering, and the suddenly burdened new president at first approached his tasks with humility. But gradually he evolved from a shrinking pipsqueak into a scrappy little cuss, gaining confidence to the point

of cockiness. When the Soviet foreign minister complained, “I have never been talked to like that in my life,” Truman shot back, “Carry out your agreements and you won’t get talked to like that.” Truman later boasted, “I gave him the one-two, right to the jaw.”

A smallish man thrust suddenly into a giant job, Truman permitted designing old associates of the “Missouri gang” to gather around him and, like Grant, was stubbornly loyal to them when they were caught with cream on their whiskers. On occasion he would send critics hot-tempered and profane “s.o.b.” letters. Most troubling, in trying to demonstrate to a skeptical public his decisiveness and power of command, he was inclined to go off half-cocked or stick mulishly to a wrongheaded notion. “To err is Truman,” cynics gibed.

But if he was sometimes small in the small things, he was often big in the big things. He had down-home authenticity, few pretensions, rock-solid probity, and a lot of that old-fashioned character trait called moxie. Not one to dodge responsibility, he placed a sign on his White House desk that read, “The buck stops here.” Among his favorite sayings was, “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

## Yalta: Bargain or Betrayal?

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Vast and silent, the Soviet Union continued to be the great enigma. The conference at Teheran in 1943, where Roosevelt had first met Stalin man to man, had done something to clear the air, but much had remained unresolved—especially questions about the postwar fates of Germany, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

A final fateful conference of the Big Three had taken place in February 1945 at Yalta. At this former tsarist resort on the relatively warm shores of the Black Sea, Stalin, Churchill, and the fast-failing Roosevelt reached momentous agreements, after pledging their faith with vodka. Final plans were laid for smashing the buckling German lines and shackling the beaten Axis foe. Stalin agreed that Poland, with revised boundaries, should have a representative government based on free elections—a pledge he soon broke. Bulgaria and Romania were likewise to have free elections—a promise also flouted. The Big Three further announced plans for fashioning a new international peacekeeping organization—the United Nations.

# MAKERS OF AMERICA

## The Suburbanites

Few images evoke more vividly the prosperity of the postwar era than aerial photographs of sprawling suburbs. Neat rows of look-alike tract houses, each with driveway and lawn and here and there a backyard swimming pool, came to symbolize the capacity of the economy to deliver the “American dream” to millions of families.

Suburbanization was hardly new. Well-off city dwellers had beaten paths to leafy outlying neighborhoods since the nineteenth century. But after

1945 the steady flow became a stampede. The baby boom, new highways, government guarantees for mortgage lending, and favorable tax policies all made suburbia blossom.

Who were the Americans racing to the new postwar suburbs? War veterans led the way in the late 1940s, aided by Veterans Administration mortgages that featured tiny down payments and low interest rates. The general public soon followed. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) offered insured mortgages with low down payments and 2 to 3 percent interest rates on thirty-year loans. With deals like this, it was hardly surprising that American families flocked into “Levittowns,” built by William and Alfred Levitt, and other similar suburban developments.

People of all kinds found their way to suburbia, heading for neighborhoods that varied from the posh to the plain. Yet for all this diversity, the overwhelming majority of suburbanites were white and middle-class. In 1967 sociologist Herbert Gans published *The Levittowners*, based on his own move to a Levitt-built community outside Philadelphia. He described suburban families in tract developments as predominantly third- or fourth-generation Americans with some college education and at least two children.

Men tended to work in either white-collar jobs or upper-level blue-collar positions such as foremen. Women usually worked in the home, so much so that suburbia came to symbolize the domestic confinement that feminists in the 1960s and 1970s decried in their campaign for women’s rights.

The house itself became more important than ever as postwar suburbanites built their leisure lives around television, home improvement projects, and barbecues on the patio. The center of family life shifted to the fenced-in backyard, as neighborly city habits of visiting on the front stoop, gabbing on the sidewalk, and strolling to local stores disappeared.

Institutions that had thrived as social centers in the city—churches, women’s clubs, fraternal organizations, taverns—had a tougher time attracting patrons in the privatized world of postwar suburbia.

Life in the suburbs was a boon to the automobile, as parents jumped behind the wheel to shuttle children, groceries, and golf clubs to and fro. The second car, once an unheard-of luxury, became a practical “necessity” for suburban families constantly “on the go.” A car culture sprang up with new destinations, like drive-thru restaurants and drive-in movies. Roadside shopping centers edged out downtowns as places to shop. Meanwhile, the new interstate highway system enabled breadwinners to live farther and farther from their jobs and still commute to work daily.

Many suburbanites continued to depend on cities for jobs, though by the 1980s the suburbs themselves became important sites of employment.

Wherever they worked, suburbanites turned their backs on the city and its problems. They fought to maintain their communities as secluded retreats, independent municipalities with their own taxes, schools, and zoning restrictions designed to keep out public housing and the poor. Even the naming of towns and streets reflected a pastoral ideal. Poplar Terrace and Mountainview Drive were popular street names; East Paterson, New Jersey, was renamed Elmwood Park in 1973. With a majority of Americans living in suburbs by the 1980s, cities lost their political clout. Bereft of state and federal aid, cities festered with worsening social problems: poverty, drug addiction, and crime.

Middle-class African-Americans began to move to the suburbs in substantial numbers by the 1980s, but even that migration failed to alter dramatically the racial divide of metropolitan America. Black suburbanites settled in towns like Rolling Oaks outside Miami or Brook Glen near Atlanta—black middle-class towns in white-majority counties. By the end of the twentieth century, suburbia as a whole was more racially diverse than at midcentury. But old patterns of urban “white flight” and residential segregation endured.

Of all the grave decisions at Yalta, the most controversial concerned the Far East. The atomic bomb had not yet been tested, and Washington strategists expected frightful American casualties in the projected assault on Japan. From Roosevelt's standpoint it seemed highly desirable that Stalin should enter the Asian war, pin down Japanese troops in Manchuria and Korea, and lighten American losses. But Soviet casualties had already been enormous, and Moscow presumably needed inducements to bring it into the Far Eastern conflagration.

Horse trader Stalin was in a position at Yalta to exact a high price. He agreed to attack Japan within three months after the collapse of Germany, and he later redeemed this pledge in full. In return, the Soviets were promised the southern half of Sakhalin Island, lost by Russia to Japan in 1905, and Japan's Kurile Islands as well. The Soviet Union was also granted joint control over the railroads of China's Manchuria and special privileges in the two key seaports of that area, Dairen and Port Arthur. These concessions evidently would give Stalin control over vital industrial centers of America's weakening Chinese ally.

As it turned out, Moscow's muscle was not necessary to knock out Japan. Critics charged that Roosevelt had sold Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) down the river when he conceded control of China's Manchuria to Stalin. The consequent undermining of Chinese morale, so the accusation ran, contributed powerfully to Jiang's overthrow by the communists four years later. The critics also assailed the "sellout" of Poland and other Eastern European countries.

Roosevelt's defenders countered that Stalin, with his mighty red army, could have secured much more of China if he wished and that the Yalta conference really set limits to his ambitions. Apologists for Roosevelt also contended that if Stalin had kept his promise to support free elections in Poland and the liberated Balkans, the sorry sequel would have been different. Actually, Soviet troops had then occupied much of Eastern Europe, and a war to throw them out was unthinkable.

The fact is that the Big Three at Yalta were not drafting a comprehensive peace settlement; at most they were sketching general intentions and testing one another's reactions. Later critics who howled about broken promises overlooked that fundamental point. In the case of Poland, Roosevelt admitted that the Yalta agreement was "so elastic that the Russians can stretch it all the way from Yalta to

Washington without ever technically breaking it." More specific understandings among the wartime allies—especially the two emerging superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union—awaited the arrival of peace.

## **The United States and the Soviet Union**

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History provided little hope that the United States and the Soviet Union would reach cordial understandings about the shape of the postwar world. Mutual suspicions were ancient, abundant, and abiding. Communism and capitalism were historically hostile social philosophies. The United States had refused officially to recognize the Bolshevik revolutionary government in Moscow until it was sixteen years old, in 1933. Soviet skepticism toward the West was nourished by the British and American delays in opening up a second front against Germany, while the Soviet army paid a grisly price to roll the Nazi invaders back across Russia and Eastern Europe. Britain and America had also frozen their Soviet "ally" out of the project to develop atomic weapons, further feeding Stalin's mistrust. The Washington government rubbed salt in Soviet wounds when it abruptly terminated vital lend-lease aid to a battered USSR in 1945 and spurned Moscow's plea for a \$6 billion reconstruction loan—while approving a similar loan of \$3.75 billion to Britain in 1946.

Different visions of the postwar world also separated the two superpowers. Stalin aimed above all to guarantee the security of the Soviet Union. The USSR had twice in the twentieth century been stabbed in its heartland by attacks across the windswept plains of Eastern Europe. Stalin made it clear from the outset of the war that he was determined to have friendly governments along the Soviet western border, especially in Poland. By maintaining an extensive Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern and Central Europe, the USSR could protect itself and consolidate its revolutionary base as the world's leading communist country.

To many Americans, that "sphere of influence" looked like an ill-gained "empire." Doubting that Soviet goals were purely defensive, they remembered the earlier Bolshevik call for world revolution. Stalin's emphasis on "spheres" also clashed with

Franklin Roosevelt's Wilsonian dream of an "open world," decolonized, demilitarized, and democratized, with a strong international organization to oversee global peace.

Even the ways in which the United States and the Soviet Union resembled each other were troublesome. Both countries had been largely isolated from world affairs before World War II—the United States through choice, the Soviet Union through rejection by the other powers. Both nations also had a history of conducting a kind of "missionary" diplomacy—of trying to export to all the world the political doctrines precipitated out of their respective revolutionary origins.

Unaccustomed to their great-power roles, unfamiliar with or even antagonistic to each other, and each believing in the universal applicability of its own particular ideology, America and the USSR suddenly found themselves staring eyeball-to-eyeball over the prostrate body of battered Europe—a Europe that had been the traditional center of international affairs. In these circumstances some sort of confrontation was virtually unavoidable. The wartime "Grand Alliance" of the United States, the Soviet Union, and Britain had been a misbegotten child of necessity, kept alive only until the mutual enemy was crushed. When the hated Hitler fell, suspicion and rivalry between communistic, despotic Russia and capitalistic, democratic America were all but inevitable. In a fateful progression of events, marked often by misperceptions as well as by genuine conflicts of interest, the two powers provoked each other into a tense standoff known as the Cold War. Enduring four and a half decades, the Cold War not only shaped Soviet-American relations; it overshadowed the entire postwar international order in every corner of the globe. The Cold War also molded societies and economies and the lives of individual people all over the planet.

## **Shaping the Postwar World**

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Despite these obstacles, the United States did manage at war's end to erect some of the structures that would support Roosevelt's vision of an open world. Meeting at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944, the Western Allies established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to encourage world trade by regulating currency exchange rates. They also

*In June 1946 Bernard Baruch (1870–1965), in presenting his plan for the control of atomic energy to the United Nations, said,*

"We are here to make a choice between the quick and the dead. That is our business. Behind the black portent of the new atomic age lies a hope which, seized upon with faith, can work our salvation. If we fail, then we have damned every man to be the slave of fear. Let us not deceive ourselves; we must elect world peace or world destruction."

founded the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) to promote economic growth in war-ravaged and underdeveloped areas. In contrast to its behavior after World War I, the United States took the lead in creating these important international bodies and supplied most of their funding. The stubborn Soviets declined to participate.

As flags wept at half-mast, the United Nations Conference opened on schedule, April 25, 1945, despite Roosevelt's dismaying death thirteen days earlier. Unlike Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt had displayed political tact by choosing both Republican and Democratic senators for the American delegation. Meeting at the San Francisco War Memorial Opera House, representatives from fifty nations fashioned the United Nations charter, which strongly resembled the old League of Nations Covenant. It featured the Security Council, dominated by the Big Five powers (the United States, Britain, the USSR, France, and China), each of whom had the right of veto, and the Assembly, which could be controlled by smaller countries. In contrast with the chilly American reception of the League in 1919, the Senate overwhelmingly approved the document on July 28, 1945, by a vote of 89 to 2.

The United Nations, setting up its permanent glass home in New York City, had some gratifying initial successes. It helped preserve peace in Iran, Kashmir, and other trouble spots. It played a large role in creating the new Jewish state of Israel. The U.N. Trusteeship Council guided former colonies to independence. Through such arms as UNESCO



(United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), and WHO (World Health Organization), the U.N. brought benefits to peoples the world over.

Far less heartening was the failure of the United States to control the fearsome new technology of the atom. U.S. delegate Bernard Baruch called in 1946 for a U.N. agency, free from the great-power veto, with worldwide authority over atomic energy, weapons, and research. The Soviet delegate countered that the possession of nuclear weapons simply be outlawed by every nation. Both plans quickly collapsed. The Truman administration had no intention of giving up its bombs, and the Soviets flatly refused to give up their veto or to invite “capitalist spies” to inspect atomic facilities in the USSR. A priceless opportunity to tame the nuclear monster in its infancy was lost. The atomic clock ticked ominously on for the next forty-five years, shadowing all relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, and casting a pall over the future of the human race.

## **The Problem of Germany**

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Hitler’s ruined Reich posed especially thorny problems for all the wartime Allies. They agreed only that the cancer of Nazism had to be cut out of the German body politic, which involved punishing Nazi leaders for war crimes. The Allies joined in trying twenty-two top culprits at Nuremberg, Germany, during 1945–1946. Accusations included committing crimes against the laws of war and humanity and plotting aggressions contrary to solemn treaty pledges.

Justice, Nuremberg-style, was harsh. Twelve of the accused Nazis swung from the gallows, and seven were sentenced to long jail terms. “Foxy Hermann” Goering, whose blubbery chest had once blazed with ribbons, cheated the hangman a few hours before his scheduled execution by swallowing a hidden cyanide capsule. The trials of several small-fry Nazis continued for years. Legal critics in America condemned these proceedings as judicial lynchings, because the victims were tried for offenses that had not been clear-cut crimes when the war began.

Beyond punishing the top Nazis, the Allies could agree on little about postwar Germany. Some

American Hitler-haters, noting that an industrialized Germany had been a brutal aggressor, at first wanted to dismantle German factories and reduce the country to a potato patch. The Soviets, denied American economic assistance, were determined to rebuild their shattered land by extracting enormous reparations from the Germans. Both these desires clashed headlong with the reality that an industrial, healthy German economy was indispensable to the recovery of Europe. The Americans soon came to appreciate that fact. But the Soviets, deeply fearful of another blitzkrieg, resisted all efforts to revitalize Germany.

*Former prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965), in a highly controversial speech at Fulton, Missouri (March 1946), warned of Soviet expansionism:*

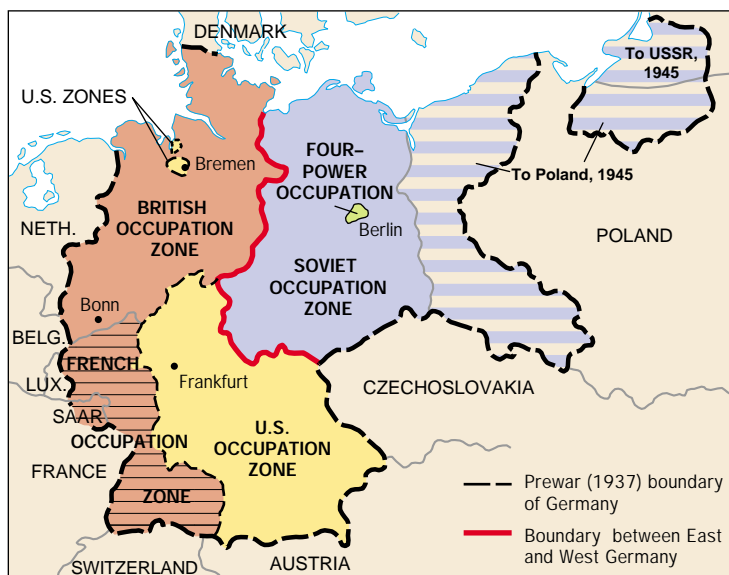
“From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.”

Along with Austria, Germany had been divided at war's end into four military occupation zones, each assigned to one of the Big Four powers (France, Britain, America, and the USSR). The Western Allies refused to allow Moscow to bleed their zones of the reparations that Stalin insisted he had been promised at Yalta. They also began to promote the idea of a reunited Germany. The communists responded by tightening their grip on their Eastern zone. Before long, it was apparent that Germany would remain indefinitely divided. West Germany eventually became an independent country, wedded to the West. East Germany, along with other

Soviet-dominated Eastern European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, became nominally independent “satellite” states, bound to the Soviet Union. Eastern Europe virtually disappeared from Western sight behind the “iron curtain” of secrecy and isolation that Stalin clanged down across Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. The division of Europe would endure for more than four decades.

With Germany now split in two, there remained the problem of the rubble heap known as Berlin. Lying deep within the Soviet zone (see the map below), this beleaguered isle in a red sea had been broken, like Germany as a whole, into sectors occupied by troops of each of the four victorious powers. In 1948, following controversies over German currency reform and four-power control, the Soviets abruptly choked off all rail and highway access to Berlin. They evidently reasoned that the Allies would be starved out.

Berlin became a hugely symbolic issue for both sides. At stake was not only the fate of the city but a test of wills between Moscow and Washington. The Americans organized a gigantic airlift in the midst of hair-trigger tension. For nearly a year, flying some of the very aircraft that had recently dropped bombs on Berlin, American pilots ferried thousands of tons of supplies a day to the grateful Berliners, their former enemies. Western Europeans took heart from



**Postwar Partition of Germany**

Germany lost much of its territory in the east to Poland and the Soviet Union. The military occupation zones were the bases for the formation of two separate countries in 1949, when the British, French, and American zones became West Germany, and the Soviet zone became East Germany. (The two Germanies were reunited in 1990.) Berlin remained under joint four-power occupation from 1945 to 1990 and became a focus and symbol of Cold War tensions.

this vivid demonstration of America's determination to honor its commitments in Europe. The Soviets, their bluff dramatically called, finally lifted their blockade in May 1949. In the same year, the governments of the two Germanies, East and West, were formally established. The Cold War had icily congealed.

### Crystallizing the Cold War

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A crafty Stalin also probed the West's resolve at other sensitive points, including oil-rich Iran. Seeking to secure oil concessions similar to those held by the

British and Americans, Stalin in 1946 broke an agreement to remove his troops from Iran's northernmost province, which the USSR had occupied, with British and American approval, during World War II. Instead, he used the troops to aid a rebel movement. Truman sent off a stinging protest, and the Soviet dictator backed down.

Moscow's hard-line policies in Germany, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East wrought a psychological Pearl Harbor. The eyes of Americans were jarred wide open by the Kremlin's apparent unwillingness to continue the wartime partnership. Any remaining goodwill from the period of comradeship-in-arms evaporated in a cloud of dark distrust. "I'm tired of babying the Soviets," Truman remarked privately in 1946, as attitudes on both sides began to harden frostily.

Truman's piecemeal responses to various Soviet challenges took on intellectual coherence in 1947, with the formulation of the "containment doctrine." Crafted by a brilliant young diplomat and Soviet specialist, George F. Kennan, this concept held that Russia, whether tsarist or communist, was relentlessly expansionary. But the Kremlin was also cautious, Kennan argued, and the flow of Soviet power into "every nook and cranny available to it" could be stemmed by "firm and vigilant containment."

Truman embraced Kennan's advice when he formally and publicly adopted a "get-tough-with-Russia" policy in 1947. His first dramatic move was triggered by word that heavily burdened Britain could no longer bear the financial and military load of defending Greece against communist pressures. If Greece fell, Turkey would presumably collapse and the strategic eastern Mediterranean would pass into the Soviet orbit.

In a surprise appearance, the president went before Congress on March 12, 1947, and requested support for what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. Specifically, he asked for \$400 million to bolster Greece and Turkey, which Congress quickly granted. More generally, he declared that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures"—a sweeping and open-ended commitment of vast and worrisome proportions. Critics then and later charged that Truman had overreacted by promising unlimited support to any tinhorn despot who

claimed to be resisting “Communist aggression.” Critics also complained that the Truman Doctrine needlessly polarized the world into pro-Soviet and pro-American camps and unwisely construed the Soviet threat as primarily military in nature. Apologists for Truman have explained that it was Truman’s fear of a revived isolationism that led him to exaggerate the Soviet threat and to cast his message in the charged language of a holy global war against godless communism—a description of the Cold War that straightjacketed future policymakers who would seek to tone down Soviet-American competition and animosity.

A threat of a different sort loomed in Western Europe—especially France, Italy, and Germany. These key nations were still suffering from the hunger and economic chaos spawned by war. They were in grave danger of being taken over from the inside by Communist parties that could exploit these hardships.

President Truman responded with a bold policy. In a commencement address at Harvard University on June 5, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall invited the Europeans to get together and work out a *joint* plan for their economic recovery. If they did so, then the United States would provide substantial financial assistance. This forced cooperation constituted a powerful nudge on the road to the eventual creation of the European Community (EC).

The democratic nations of Europe rose enthusiastically to the life-giving bait of the so-called Marshall Plan. They met in Paris in July 1947 to thrash out the details. There Marshall offered the same aid to the Soviet Union and its allies, if they would make political reforms and accept certain outside controls. But nobody was surprised when the Soviets walked out, denouncing the “Martial Plan” as one more capitalist trick.

The Marshall Plan called for spending \$12.5 billion over four years in sixteen cooperating countries. Congress at first balked at this mammoth sum. It looked even more huge when added to the nearly \$2 billion the United States had already contributed to European relief through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the hefty American contributions to the United Nations, IMF, and World Bank. But a Soviet-sponsored communist coup in Czechoslovakia finally

awakened the legislators to reality, and they voted the initial appropriations in April 1948. Congress evidently concluded that if Uncle Sam did not get the Europeans back on their feet, they would never get off his back.

Truman’s Marshall Plan was a spectacular success. American dollars pumped reviving blood into the economic veins of the anemic Western European nations. Within a few years, most of them were exceeding their prewar outputs, as an “economic miracle” drenched Europe in prosperity. The Communist parties in Italy and France lost ground, and these two keystone countries were saved from the westward thrust of communism.

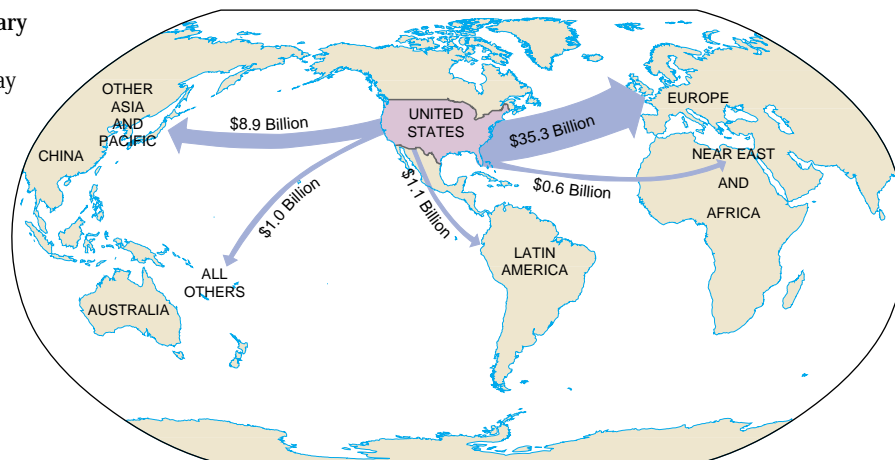
A resolute Truman made another fateful decision in 1948. Access to Middle Eastern oil was crucial to the European recovery program and, increasingly, to the health of the U.S. economy, as domestic American oil reserves dwindled. Yet the Arab oil countries adamantly opposed the creation

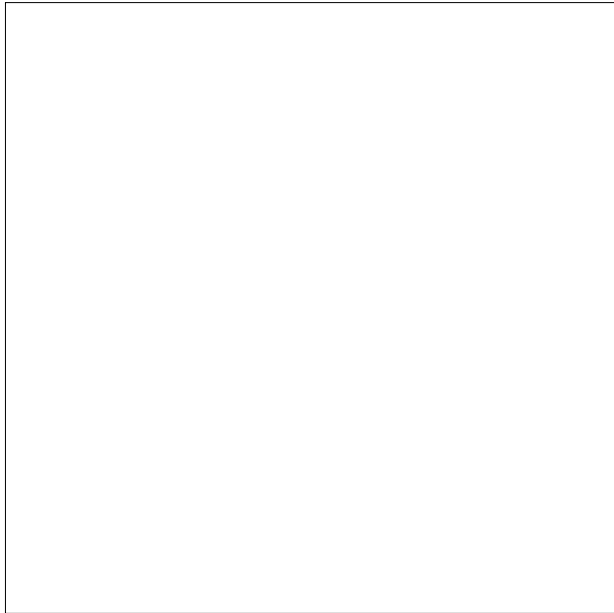
of the Jewish state of Israel in the British mandate territory of Palestine. Should Israel be born, a Saudi Arabian leader warned Truman, the Arabs “will lay siege to it until it dies of famine.” Defying Arab wrath as well as the objections of his own State and Defense Departments and the European Allies, all of them afraid to antagonize the oil-endowed Arabs, Truman officially recognized the state of Israel on

the day of its birth, May 14, 1948. Humanitarian sympathy for the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust ranked high among his reasons, as did his wishes to preempt Soviet influence in the Jewish state and to retain the support of American Jewish voters. Truman’s policy of strong support for Israel would vastly complicate U.S. relations with the Arab world in the decades ahead.

#### United States Foreign Aid, Military and Economic, 1945–1954

Marshall Plan aid swelled the outlay for Europe. Note the emphasis on the “developed” world, with relatively little aid going to what are now called “Third World” countries.





## America Begins to Rearm

The Cold War, the struggle to contain Soviet communism, was not war, yet it was not peace. The standoff with the Kremlin banished the dreams of tax-fatigued Americans that tanks could be beaten into automobiles.

The Soviet menace spurred the unification of the armed services as well as the creation of a huge new national security apparatus. Congress in 1947 passed the National Security Act, creating the Department of Defense. The department was to be housed in the sprawling Pentagon building on the banks of the Potomac and to be headed by a new cabinet officer, the secretary of defense. Under the secretary, but now without cabinet status, were the civilian secretaries of the navy, the army (replacing the old secretary of war), and the air force (a recognition of the rising importance of air power). The uniformed heads of each service were brought together as the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The National Security Act also established the National Security Council (NSC) to advise the presi-

dent on security matters and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to coordinate the government's foreign fact-gathering. The "Voice of America," authorized by Congress in 1948, began beaming American radio broadcasts behind the iron curtain. In the same year, Congress resurrected the military draft, providing for the conscription of selected young men from nineteen to twenty-five years of age. The forbidding presence of the Selective Service System shaped millions of young people's educational, marital, and career plans in the following quarter-century. One shoe at a time, a war-weary America was reluctantly returning to a war footing.

The Soviet threat was also forcing the democracies of Western Europe into an unforeseen degree of unity. In 1948 Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed a path-breaking treaty of defensive alliance at Brussels. They then invited the United States to join them.

The proposal confronted the United States with a historic decision. America had traditionally avoided entangling alliances, especially in peacetime (if the Cold War could be considered peacetime). Yet American participation in the emerging coalition could serve many purposes: it would strengthen the policy of containing the Soviet Union; it would provide a framework for the reintegration of Germany into the European family; and it would reassure jittery Europeans that a traditionally isolationist Uncle Sam was not about to abandon them to the marauding Russian bear—or to a resurgent and domineering Germany.

The Truman administration decided to join the European pact, called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in recognition of its transatlantic character. With white-tie pageantry, the NATO treaty was signed in Washington on April 4, 1949. The twelve original signatories pledged to regard an attack on one as an attack on all and promised to respond with "armed force" if necessary. Despite last-ditch howls from immovable isolationists, the Senate approved the treaty on July 21, 1949, by a vote of 82 to 13. Membership was boosted to fourteen in 1952 by the inclusion of Greece and Turkey, to fifteen in 1955 by the addition of West Germany.

The NATO pact was epochal. It marked a dramatic departure from American diplomatic convention, a gigantic boost for European unification, and a significant step in the militarization of the Cold War. NATO became the cornerstone of all Cold War

American policy toward Europe. With good reason pundits summed up NATO's threefold purpose: "to keep the Russians out, the Germans down, and the Americans in."

## Reconstruction and Revolution in Asia

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Reconstruction in Japan was simpler than in Germany, primarily because it was largely a one-man show. The occupying American army, under the supreme Allied commander, five-star general Douglas MacArthur, sat in the driver's seat. In the teeth of violent protests from the Soviet officials, MacArthur went inflexibly ahead with his program for the democratization of Japan. Following the pattern in Germany, top Japanese "war criminals" were tried in Tokyo from 1946 to 1948. Eighteen of them were sentenced to prison terms, and seven were hanged.

General MacArthur, as a kind of Yankee mikado, enjoyed a stunning success. The Japanese cooperated to an astonishing degree. They saw that good behavior and the adoption of democracy would

speed the end of the occupation—as it did. A MacArthur-dictated constitution was adopted in 1946. It renounced militarism and introduced Western-style democratic government—paving the way for a phenomenal economic recovery that within a few decades made Japan one of the world's mightiest industrial powers.

If Japan was a success story for American policymakers, the opposite was true in China, where a bitter civil war had raged for years between Nationalists and communists. Washington had halfheartedly supported the Nationalist government of Generalissimo Chiang Jieshi in his struggle with the communists under Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). But ineptitude and corruption within the generalissimo's regime gradually began to corrode the confidence of his people. Communist armies swept south overwhelmingly, and late in 1949 Chiang was forced to flee with the remnants of his once-powerful force to the last-hope island of Formosa (Taiwan).

The collapse of Nationalist China was a depressing defeat for America and its allies in the Cold War—the worst to date. At one fell swoop, nearly one-fourth of the world's population—some 500 million people—was swept into the communist

*In August 1949 Secretary of State Dean Acheson (1893–1971) explained publicly why America had “dumped” Jiang Jieshi:*

“The unfortunate but inescapable fact is that the ominous result of the civil war in China was beyond the control of the government of the United States. Nothing that this country did or could have done within the reasonable limits of its capabilities could have changed that result; nothing that was left undone by this country has contributed to it. It was the product of internal Chinese forces, forces which this country tried to influence but could not.”

camp. The so-called fall of China became a bitterly partisan issue in the United States. The Republicans, seeking “goats” who had “lost China,” assailed President Truman and his bristly mustached, British-appearing secretary of state, Dean Acheson. They insisted that Democratic agencies, wormy with communists, had deliberately withheld aid from Jiang Jieshi so that he would fall. Democrats heatedly replied that when a regime has forfeited the support of its people, no amount of outside help will save it. Truman, the argument ran, did not “lose” China, because he never had China to lose. Jiang himself had never controlled all of China.

More bad news came in September 1949 when President Truman shocked the nation by announcing that the Soviets had exploded an atomic bomb—approximately three years earlier than many experts had thought possible. American strategists since 1945 had counted on keeping the Soviets in line by threats of a one-sided aerial attack with nuclear weapons. But atomic bombing was now a game that two could play.

To outpace the Soviets in nuclear weaponry, Truman ordered the development of the “H-bomb” (hydrogen bomb)—a city-smashing device many times more deadly than the atomic bomb. The United States exploded its first hydrogen device on a South Pacific atoll in 1952, despite warnings from some scientists that the H-bomb was so powerful that “it becomes a weapon which in practical effect is almost one of genocide.” Famed physicist Albert

Einstein, whose theories had helped give birth to the atomic age, declared that “annihilation of any life on earth has been brought within the range of technical possibilities.” Not to be outdone, the Soviets exploded their first H-bomb in 1953, and the nuclear arms race entered a perilously competitive cycle. Nuclear “superiority” became a dangerous and delusive dream, as each side tried to outdo the other in the scramble to build more destructive weapons. If the Cold War should ever blaze into a hot war, there might be no world left for the communists to communize or the democracies to democratize—a chilling thought that constrained both camps. Peace through mutual terror brought a shaky stability to the superpower standoff.

### **Ferretting Out Alleged Communists**

One of the most active Cold War fronts was at home, where a new antired chase was in full cry. Many nervous citizens feared that communist spies, paid with Moscow gold, were undermining the government and treacherously misdirecting foreign policy. In 1947 Truman launched a massive “loyalty” program. The attorney general drew up a list of ninety supposedly disloyal organizations, none of which was given the opportunity to prove its innocence. The Loyalty Review Board investigated more than 3 million federal employees, some 3,000 of whom either resigned or were dismissed, none under formal indictment.

Individual states likewise became intensely security-conscious. Loyalty oaths in increasing numbers were demanded of employees, especially teachers. The gnawing question for many earnest Americans was, Could the nation continue to enjoy traditional freedoms—especially freedom of speech, freedom of thought, and the right of political dissent—in a Cold War climate?

In 1949 eleven communists were brought before a New York jury for violating the Smith Act of 1940, the first peacetime antisediton law since 1798. Convicted of advocating the overthrow of the American government by force, the defendants were sent to prison. The Supreme Court upheld their convictions in *Dennis v. United States* (1951).

The House of Representatives in 1938 had established the Committee on Un-American Activities (popularly known as “HUAC”) to investigate



“subversion.” In 1948 committee member Richard M. Nixon, an ambitious red-catcher, led the chase after Alger Hiss, a prominent ex-New Dealer and a distinguished member of the “eastern establishment.” Accused of being a communist agent in the 1930s, Hiss demanded the right to defend himself. He dramatically met his chief accuser before the Un-American Activities Committee in August 1948. Hiss denied everything but was caught in embarrassing falsehoods, convicted of perjury in 1950, and sentenced to five years in prison.

Was America really riddled with Soviet spies? It now seems unlikely. But for many ordinary Americans, the hunt for communists was not just about fending off the military threat of the Soviet Union. Unsettling dangers lurked closer to home. While men like Nixon and Senator Joseph McCarthy led the search for communists in Washington, conservative politicians at the state and local levels discovered that all manner of real or perceived social changes—including declining religious sentiment, increased sexual freedom, and agitation for civil rights—could be tarred with a red brush. Anticomunist crusaders ransacked school libraries for “subversive” textbooks and drove debtors, drinkers,

and homosexuals, all alleged to be security risks, from their jobs.

Some Americans, including President Truman, realized that the red hunt was turning into a witch hunt. In 1950 Truman vetoed the McCarran Internal Security Bill, which among other provisions authorized the president to arrest and detain suspicious people during an “internal security emergency.” Critics protested that the bill smacked of police-state, concentration-camp tactics. But the congressional guardians of the Republic’s liberties enacted the bill over Truman’s veto.

The stunning success of the Soviet scientists in developing an atomic bomb was attributed by many to the cleverness of communist spies in stealing American secrets. Notorious among those who had allegedly “leaked” atomic data to Moscow were two American citizens, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. They were convicted in 1951 of espionage and, after prolonged appeals, went to the electric chair in 1953—the only people in American history ever executed in peacetime for espionage. Their sensational trial and electrocution, combined with sympathy for their two orphaned children, began to sour some sober citizens on the excesses of the red-hunters.

## Democratic Divisions in 1948

Attacking high prices and “High-Tax Harry” Truman, the Republicans had won control of Congress in the congressional elections of 1946. Their prospects had seldom looked rosier as they gathered in Philadelphia to choose their 1948 presidential candidate. They noisily renominated warmed-over New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, still as debonair as if he had stepped out of a bandbox.

Also gathering in Philadelphia, Democratic politicians looked without enthusiasm on their hand-me-down president and sang, “I’m Just Mild About Harry.” But their “dump Truman” movement collapsed when war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower refused to be drafted. The peppery president, unwanted but undaunted, was then chosen in the face of vehement opposition by southern delegates. They were alienated by his strong stand in favor of civil rights for blacks, who now mustered many votes in the big-city ghettos of the North.

Truman’s nomination split the party wide open. Embittered southern Democrats from thirteen states, like their fire-eating forebears of 1860, next met in their own convention, in Birmingham, Alabama, with Confederate flags brashly in evidence. Amid scenes of heated defiance, these “Dixiecrats” nominated Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina on a States’ Rights party ticket.

To add to the confusion within Democratic ranks, former vice president Henry A. Wallace threw his hat into the ring. Having parted company with the administration over its get-tough-with-Russia policy, he was nominated at Philadelphia by the new Progressive party—a bizarre collection of disgruntled former New Dealers, starry-eyed pacifists, well-meaning liberals, and communist-fronters.

Wallace, a vigorous if misguided liberal, assailed Uncle Sam’s “dollar imperialism” from the stump. This so-called Pied Piper of the Politburo took an apparently pro-Soviet line that earned him drenchings with rotten eggs in hostile cities. But to many Americans, Wallace raised the only hopeful voice in the deepening gloom of the Cold War.

With the Democrats ruptured three ways and the Republican congressional victory of 1946 just past, Dewey’s victory seemed assured. Succumbing to overconfidence engendered by his massive lead in public-opinion polls, the cold, smug Dewey confined himself to dispensing soothing-syrup trivialities like “Our future lies before us.”

*Atomic scientist Edward Condon (1902–1974) warned as early as 1946—three years before the Soviets exploded their own atomic bomb—that Americans’ confidence in their nuclear monopoly was a dangerous delusion that could unleash vicious accusations and scapegoating:*

“The laws of nature, some seem to think, are ours exclusively. . . . Having created an air of suspicion and distrust, there will be persons among us who think our nations can know nothing except what is learned by espionage. So, when other countries make atom bombs, these persons will cry ‘treason’ at our scientists, for they will find it inconceivable that another country could make a bomb in any other way.”

The seemingly doomed Truman, with little money and few active supporters, had to rely on his “gut-fighter” instincts and folksy personality. Traveling the country by train to deliver some three hundred “give ‘em hell” speeches, he lashed out at the Taft-Hartley “slave labor” law and the “do-nothing” Republican Congress, while whipping up support for his program of civil rights, improved labor benefits, and health insurance. “Pour it on ‘em, Harry!”

cried increasingly large and enthusiastic crowds, as the pugnacious president rained a barrage of verbal uppercuts on his opponent.

On election night the *Chicago Tribune* ran off an early edition with the headline “DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN.” But in the morning, it turned out that “President” Dewey had embarrassingly snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. Truman had swept to a stunning triumph, to the complete bewilderment of politicians, pollsters, prophets, and pundits. Even though Thurmond took away 39 electoral votes in the South, Truman won 303 electoral votes, primarily from the South, Midwest, and West. Dewey’s 189 electoral votes came principally from the East. The popular vote was 24,179,345 for Truman, 21,991,291 for Dewey, 1,176,125 for Thurmond, and 1,157,326 for Wallace. To make the victory sweeter, the Democrats regained control of Congress as well.

Truman’s victory rested on farmers, workers, and blacks, all of whom were Republican-wary. Republican overconfidence and Truman’s lone-wolf, never-say-die campaign also won him the support of many Americans who admired his “guts.” No one wanted him, someone remarked, except the people. Dewey, in contrast, struck many voters as arrogant, evasive, and wooden. When Dewey took the platform to give a speech, said one commentator, “he comes out like a man who has been mounted on casters and given a tremendous shove from behind.”

Smiling and self-assured, Truman sounded a clarion note in the fourth point of his inaugural

*In his inaugural address, January 1949, President Harry S Truman (1884–1972) said,*

“Communism is based on the belief that man is so weak and inadequate that he is unable to govern himself, and therefore requires the rule of strong masters. . . . Democracy is based on the conviction that man has the moral and intellectual capacity, as well as the inalienable right, to govern himself with reason and justice.”

*As Truman's Fair Deal was rebuffed by a hostile Congress, critics like the conservative New York Daily News gloated that the odious New Deal was finally vanquished:*

"The New Deal is kaput like the Thirty Years' War or the Black Plague or other disasters. . . . [Its demise] is like coming out of the darkness into sunlight. Like feeling clean again after a long time in the muck."

address, when he called for a "bold new program" ("Point Four"). The plan was to lend U.S. money and technical aid to underdeveloped lands to help them help themselves. Truman wanted to spend millions to keep underprivileged peoples from becoming communists rather than spend billions to shoot them after they had become communists. This farseeing program was officially launched in 1950, and it brought badly needed assistance to impoverished countries, notably in Latin America, Africa, the Near East, and the Far East.

At home Truman outlined a sweeping "Fair Deal" program in his 1949 message to Congress. It called for improved housing, full employment, a higher minimum wage, better farm price supports, new TVAs, and an extension of Social Security. But most of the Fair Deal fell victim to congressional opposition from Republicans and southern Democrats. The only major successes came in raising the minimum wage, providing for public housing in the Housing Act of 1949, and extending old-age insurance to many more beneficiaries in the Social Security Act of 1950.

## **The Korean Volcano Erupts (1950)**

Korea, the Land of the Morning Calm, heralded a new and more disturbing phase of the Cold War—a shooting phase—in June 1950. When Japan collapsed in 1945, Soviet troops had accepted the Japanese surrender north of the thirty-eighth parallel on the Korean peninsula, and American troops had done likewise south of that line. Both superpowers professed to want the reunification of Korea, but, as

in Germany, each helped to set up rival regimes above and below the parallel.

By 1949, when the Soviets and Americans had both withdrawn their forces, the entire peninsula was a bristling armed camp, with two hostile regimes eyeing each other suspiciously. Secretary of State Acheson seemed to wash his hands of the dispute early in 1950, when he declared in a memorable speech that Korea was outside the essential United States defense perimeter in the Pacific.

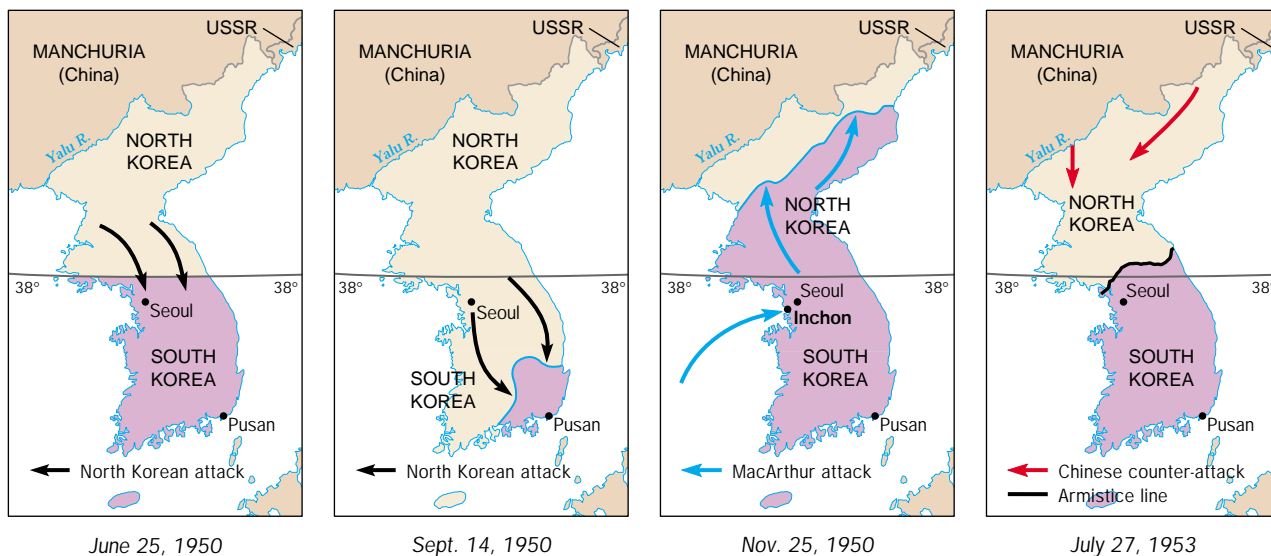
The explosion came on June 25, 1950. Spearheaded by Soviet-made tanks, North Korean army columns rumbled across the thirty-eighth parallel. Caught flat-footed, the South Korean forces were shoved back southward to a dangerously tiny defensive area around Pusan, their weary backs to the sea.

President Truman sprang quickly into the breach. The invasion seemed to provide devastating proof of a fundamental premise in the "containment doctrine" that shaped Washington's foreign policy: that even a slight relaxation of America's guard was an invitation to communist aggression somewhere.

The Korean invasion also provided the occasion for a vast expansion of the American military. Truman's National Security Council had recommended in a famous document of 1950 (known as National Security Council Memorandum Number 68, or NSC-68) that the United States should quadruple its defense spending. Buried at the time because it was considered politically impossible to implement, NSC-68 was resurrected by the Korean crisis. "Korea saved us," Secretary of State Acheson later commented. Truman now ordered a massive military buildup, well beyond what was necessary for the immediate purposes of the Korean War. Soon the United States had 3.5 million men under arms and was spending \$50 billion per year on the defense budget—some 13 percent of the GNP.

NSC-68 was a key document of the Cold War period, not only because it marked a major step in the militarization of American foreign policy, but also because it vividly reflected the sense of almost limitless possibility that pervaded postwar American society. NSC-68 rested on the assumption that the enormous American economy could bear without strain the huge costs of a gigantic rearmament program. Said one NSC-68 planner, "There was practically nothing the country could not do if it wanted to do it."

Truman took full advantage of a temporary Soviet absence from the United Nations Security Council on June 25, 1950, to obtain a unanimous



The Shifting Front in Korea

condemnation of North Korea as an aggressor. (Why the Soviets were absent remains controversial. Scholars once believed that the Soviets were just as surprised as the Americans by the attack. It now appears that Stalin had given his reluctant approval to North Korea's strike plan but believed that the fighting would be brief and that the United States would take little interest in it.) The Council also called upon all U.N. members, including the United States, to "render every assistance" to restore peace. Two days later, without consulting Congress, Truman ordered American air and naval units to support South Korea. Before the week was out, he also ordered General Douglas MacArthur's Japan-based occupation troops into action alongside the beleaguered South Koreans.

Officially, the United States was simply participating in a United Nations "police action." But in fact, the United States made up the overwhelming bulk of the U.N. contingents, and General MacArthur, appointed U.N. commander of the entire operation, took his orders from Washington, not from the Security Council.

### The Military Seesaw in Korea

Rather than fight his way out of the southern Pusan perimeter, MacArthur launched a daring amphibious landing behind the enemy's lines at Inchon.

This bold gamble on September 15, 1950, succeeded brilliantly; within two weeks the North Koreans had scrambled back behind the "sanctuary" of the thirty-eighth parallel. Truman's avowed intention was to restore South Korea to its former borders, but the pursuing South Koreans had already crossed the thirty-eighth parallel, and there seemed little point in permitting the North Koreans to regroup and come again. The U.N. Assembly tacitly authorized a crossing by MacArthur, whom President Truman ordered northward, provided that there was no intervention in force by the Chinese or Soviets.

The Americans thus raised the stakes in Korea, and in so doing they quickened the fears of another potential player in this dangerous game. The Chinese communists had publicly warned that they would not sit idly by and watch hostile troops approach the strategic Yalu River boundary between Korea and China. But MacArthur pooh-poohed all predictions of an effective intervention by the Chinese and reportedly boasted that he would "have the boys home by Christmas."

MacArthur erred badly. In November 1950 hordes of Chinese "volunteers" fell upon his rashly overextended lines and hurled the U.N. forces reeling back down the peninsula. The fighting now sank into a frostbitten stalemate on the icy terrain near the thirty-eighth parallel.

An imperious MacArthur, humiliated by this rout, pressed for drastic retaliation. He favored a blockade of the Chinese coast and bombardment of

Chinese bases in Manchuria. But Washington policy-makers, with anxious eyes on Moscow, refused to enlarge the already costly conflict. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff declared that a wider clash in Asia would be “the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and with the wrong enemy.” Europe, not Asia, was the administration’s first concern; and the USSR, not China, loomed as the more sinister foe.

Two-fisted General MacArthur felt that he was being asked to fight with one hand tied behind his back. He sneered at the concept of a “limited war” and insisted that “there is no substitute for victory.” When the general began to take issue publicly with presidential policies, Truman had no choice but to remove the insubordinate MacArthur from command (April 11, 1951). MacArthur, a legend in his own mind, returned to an uproarious welcome, whereas Truman was condemned as a “pig,” an “imbecile,” a “Judas,” and an appeaser of “Communist Russia and Communist China.” In July 1951 truce discussions began in a rude field tent near the firing line but were almost immediately snagged on the issue of prisoner exchange. Talks dragged on unproductively for nearly two years while men continued to die.

## Chronology

- 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (GI Bill)  
Bretton Woods economic conference
- 1945 Spock publishes *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*  
Yalta conference  
United States ends lend-lease to the USSR  
United Nations established
- 1945-
- 1946 Nuremberg war crimes trials in Germany
- 1946 Employment Act creates Council of Economic Advisers  
Iran crisis
- 1946-
- 1948 Tokyo war crimes trials
- 1947 Truman Doctrine  
Marshall Plan  
Taft-Hartley Act  
National Security Act creates Department of Defense, National Security Council (NSC), and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- 1948 United States officially recognizes Israel  
“Voice of America” begins radio broadcasts behind iron curtain  
Hiss case begins  
Truman defeats Dewey for presidency
- 1948-
- 1949 Berlin crisis
- 1949 NATO established  
Communists defeat Nationalists in China
- 1950 American economy begins postwar growth  
McCarthy red hunt begins  
McCarran Internal Security Bill passed by Congress over Truman’s veto
- 1950-
- 1953 Korean War
- 1951 Truman fires MacArthur  
Rosenbergs convicted of treason
- 1952 United States explodes first hydrogen bomb
- 1957 Postwar peak of U.S. birthrate
- 1973 U.S. birthrate falls below replacement level

## Who Was to Blame for the Cold War?

Whose fault was the Cold War? (And, for that matter, who should get credit for ending it?) For two decades after World War II, American historians generally agreed that the aggressive Soviets were solely responsible. This “orthodox” or “official” appraisal squared with the traditional view of the United States as a virtuous, innocent land with an idealistic foreign policy. This point of view also justified America’s Cold War containment policy, which cast the Soviet Union as the aggressor that must be confined by an ever-vigilant United States. America supposedly had only defensive intentions, with no expansionary ambitions of its own.

In the 1960s a vigorous revisionist interpretation flowered, powerfully influenced by disillusion over U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The revisionists stood the orthodox view on its head. The Soviets, they argued, had only defensive intentions at the end of World War II; it was the Americans who had behaved provocatively by brandishing their new atomic weaponry. Some of these critics pointed an accusing finger at President Truman, alleging that he abandoned Roosevelt’s conciliatory approach to the Soviets and adopted a bullying attitude, emboldened by the American atomic monopoly.

More radical revisionists like Gabriel and Joyce Kolko even claimed to have found the roots of Truman’s alleged belligerence in long-standing American policies of economic imperialism—policies that eventually resulted in the tragedy of Vietnam (see pp. 935–938). In this view the Vietnam War followed logically from America’s insatiable “need” for overseas markets and raw materials. Vietnam itself may have been economically unimportant, but, so the argument ran, a communist Vietnam represented an intolerable challenge to American hegemony. Ironically, revisionists thus endorsed the so-called domino theory, which official apologists often cited in defense of America’s Vietnam policy. According to the domino theory, if the United States declined to fight in Vietnam, other countries would lose their faith in America’s will (or their fear of American power) and would tumble one after the other like “dominoes” into the Soviet camp. Revisionists stressed what they saw as the *economic necessity*

behind the domino theory: losing in Vietnam, they claimed, would unravel the American economy.

In the 1970s a “postrevisionist” interpretation emerged that is widely agreed upon today. Historians such as John Lewis Gaddis and Melvyn Leffler pooh-pooh the economic determinism of the revisionists, while frankly acknowledging that the United States did have vital security interests at stake in the post–World War II era. The postrevisionists analyze the ways in which inherited ideas (like isolationism) and the contentious nature of postwar domestic politics, as well as miscalculations by American leaders, led a nation in search of security into seeking not simply a sufficiency but a “preponderance” of power. The American *overreaction* to its security needs, these scholars suggest, exacerbated U.S.-Soviet relations and precipitated the four-decade-long nuclear arms race that formed the centerpiece of the Cold War.

In the case of Vietnam, the postrevisionist historians focus not on economic necessity, but on a failure of political intelligence, induced by the stressful conditions of the Cold War, that made the dubious domino theory seem plausible. Misunderstanding Vietnamese intentions, exaggerating Soviet ambitions, and fearing to appear “soft on communism” in the eyes of their domestic political rivals, American leaders plunged into Vietnam, sadly misguided by their own Cold War obsessions.

Most postrevisionists, however, still lay the lion’s share of the blame for the Cold War on the Soviet Union. By the same token, they credit the Soviets with ending the Cold War—a view hotly disputed by Ronald Reagan’s champions, who claim that it was his anti-Soviet policies in the 1980s that brought the Russians to their knees (see pp. 984–985). The great unknown, of course, is the precise nature of Soviet thinking in the Cold War years. Were Soviet aims predominantly defensive, or did the Kremlin incessantly plot world conquest? Was there an opportunity for reconciliation with the West following Stalin’s death in 1953? Should Mikhail Gorbachev or Ronald Reagan be remembered as the leader who ended the Cold War? With the opening of Soviet archives, scholars are eagerly pursuing answers to such questions.

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For further reading, see page A25 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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# The Eisenhower Era

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1952–1960

*Every warship launched, every rocket fired  
signifies . . . a theft from those who hunger and are not fed,  
those who are cold and are not clothed.*

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER, APRIL 16, 1953

**I**n President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the man and the hour met. Americans yearned for a period of calm in which they could pursue without distraction their new visions of consumerist affluence. The nation sorely needed a respite from twenty years of depression and war. Yet the American people unexpectedly found themselves in the early 1950s dug into the frontlines of the Cold War abroad and dangerously divided at home over the explosive issues of communist subversion and civil rights. They longed for reassuring leadership. “Ike” seemed ready both to reassure and to lead.

## The Advent of Eisenhower

Democratic prospects in the presidential election of 1952 were blighted by the military deadlock in Korea, Truman’s clash with MacArthur, war-bred

inflation, and whiffs of scandal from the White House. Dispirited Democrats, convening in Chicago, nominated a reluctant Adlai E. Stevenson, the witty, eloquent, and idealistic governor of Illinois. Republicans enthusiastically chose General Dwight D. Eisenhower on the first ballot. As a concession to the hard-line anticommunist wing of the party, the convention selected as “Ike’s” running mate California senator Richard M. Nixon, who had distinguished himself as a relentless red-hunter.

Eisenhower was already the most popular American of his time, as “I Like Ike” buttons everywhere testified. His ruddy face, captivating grin, and glowing personality made him a perfect candidate in the dawning new age of television politics. He had an authentic hero’s credentials as wartime supreme commander of the Allied forces in Europe, army chief of staff after the war, and the first supreme commander of NATO from 1950 to 1952. He had also been “civilianized” by a brief term as president of Columbia University from 1948 to 1950.



Striking a grandfatherly, nonpartisan pose, Eisenhower left the rough campaigning to Nixon, who relished pulling no punches. The vice-presidential candidate lambasted his opponents with charges that they had cultivated corruption, caved in on Korea, and coddled communists. He particularly blasted the intellectual (“egghead”) Stevenson as “Adlai the appeaser,” with a “Ph.D. from [Secretary of State] Dean Acheson’s College of Cowardly Communist Containment.”

Nixon himself faltered when reports surfaced of a secretly financed “slush fund” he had tapped while holding a seat in the Senate. Prodded by Republican party officials, Eisenhower seriously considered dropping him from the ticket, but a scared Nixon went on national television with a theatrical appeal filled with self-pity, during which he referred to the family cocker spaniel, Checkers. This heart-tugging “Checkers speech” saved him his place on the ticket.

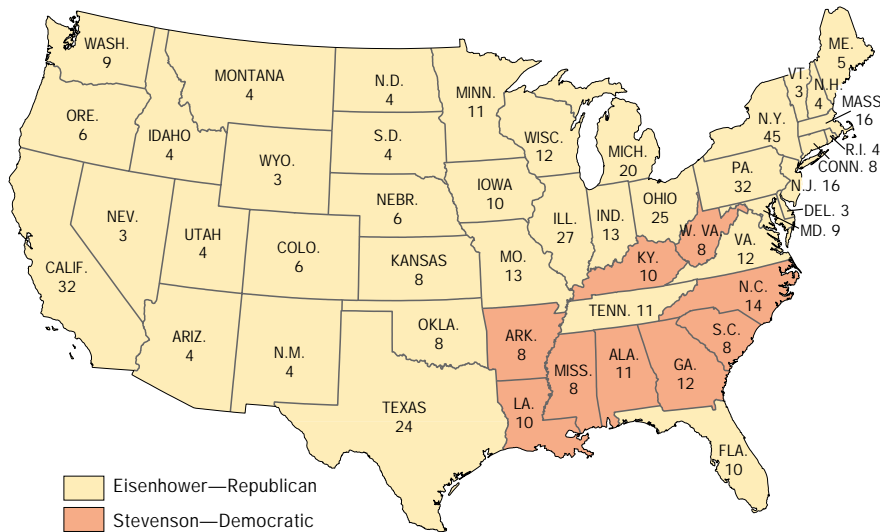
The maudlin Checkers speech also demonstrated the awesome political potentialities of television—foreshadowed by FDR’s mastery of the radio. Nixon had defied Republican party bosses and bent Eisenhower himself to his will by appealing directly to the American people in their living rooms. His performance illustrated the disturbing power of the new, vivid medium, which communicated with far more immediacy and effect than its electronic cousin, the radio, ever could.

Even Eisenhower reluctantly embraced the new technology of the black-and-white television screen. He allowed himself to be filmed in a New York TV studio giving extremely brief “answers” to a nonexistent audience, whose “questions” were taped later, then carefully spliced with Eisenhower’s statements to give the illusion of a live discussion. “To think that an old soldier should come to this,” Ike grumbled. These so-called “spots” foreshadowed the future of political advertising. They amounted, as one critic observed, to “selling the President like toothpaste.” Devoid of substance, they vastly oversimplified complicated economic and social issues. “What about the high cost of living?” one spot asked. “My wife Mamie worries about the same thing,” Ike answered. “I tell her it’s my job to change that on November fourth.”

In future years television made possible a kind of “plebiscitarian” politics, through which lone-wolf politicians could go straight to the voters without the mediating influence of parties or other institu-

tions. The new medium thus stood revealed as a threat to the historic role of political parties, which traditionally had chosen candidates through complex internal bargaining and had educated and mobilized the electorate. And given television’s origins in entertainment and advertising, political messages would be increasingly tuned to the standards of show business and commercialism. Gradually, as television spread to virtually every household in the land, those standards would rule politics with iron sway as ten-second television “sound bites” became the most common form of political communication.

The outcome of the presidential election of 1952 was never really in doubt. Given an extra prod by Eisenhower’s last-minute pledge to go personally to Korea to end the war, the voters overwhelmingly declared for Ike. He garnered 33,936,234 votes to Stevenson’s 27,314,992. He cracked the solid South wide open, ringing up 442 electoral votes to 89 for his opponent. Ike not only ran far ahead of his ticket but managed to pull enough Republicans into office on his military coattails to ensure GOP control of the new Congress by a paper-thin margin.



Presidential Election of 1952 (with electoral vote by state) A Democrat quipped that “if the voters liked the Republicans the way they liked Ike, the two-party system would be in bad shape.” Fortunately for Democrats, Eisenhower scored a personal, not a party, victory. Republicans won minuscule majorities in Congress, majorities that disappeared in the congressional elections two years later.

## “Ike” Takes Command

True to his campaign pledge, president-elect Eisenhower undertook a flying three-day visit to Korea in December 1952. But even a glamorous Ike could not immediately budge the peace negotiations off dead center. Seven long months later, after Eisenhower had threatened to use atomic weapons, an armistice

was finally signed but was repeatedly violated in succeeding decades.

The brutal and futile fighting had lasted three years. About fifty-four thousand Americans lay dead, joined by perhaps more than a million Chinese, North Koreans, and South Koreans. Tens of billions of American dollars had been poured down the Asian sinkhole. Yet this terrible toll in blood and treasure bought only a return to the conditions of 1950: Korea remained divided at the thirty-eighth parallel. Americans took what little comfort they could from the fact that communism had been “contained” and that the bloodletting had been “limited” to something less than full-scale global war. The shooting had ended, but the Cold War still remained frigidly frozen.

As a military commander, Eisenhower had cultivated a leadership style that self-consciously projected an image of sincerity, fairness, and optimism. He had been widely perceived during the war as an “unmilitary” general, and in the White House he similarly struck the pose of an “unpolitical” president, serenely above the petty partisan fray. He also shrewdly knew that his greatest “asset” was his enjoyment of the “affection and respect of our citizenry,” as he confided to his diary in 1949.

Ike thus seemed ideally suited to soothe the anxieties of troubled Americans, much as a distinguished and well-loved grandfather brings stability to his family. He played this role well as he presided over a decade of shaky peace and shining prosperity. Yet

critics charged that he unwisely hoarded the “asset” of his immense popularity, rather than spend it for a good cause (especially civil rights), and that he cared more for social harmony than for social justice.

## The Rise and Fall of Joseph McCarthy

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One of the first problems Eisenhower faced was the swelling popularity and swaggering power of anti-communist crusader Senator Joseph R. McCarthy. Elected to the Senate on the basis of a trumped-up war-hero record, “Tailgunner Joe” was just an obscure junior senator from Wisconsin until he crashed into the limelight with the spectacular charge that scores of known communists worked in the State Department. In a February 1950 speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy accused Secretary of State Dean Acheson of knowingly employing 205 Communist party members. Pressed to reveal the names, McCarthy later conceded that there were only 57 genuine communists and in the end failed to root out even one. But the speech won him national visibility, and McCarthy’s Republican colleagues realized the usefulness of this kind of attack on the Democratic administration. The supposedly fair-minded Senator Robert Taft urged McCarthy, “If one case doesn’t work, try another.” Ohio’s Senator John Bricker reportedly said, “Joe, you’re a dirty s.o.b., but there are times when you’ve got to have an s.o.b. around, and this is one of them.”

McCarthy’s rhetoric grew bolder and his accusations spread more wildly after the Republican victory in 1952. McCarthy saw the red hand of Moscow everywhere. The Democrats, he charged, “bent to whispered pleas from the lips of traitors.” Incredibly, he even denounced General George Marshall, former army chief of staff and ex-secretary of state, as “part of a conspiracy so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man.”

McCarthy flourished in the seething Cold War atmosphere of suspicion and fear. He was neither the first nor the most effective red-hunter, but he was surely the most ruthless, and he did the most damage to American traditions of fair play and free speech. The careers of countless officials, writers, and actors were ruined after “Low-Blow Joe” had “named” them, often unfairly, as communists or communist sympathizers. Politicians trembled in

the face of such onslaughts, especially when opinion polls showed that a majority of the American people approved of McCarthy’s crusade. His intervention in certain key senatorial elections brought resounding defeat for his enemies.

Eisenhower privately loathed McCarthy but publicly tried to stay out of his way, saying, “I will not get in the gutter with that guy.” Trying to appease the brash demagogue from Wisconsin, Eisenhower allowed him, in effect, to control personnel policy at the State Department. One baleful result was severe damage to the morale and effectiveness of the professional foreign service. In particular, McCarthyite purges deprived the government of a number of Asian specialists who might have counseled a wiser course in Vietnam in the fateful decade that followed.

McCarthy finally bent the bow too far when he attacked the U.S. Army. The embattled military men fought back in thirty-five days of televised hearings in the spring of 1954. The political power of the new broadcast medium was again demonstrated as up to 20 million Americans at a time watched in fascination while a boorish, surly McCarthy publicly cut

*In a moment of high drama during the Army-McCarthy hearings, attorney Joseph Welch (1890–1960) reproached McCarthy in front of a huge national television audience for threatening to slander a young lawyer on Welch's staff:*

"Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness. Little did I dream you could be so cruel as to do an injury to that lad. . . . If it were in my power to forgive you for your reckless cruelty, I would do so. I like to think that I am a gentleman, but your forgiveness will have to come from someone other than me. . . . Have you no decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?"

his own throat by parading his essential meanness and irresponsibility. A few months later, the Senate formally condemned him for "conduct unbecoming a member." Three years later, unwept and unsung, McCarthy died of chronic alcoholism. But "McCarthyism" has passed into the English language as a label for the dangerous forces of unfairness and fear that a democratic society can unleash only at its peril.

## **Desegregating the South**

America counted some 15 million black citizens in 1950, two-thirds of whom still made their homes in the South. There they lived bound by the iron folkways of a segregated society. A rigid set of antiquated rules known as Jim Crow laws governed all aspects of their existence, from the schoolroom to the restroom. Every day of their lives, southern blacks dealt with a bizarre array of separate social arrangements that kept them insulated from whites, economically inferior, and politically powerless. Later generations, black and white alike, would wonder at how their ancestors could have daily made their way through this anthropological museum of cruel and stifling customs.

Blacks everywhere in the South, for example, not only attended segregated schools but were compelled to use separate public toilets, drinking fountains, restaurants, and waiting rooms. Trains and buses had "whites only" and "colored only" seating. Because Alabama hotels were prohibited from serving blacks, the honeymooning Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and his wife, Coretta, spent their wedding night in 1953 in a blacks-only funeral parlor. Only about 20 percent of eligible southern blacks were registered to vote, and fewer than 5 percent were registered in some Deep South states like Mississippi and Alabama. As late as 1960, white southern sensibilities about segregation were so tender that television networks blotted out black speakers at the national political conventions for fear of offending southern stations.

Where the law proved insufficient to enforce this regime, vigilante violence did the job. Six black war veterans, claiming the rights for which they had fought overseas, were murdered in the summer of 1946. A Mississippi mob lynched black fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 for allegedly leering at a white woman. It is small wonder that a black clergyman declared that "everywhere I go in the South the Negro is forced to choose between his hide and his soul."

In his notable book of 1944, *An American Dilemma*, Swedish scholar Gunnar Myrdal had exposed the contradiction between America's professed belief that all men are created equal and its sordid treatment of black citizens. There had been token progress in race relations since the war—Jack Roosevelt ("Jackie") Robinson, for example, had cracked the racial barrier in big-league baseball when the Brooklyn Dodgers signed him in 1947. But for the most part, the national conscience still slumbered, and blacks still suffered.

Increasingly, however, African-Americans refused to suffer in silence. The war had generated a new militancy and restlessness among many members of the black community (see "Makers of America: The Great African-American Migration," pp. 892–893). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had for years pushed doggedly to dismantle the legal underpinnings of segregation and now enjoyed some success. In 1944 the Supreme Court ruled the "white primary" unconstitutional, thereby undermining the status of the Democratic party in the South as a white person's club. And in 1950 NAACP chief legal

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Great African-American Migration

The great social upheavals of World War II continued to transform America well after the guns had fallen silent in 1945. Among the groups most affected by the war's impact were African-Americans. Predominantly a rural, southern people before 1940, African-Americans were propelled by the war into the cities of the North and West, and by 1970 a majority lived outside the states of the old Confederacy. The results of that massive demographic shift were momentous, for African-Americans and for all of American society.

So many black southerners took to the roads during World War II that local officials lost track of their numbers. Black workers on the move crowded into boardinghouses, camped out in cars, and clustered in the juke joints of roadside America en route to their new lives.

Southern cotton fields and tobacco plantations had historically yielded slender sustenance to African-American farmers, most of whom struggled to make ends meet as tenants or sharecroppers. The Great Depression dealt black southerners yet another blow, for when New Deal farm programs paid growers to leave their land fallow, many landlords simply pocketed the money and evicted their tenants—white as well as black—from their now-idle fields. As the Depression deepened, dispossessed former tenants and sharecroppers toiled as seasonal farm workers or languished without jobs, without shelter, and without hope.

The spanking new munitions plants and bustling shipyards of the wartime South at first offered little solace to African-Americans. In 1940 and 1941, the labor-hungry war machine soaked up

unemployed white workers but commonly denied jobs to blacks. When the Army constructed a training camp near Petersburg, Virginia, it imported white carpenters from all parts of the United States, rather than employ the hundreds of skilled black carpenters who lived nearby. Fed up with such injustices, many African-Americans headed for shipyards, factories, foundries, and fields on the Pacific Coast or north of the Mason-Dixon line, where their willing hands found waiting work in abundance.

Angered by the racism that was driving their people from the South, black leaders cajoled President Roosevelt into issuing an executive order in June 1941 declaring that “there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin.” Roosevelt’s action was a tenuous, hesitant step. Yet in its way Executive Order 8802 amounted to a second Emancipation Proclamation, as the federal government for the first time since Reconstruction had committed itself to ensuring justice for African-Americans.

The entire nation was now forced to confront the evil of racism, as bloody wartime riots in Detroit, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities tragically demonstrated. But for the first time, large numbers of blacks had a foothold in the industrial economy, and they were not about to give it up.

By war’s end the great wartime exodus had scattered hundreds of thousands of African-Americans to new regions and new ways of life—a second black diaspora comparable in its scale and consequence to the original black dispersal out of Africa itself. In the post-war decades, blacks continued to pour out of the South in search of economic opportunity and political freedom. In western and northern cities, blacks now competed for housing and jobs, and they also voted—many of them for the first time in their lives.

As early as 1945, NAACP leader Walter White concluded that the war “immeasurably magnified the Negro’s awareness of the disparity between the American profession and practice of democracy.” After the war, he predicted, African-Americans would be “convinced that whatever betterment of their lot is achieved must come largely from their own efforts.” The wartime migration thus set the stage for the success of the civil rights movement that began to stir in the 1950s. With their new political base outside the Old South, and with new support from the Democratic party, African-Americans eventually forced an end to the hated segregationist practices that had caused them to flee the South in the first place.

*A black woman described the day-in, day-out humiliations of life in a Jim Crow South:*

“You could not go to a white restaurant; you sat in a special place at the movie house; and Lord knows, you sat in the back of the bus. It didn’t make any difference if you were rich or poor, if you were black you were nothing. You might have a hundred dollars in your pocket, but if you went to the store you would wait at the side until all the clerks got through with all the white folks, no matter if they didn’t have change for a dollar. Then the clerk would finally look at you and say, ‘Oh, did you want something? I didn’t see you there.’”

franchised. Raised in a prosperous black family in Atlanta and educated partly in the North, he had for most of his life been sheltered from the grossest cruelties of segregation. But his oratorical skill, his passionate devotion to biblical and constitutional conceptions of justice, and his devotion to the non-violent principles of India’s Mohandas Gandhi were destined to thrust him to the forefront of the black revolution that would soon pulse across the South and the rest of the nation.

### **Seeds of the Civil Rights Revolution**

counsel Thurgood Marshall (later a Supreme Court justice), in the case of *Sweatt v. Painter*, wrung from the High Court a ruling that separate professional schools for blacks failed to meet the test of equality.

On a chilly day in December 1955, Rosa Parks, a college-educated black seamstress, made history in Montgomery, Alabama. She boarded a bus, took a seat in the “whites only” section, and refused to give it up. Her arrest for violating the city’s Jim Crow statutes sparked a yearlong black boycott of the city buses and served notice throughout the South that blacks would no longer submit meekly to the absurdities and indignities of segregation.

The Montgomery bus boycott also catapulted to prominence a young pastor at Montgomery’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. Barely twenty-seven years old, King seemed an unlikely champion of the downtrodden and dis-

When President Harry Truman heard about the lynching of black war veterans in 1946, he exclaimed, “My God! I had no idea it was as terrible as that.” The horrified Truman responded by commissioning a report titled “To Secure These Rights.” Following the report’s recommendations, Truman in 1948 ended segregation in federal civil service and ordered “equality of treatment and opportunity” in the armed forces. The military brass at first protested that “the army is not a sociological laboratory,” but manpower shortages in Korea forced the integration of combat units, without the predicted loss of effectiveness. Yet Congress stubbornly resisted passing civil rights legislation, and Truman’s successor, Dwight Eisenhower, showed no real signs

of interest in the racial issue. Within the government that left only the judicial branch as an avenue of advancement for civil rights.

Breaking the path for civil rights progress was broad-jawed Chief Justice Earl Warren, former governor of California. Elevated to the supreme bench by Eisenhower, Warren shocked the president and other traditionalists with his active judicial intervention in previously taboo social issues. Publicly snubbed and privately scorned by President Eisenhower, Warren persisted in encouraging the Court to apply his straightforward populist principles. Critics assailed this “judicial activism,” and “Impeach Earl Warren” signs blossomed along the nation’s highways. But Warren’s defenders argued that the Court was rightly stepping up to confront important social issues—especially civil rights for African-Americans—because the Congress had abdicated its responsibilities by refusing to deal with them. When it came to fundamental rights, Warren’s allies claimed, “legislation by the judiciary” was better than no legislation at all.

The unanimous decision of the Warren Court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in May 1954 was epochal. In a forceful opinion, the learned justices ruled that segregation in the public schools was “inherently unequal” and thus unconstitutional. The uncompromising sweep of the deci-

sion startled conservatives like an exploding time bomb, for it reversed the Court’s earlier declaration of 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (see p. 511) that “separate but equal” facilities were allowable under the Constitution. That doctrine was now dead. Desegregation, the justices insisted, must go ahead with “all deliberate speed.”

The Border States generally made reasonable efforts to comply with this ruling, but in the Deep South die-hards organized “massive resistance” against the Court’s annulment of the sacred principle of “separate but equal.” More than a hundred southern congressional representatives and senators signed the “Declaration of Constitutional Principles” in 1956, pledging their unyielding resistance to desegregation. Several states diverted public funds to hastily created “private” schools, for there the integration order was more difficult to apply. Throughout the South white citizens’ councils, sometimes with fire and hemp, thwarted attempts to make integration a reality. Ten years after the Court’s momentous ruling, fewer than 2 percent of the eligible blacks in the Deep South were sitting in classrooms with whites. The southern translation of “all deliberate speed” was apparently deliberately slow.

### **Crisis at Little Rock**

*Joseph E. Lowery (b. 1923), a Methodist minister and civil rights activist in Mobile, Alabama, reflected on the powerful message of the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott for blacks:*

“You see, what the bus thing did was simply more than withholding patronage from the bus; it was restoring a sense of dignity to the patrons, as best expressed by an oft-quoted black woman in Montgomery who said, ‘Since I’ve been walking, my feet are tired, but my soul’s rested.’ . . . [P]rior to the bus boycotts, the determination of our freedom rested with the courts. With the bus boycott, we determined it. . . . The court could say what it liked, we weren’t gon’ ride—in the back of the bus. We’d walk.”

President Eisenhower was little inclined toward promoting integration. He shied away from employing his vast popularity and the prestige of his office to educate white Americans about the need for racial justice. His personal attitudes may have helped to restrain him. He had grown up in an all-white town and spent his career in a segregated army. He had advised against integration of the armed forces in 1948 and had criticized Truman’s call for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission. He complained that the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* had upset “the customs and convictions of at least two generations of Americans,” and he steadfastly refused to issue a public statement endorsing the Court’s conclusions. “I do not believe,” he explained, “that prejudices, even palpably unjustifiable prejudices, will succumb to compulsion.”

But in September 1957, Ike was forced to act. Orval Faubus, the governor of Arkansas, mobilized



the National Guard to prevent nine black students from enrolling in Little Rock's Central High School. Confronted with a direct challenge to federal authority, Eisenhower sent troops to escort the children to their classes.

In the same year, Congress passed the first Civil Rights Act since Reconstruction days. Eisenhower characteristically reassured a southern senator that the legislation represented "the mildest civil rights

bill possible." It set up a permanent Civil Rights Commission to investigate violations of civil rights and authorized federal injunctions to protect voting rights.

Blacks meanwhile continued to take the civil rights movement into their own hands. Martin Luther King, Jr., formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957. It aimed to mobilize the vast power of the black churches on

behalf of black rights. This was an exceptionally shrewd strategy, because the churches were the largest and best-organized black institutions that had been allowed to flourish in a segregated society.

More spontaneous was the “sit-in” movement launched on February 1, 1960, by four black college freshmen in Greensboro, North Carolina. Without a detailed plan or institutional support, they demanded service at a whites-only Woolworth’s lunch counter. Observing that “fellows like you make our race look bad,” the black waitress refused to serve them. But they kept their seats and returned the next day with nineteen classmates. The following day, eighty-five students joined in; by the end of the week, a thousand. Like a prairie fire, the sit-in movement burned swiftly across the South, swelling into a wave of wade-ins, lie-ins, and pray-ins to compel equal treatment in restaurants, transportation, employment, housing, and voter registration. In April 1960 southern black students formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”) to give more focus and force to these efforts. Young and impassioned, SNCC members would eventually lose patience with the more stately tactics of the SCLC and the even more deliberate legalisms of the NAACP.

## **Eisenhower Republicanism at Home**

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The balding, sixty-two-year-old General Eisenhower had entered the White House in 1953 pledging his administration to a philosophy of “dynamic conservatism.” “In all those things which deal with people, be liberal, be human,” he advised. But when it came to “people’s money, or their economy, or their form of government, be conservative.” This balanced, middle-of-the-road course harmonized with the depression-daunted and war-weary mood of the times. Some critics called Eisenhower’s presidency a case of “the bland leading the bland.”

Above all, Eisenhower strove to balance the federal budget and guard the Republic from what he called “creeping socialism.” The former supreme allied commander put the brakes on Truman’s enormous military buildup, though defense spending still soaked up some 10 percent of the GNP. True to his small-government philosophy, Eisenhower supported the transfer of control over offshore oil fields

from the federal government to the states. Ike also tried to curb the TVA by encouraging a private power company to build a generating plant to compete with the massive public utility spawned by the New Deal. Speaking of the TVA, Eisenhower reportedly said, “By God, if ever we could do it, before we leave here, I’d like to see us *sell* the whole thing, but I suppose we can’t go that far.” Eisenhower’s secretary of health, education, and welfare condemned the free distribution of the Salk antipolio vaccine as “socialized medicine.”

Eisenhower responded to the Mexican government’s worries that illegal Mexican immigration to the United States would undercut the *bracero* program of legally imported farmworkers inaugurated during World War II (see p. 833). In a massive roundup of illegal immigrants, dubbed Operation Wetback in reference to the migrants’ watery route across the Rio Grande, as many as 1 million Mexicans were apprehended and returned to Mexico in 1954.

In yet another of the rude and arbitrary reversals that long have afflicted the government's relations with Native Americans, Eisenhower also sought to cancel the tribal preservation policies of the "Indian New Deal," in place since 1934 (see p. 790). He proposed to "terminate" the tribes as legal entities and to revert to the assimilationist goals of the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 (see p. 597). A few tribes, notably the Klamaths of Oregon, were induced to terminate themselves. In return for cash payments, the Klamaths relinquished all claims on their land and agreed to their legal dissolution as a tribe. But most Indians resisted termination, and the policy was abandoned in 1961.

Eisenhower knew that he could not unscramble all the eggs that had been fried by New Dealers and Fair Dealers for twenty long years. He pragmatically accepted and thereby legitimated many New Dealish programs, stitching them permanently into the

fabric of American society. As he told his brother, "Should any political party attempt to abolish Social Security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history."

In some ways Eisenhower even did the New Deal one better. In a public works project that dwarfed anything the New Dealers had ever dreamed of, Ike backed the Interstate Highway Act of 1956, a \$27 billion plan to build forty-two thousand miles of sleek, fast motorways. Laying down these modern, multilane roads created countless construction jobs and speeded the suburbanization of America. The Highway Act offered juicy benefits to the trucking, automobile, oil, and travel industries, while at the same time robbing the railroads, especially passenger trains, of business. The act also exacerbated problems of air quality and energy consumption, and had especially disastrous consequences for cities, whose once-vibrant downtowns withered away while shopping malls flourished in the far-flung suburbs. One critic carped that the most charitable assumption about the Interstate

Highway Act was that Congress “didn’t have the faintest notion of what they were doing.”

Despite his good intentions, Eisenhower managed to balance the budget only three times in his eight years in office, and in 1959 he incurred the biggest peacetime deficit thus far in American history. Yet critics blamed his fiscal timidity for aggravating several business recessions during the decade, especially the sharp downturn of 1957–1958, which left more than 5 million workers jobless. Economic troubles helped to revive the Democrats, who regained control of both houses of Congress in 1954. Unemployment jitters also helped to spark the merger of the AF of L and the CIO in 1955, ending two decades of bitter division in the house of labor.

### **A New Look in Foreign Policy**

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Mere containment of communism was condemned in the 1952 Republican platform as “negative, futile, and immoral.” Incoming secretary of state John Foster Dulles—a pious churchgoer whose sanctimonious manner was lampooned by critics as “Dull, Duller, Dulles”—promised not merely to stem the red tide but to “roll back” its gains and “liberate captive peoples.” At the same time, the new administration promised to balance the budget by cutting military spending.

How were these two contradictory goals to be reached? Dulles answered with a “policy of boldness” in early 1954. Eisenhower would relegate the army and the navy to the back seat and build up an air fleet of superbombers (called the Strategic Air Command, or SAC) equipped with city-flattening nuclear bombs. These fearsome weapons would inflict “massive retaliation” on the Soviets or the Chinese if they got out of hand. The advantages of this new policy were thought to be its paralyzing nuclear impact and its cheaper price tag when compared with conventional forces—“more bang for the buck.” In 1955 Eisenhower actually threatened nuclear reprisal when Communist China shelled some small islands near the Nationalist Chinese stronghold of Taiwan.

At the same time, Eisenhower sought a thaw in the Cold War through negotiations with the new Soviet leaders who came to power after dictator

Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953. But the new Soviet premier, Nikita Khrushchev, rudely rejected Ike’s heartfelt proposals for peace at the Geneva summit conference in 1955. When Ike called for “open skies” over both the Soviet Union and the United States to prevent either side from miscalculating the other’s military intentions, Khrushchev replied, “This is a very transparent espionage device. . . . You could hardly expect us to take this seriously.” Eisenhower went home empty-handed.

In the end, the touted “new look” in foreign policy proved illusory. In 1956 the Hungarians rose up against their Soviet masters and appealed in vain to the United States for aid, while Moscow reasserted its domination with the unmistakable language of force. Embittered Hungarian freedom fighters naturally accused Uncle Sam of “welshing” when the chips were down. The truth was that America’s mighty nuclear sledgehammer was too heavy a weapon to wield in such a relatively minor crisis. The rigid futility of the “massive retaliation” doctrine was thus starkly exposed. To his dismay, Eisenhower also discovered that the aerial and atomic hardware necessary for “massive retaliation” was staggeringly expensive.

### **The Vietnam Nightmare**

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Europe, thanks to the Marshall Plan and NATO, seemed reasonably secure by the early 1950s, but East Asia was a different can of worms. Nationalist movements had sought for years to throw off the French colonial yoke in Indochina. The Vietnamese leader, goateed Ho Chi Minh, had tried to appeal personally to Woodrow Wilson in Paris as early as 1919 to support self-determination for the peoples of Southeast Asia. Franklin Roosevelt had likewise inspired hope among Asian nationalists.

Cold War events dampened the dreams of anti-colonial Asian peoples. Their leaders—including Ho Chi Minh—became increasingly communist while the United States became increasingly anti-communist. By 1954 American taxpayers were financing nearly 80 percent of the costs of a bottomless French colonial war in Indochina. The United States’ share amounted to about \$1 billion a year.

Despite this massive aid, French forces continued to crumble under Viet Minh guerrilla



The Far East, 1955–1956

pressure. In March 1954 a key French garrison was trapped hopelessly in the fortress of Dienbienphu at the northwestern corner of Vietnam. The new “policy of boldness” was now put to the test. Secretary Dulles, Vice President Nixon, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored intervention with American bombers to help bail out the beleaguered French. But Eisenhower, wary about another war in Asia so soon after Korea and correctly fearing British nonsupport, held back.

Dienbienphu fell to the nationalists, and a multinational conference at Geneva roughly halved Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel (see map). The victorious Ho Chi Minh in the north consented to this arrangement on the assurance that Vietnam-wide elections would be held within two years. In the south a pro-Western government under Ngo Dinh Diem was soon entrenched at Saigon. The Vietnamese never held the promised elections, primarily because the communists seemed certain to win, and Vietnam remained a dangerously divided country.

Eisenhower promised economic and military aid to the autocratic Diem regime, provided that it undertook certain social reforms. Change came at a

snail’s pace, but American aid continued, as communist guerrillas heated up their campaign against Diem. The Americans had evidently backed a losing horse but could see no easy way to call off their bet.

## A False Lull in Europe

The United States had initially backed the French in Indochina in part to win French approval of a plan to rearm West Germany. Despite French fears, the Germans were finally welcomed into the NATO fold in 1955, with an expected contribution of half a million troops. In the same year, the Eastern European countries and the Soviets signed the Warsaw Pact, creating a red military counterweight to the newly bolstered NATO forces in the West.

Despite these hardening military lines, the Cold War seemed to be thawing a bit. Eisenhower earnestly endeavored to cage the nuclear demon by negotiating arms-control agreements with Moscow, and early signs were encouraging. In May 1955 the Soviets rather surprisingly agreed to end the occupation of Austria. A summit conference in July produced little progress on the burning issues, but it bred a conciliatory “spirit of Geneva” that caused a modest blush of optimism to pass over the face of the Western world. Hopes rose further the following year when Soviet Communist party boss Nikita Khrushchev, a burly ex-coal miner, publicly denounced the bloody excesses of Joseph Stalin, the dictator dead since 1953.

Violent events late in 1956 ended the post-Geneva lull. When the liberty-loving Hungarians struck for their freedom, they were ruthlessly overpowered by Soviet tanks. While the Western world looked on in horror, Budapest was turned into a slaughterhouse, and thousands of Hungarian refugees fled their country in panic for the Austrian border. The United States eventually altered its immigration laws to admit thirty thousand Hungarian fugitives.

## Menaces in the Middle East

Increasing fears of Soviet penetration into the oil-rich Middle East prompted Washington to take audacious action. The government of Iran, suppos-

edly influenced by the Kremlin, began to resist the power of the gigantic Western companies that controlled Iranian petroleum. In response, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) engineered a coup in 1953 that installed the youthful shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, as a kind of dictator. Though successful in the short run in securing Iranian oil for the West, the American intervention left a bitter legacy of resentment among many Iranians. More than two decades later, they took their revenge on the shah and his American allies (see p. 972).

The Suez crisis proved far messier than the swift stroke in Iran. President Nasser of Egypt, an ardent Arab nationalist, was seeking funds to build an immense dam on the upper Nile for urgently needed irrigation and power. America and Britain tentatively offered financial help, but when Nasser began to flirt openly with the communist camp, Secretary of State Dulles dramatically withdrew the dam offer. Nasser promptly regained face by nationalizing the Suez Canal, owned chiefly by British and French stockholders.

Nasser's action placed a razor's edge at the jugular vein of Western Europe's oil supply. Secretary Dulles labored strenuously to ward off armed intervention by the cornered European powers—as well

as by the Soviets, who threatened to match any Western invasion by pouring “volunteers” into Egypt and perhaps by launching nuclear attacks on Paris and London. But the United States' apprehensive French and British allies, deliberately keeping Washington in the dark and coordinating their blow with one from Israel, staged a joint assault on Egypt late in October 1956.

For a breathless week, the world teetered on the edge of the abyss. The French and British, however, had made a fatal miscalculation—that the United States would supply them with oil while their Middle Eastern supplies were disrupted, as an oil-rich Uncle Sam had done in the two world wars. But to their unpleasant surprise, a furious President Eisenhower resolved to let them “boil in their own oil” and refused to release emergency supplies. The oil-less allies resentfully withdrew their troops, and for the first time in history, a United Nations police force was sent to maintain order.

The Suez crisis also marked the last time in history that the United States could brandish its “oil weapon.” As recently as 1940, the United States had produced two-thirds of the world's oil, while a scant 5 percent of the global supply flowed from the Middle East. But domestic American reserves had been rapidly depleted. In 1948 the United States had

become a net oil importer. Its days as an “oil power” clearly were numbered as the economic and strategic importance of the Middle East oil region grew dramatically.

The U.S. president and Congress proclaimed the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957, pledging U.S. military and economic aid to Middle Eastern nations threatened by communist aggression. The real threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East, however, was not communism but nationalism, as Nasser’s wild popularity among the masses of all Arab countries demonstrated. The poor, sandy sheikdoms increasingly resolved to reap for themselves the lion’s share of the enormous oil wealth that Western companies pumped out of the scorching Middle Eastern deserts. In a move with portentous implications, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran joined with Venezuela in 1960 to form the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In the next two decades, OPEC’s stranglehold on the Western economies would tighten to a degree that even Nasser could not have imagined.

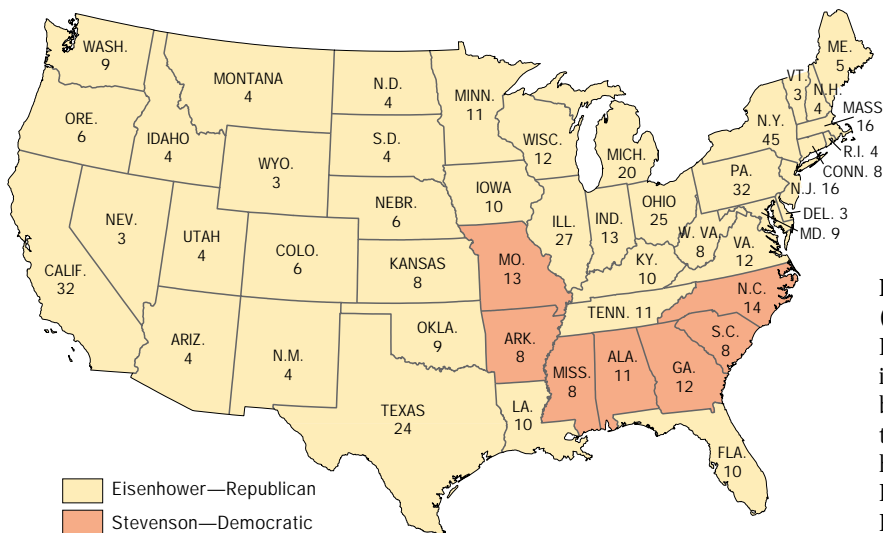
### Round Two for Ike

The election of 1956 was a replay of the 1952 contest, with President Eisenhower—no worse for wear after a heart attack in 1955 and major abdominal

surgery in 1956—pitted once more against Adlai Stevenson. Democrats were hard-pressed to find an issue with which to attack the genial general in a time of prosperity and peace, and the voters made it clear that they still liked Ike. Eisenhower piled up an enormous majority of 35,590,472 popular votes to Stevenson’s 26,022,752; in the electoral college, the count was even more unbalanced at 457 to 73. But despite the GOP national chairman’s boast that “any jockey would look good riding Ike,” in fact the general’s coattails this time were not so stiff or broad. He failed to win for his party either house of Congress—the first time since Zachary Taylor’s election in 1848 that a winning president had headed such a losing ticket.

In fragile health, Eisenhower began his second term as a part-time president. Critics charged that he kept his hands on his golf clubs, fly rod, and shotgun more often than on the levers of power. But in his last years in office, Ike rallied himself to do less golfing and more governing.

A key area in which the president bestirred himself was labor legislation. A drastic labor-reform bill in 1959 grew out of recurrent strikes in critical industries and scandalous revelations of gangsterism in unionist high echelons. In particular, fraud and brass-knuckle tactics tainted the Teamsters Union. The millionaire Teamster chief, “Dave” Beck, invoked the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination 209 times before a Senate investigat-



**Presidential Election of 1956 (with electoral vote by state)** Eisenhower made even deeper inroads into the traditional bastion of Democratic strength, the once-solid South, than he had in 1952. Louisiana went Republican for the first time since Reconstruction days, in 1876.

ing committee in 1957 to avoid telling what he had done with \$320,000. He was later sentenced to prison for embezzlement. When his union defiantly elected the tough-fisted James R. Hoffa as his successor, the AF of L-CIO expelled the Teamsters. The Senate committee reported that in fifteen years, union officials had stolen or misappropriated some \$10 million. Hoffa later was jailed for jury tampering, served part of his sentence, and disappeared—evidently the victim of the gangsters whom he had apparently crossed.

Even labor's friends agreed that the house of labor needed a thorough housecleaning. Congress rallied to devise a tough labor-reform bill. Teamster boss Hoffa threatened to defeat for reelection congressional representatives who dared to vote for the proposed labor law. Eisenhower responded with a dramatic television appeal, and Congress in 1959

passed the Landrum-Griffin Act. It was designed to bring labor leaders to book for financial shenanigans and to prevent bullying tactics. Seizing the opportune moment, antilaborites also forced into the bill prohibitions against “secondary boycotts” and certain kinds of picketing.

## **The Race with the Soviets into Space**

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Soviet scientists astounded the world on October 4, 1957, by lofting into orbit around the globe a beeping “baby moon” (*Sputnik I*) weighing 184 pounds. A month later they topped their own ace by sending aloft a larger satellite (*Sputnik II*) weighing 1,120 pounds and carrying a dog.

This amazing scientific breakthrough shattered American self-confidence. The Soviets had long been trying to convince the uncommitted nations that the shortcut to superior industrial production lay through communism, and the *Sputniks* gave credence to their claim. America had seemingly taken a back seat in scientific achievement. Envious “backward” nations laughed at America’s discomfiture, all the more so because the Soviets were occupying outer space while American troops were occupying the high school in Little Rock.

Military implications of these human-made satellites proved sobering. If the Soviets could fire heavy objects into outer space, they certainly could reach America with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Old-soldier Eisenhower, adopting a father-knows-best attitude toward the Soviet “gimmick,” remarked that it should not cause “one iota” of concern. Others, chiefly Republicans, blamed the Truman administration for having spent more for supporting peanut propagation than for supporting a missile program. Agonizing soul-searching led to the conclusion that while the United States was well advanced on a broad scientific front, including color television, the Soviets had gone all out for rocketry. Experts testified that America’s manned bombers were still a powerful deterrent, but heroic efforts were needed if the alleged “missile gap” was not to widen.

“Rocket fever” swept the nation. Eisenhower established the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and directed billions of



dollars to missile development. After humiliating and well-advertised failures—notably the Vanguard missile, which blew up on national television just a few feet above the ground in 1957—in February 1958 the United States managed to put into orbit a grapefruit-sized satellite weighing 2.5 pounds. By the end of the decade, several satellites had been launched, and the United States had successfully tested its own ICBMs.

The *Sputnik* success led to a critical comparison of the American educational system, which was already under fire as too easygoing, with that of the Soviet Union. A strong move now developed in the United States to replace “frills” with solid subjects—to substitute square roots for square dancing. Congress rejected demands for federal scholarships, but late in 1958 the National Defense and Education Act (NDEA) authorized \$887 million in loans to needy college students and in grants for the improvement of teaching the sciences and languages.

## **The Continuing Cold War**

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The fantastic race toward nuclear annihilation continued unabated. Humanity-minded scientists urged that nuclear tests be stopped before the atmosphere became so polluted as to produce generations of deformed mutants. The Soviets, after completing an intensive series of exceptionally “dirty” tests, proclaimed a suspension in March 1958 and urged the Western world to follow. Beginning in October 1958, Washington did halt both underground and atmospheric testing. But attempts to regularize such suspensions by proper inspection sank on the reef of mutual mistrust.

Thermonuclear suicide seemed nearer in July 1958, when both Egyptian and communist plottings threatened to engulf Western-oriented Lebanon. After its president had called for aid under the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States boldly landed several thousand troops and helped restore order without taking a single life.

The burly Khrushchev, seeking new propaganda laurels, was eager to meet with Eisenhower and pave the way for a “summit conference” with Western leaders. Despite grave misgivings as to any tangible results, the president invited him to America

in 1959. Arriving in New York, Khrushchev appeared before the U.N. General Assembly and dramatically resurrected the ancient Soviet proposal of complete disarmament. But he offered no practical means of achieving this end.

A result of this tour was a meeting at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland. Khrushchev emerged saying that his ultimatum for the evacuation of Berlin would be extended indefinitely. The relieved world gave prayerful but premature thanks for the “spirit of Camp David.”

The Camp David spirit quickly evaporated when the follow-up Paris “summit conference,” scheduled for May 1960, turned out to be an incredible fiasco. Both Moscow and Washington had publicly taken a firm stand on the burning Berlin issue, and neither could risk a public backdown. Then, on the eve of the conference, an American U-2 spy plane was shot down deep in the heart of Russia. After bungling bureaucratic denials in Washington, “honest Ike” took the unprecedented step of assuming personal responsibility. Khrushchev stormed

into Paris filling the air with invective, and the conference collapsed before it could get off the ground. The concord of Camp David was replaced with the grapes of wrath.

## **Cuba's Castroism Spells Communism**

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Latin Americans bitterly resented Uncle Sam's lavishing of billions of dollars on Europe, while doling out only millions to the poor relations to the south. They also chafed at Washington's continuing habit of intervening in Latin American affairs—as in a CIA-directed coup that ousted a leftist government in Guatemala in 1954. On the other hand, Washington continued to support—even decorate—bloody dictators who claimed to be combatting communists.

Most ominous of all was the communist beachhead in Cuba. The ironfisted dictator Fulgencio Batista had encouraged huge investments of American capital, and Washington in turn had given him some support. When black-bearded Dr. Fidel Castro engineered a revolution early in 1959, he denounced the Yankee imperialists and began to expropriate valuable American properties in pursuing a land-distribution program. Washington, finally losing patience, released Cuba from “imperialistic slavery” by cutting off the heavy U.S. imports of Cuban sugar. Castro retaliated with further wholesale confiscations of Yankee property and in effect made his left-wing dictatorship an economic and military satellite of Moscow. An exodus of anti-Castro Cubans headed for the United States, especially Florida. Nearly 1 million arrived between 1960 and 2000. Washington broke diplomatic relations with Cuba early in 1961.

Americans talked seriously of invoking the Monroe Doctrine before the Soviets set up a communist base only ninety miles from their shores. Khrushchev angrily proclaimed that the Monroe Doctrine was dead and indicated that he would shower missiles upon the United States if it attacked his good friend Castro.

The Cuban revolution, which Castro sought to “export” to his neighbors, brought other significant responses. At San Jose, Costa Rica, in August 1960, the United States induced the Organization of American States to condemn (unenthusiastically)

communist infiltration into the Americas. President Eisenhower, whom Castro dubbed “the senile White House golfer,” hastily proposed a long-deferred “Marshall Plan” for Latin America. Congress responded to his recommendation with an initial authorization of \$500 million. The Latin Americans had Castro to thank for attention that many of them regarded as too little and too late.

## **Kennedy Challenges Nixon for the Presidency**

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As Republicans approached the presidential campaign of 1960, Vice President Nixon was their heir apparent. To many he was a gifted party leader, to others a ruthless opportunist. The “old” Nixon had been a no-holds-barred campaigner, especially in assailing Democrats and left-wingers. The “new” Nixon was represented as a mature, seasoned statesman. More in the limelight than any earlier vice president, he had shouldered heavy responsibilities and had traveled globally as a “troubleshooter” in various capacities. He had vigorously defended American democracy in a famous “kitchen debate” with Khrushchev in Moscow in 1959. His supporters, flourishing a telling photograph of this finger-pointing episode, claimed that he alone knew how to “stand up to” the Soviets.

Nixon was nominated unanimously on the first ballot in Chicago. His running mate was the patrician Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., of Massachusetts (grandson of Woodrow Wilson's arch-foe), who had served conspicuously for seven years as the U.S. representative to the United Nations.

By contrast, the Democratic race for the presidential nomination started as a free-for-all. John F. Kennedy—a tall, youthful, tooth-flashing millionaire senator from Massachusetts—won impressive victories in the primaries. He then scored a first-ballot triumph in Los Angeles over his closest rival, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, the Senate majority leader from Texas. A disappointed South was not completely appeased when Johnson accepted second place on the ticket in an eleventh-hour marriage of convenience. Kennedy's challenging acceptance speech called upon the American people for sacrifices to achieve their potential greatness, which he hailed as the New Frontier.

*Candidate John F. Kennedy (1917–1963), in a speech to a Houston group of Protestant ministers (September 12, 1960), declared,*

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President, should he be a Catholic, how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote . . . and where no man is denied public office because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.”

## The Presidential Issues of 1960

Bigotry inevitably showed its snarling face. Senator Kennedy was a Roman Catholic, the first to be nominated since Al Smith's ill-starred campaign in 1928. Smear artists revived the ancient charges about the Pope's controlling the White House. Kennedy pointed to his fourteen years of service in Congress, denied that he would be swayed by Rome, and asked if some 40 million Catholic Americans were to be condemned to second-class citizenship from birth.

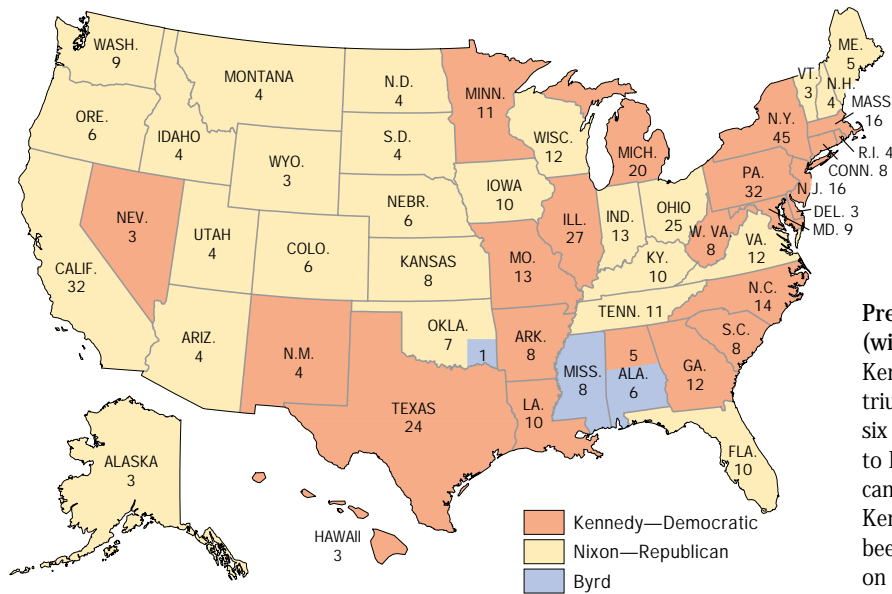
Kennedy's Catholicism aroused misgivings in the Protestant, Bible Belt South, which was ordinarily Democratic. “I fear Catholicism more than I fear communism,” declaimed one Baptist minister in North Carolina. But the religious issue largely canceled itself out. If many southern Democrats stayed away from the polls because of Kennedy's Catholicism, northern Democrats in unusually large numbers supported Kennedy because of the bitter attacks on their Catholic faith.

Kennedy charged that the Soviets, with their nuclear bombs and circling *Sputniks*, had gained on America in prestige and power. Nixon, forced to defend the dying administration, insisted that the nation's prestige had not slipped, although Kennedy was causing it to do so by his unpatriotic talk.

Television may well have tipped the scales. Nixon agreed to meet Kennedy in four so-called debates. The contestants crossed words in millions of living rooms before audiences estimated at 60 million or more. Nobody “won” the debates. But Kennedy at least held his own and did not suffer by comparison with the more “experienced” Nixon. The debates demonstrated the importance of image in a television age. Many viewers found Kennedy's glamour and vitality far more appealing than Nixon's tired and pallid appearance.

Kennedy squeezed through by the rather comfortable margin of 303 electoral votes to 219,\* but with the breathtakingly close popular margin of only 118,574 votes out of over 68 million cast. Like Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy ran well in the large industrial centers, where he had strong support from workers, Catholics, and African-Americans. (He had solicitously telephoned the pregnant Coretta King, whose husband, Martin Luther King, Jr., was then imprisoned in Georgia for a sit-in.)

\*Six Democratic electors in Alabama, all eight unpledged Democratic electors in Mississippi, and one Republican elector in Oklahoma voted for Senator Harry F. Byrd.



**Presidential Election of 1960 (with electoral vote by state)**  
 Kennedy owed his hairbreadth triumph to his victories in twenty-six of the forty largest cities—and to Lyndon Johnson's strenuous campaigning in the South, where Kennedy's Catholicism may have been a hotter issue than his stand on civil rights.

Although losing a few seats, the Democrats swept both houses of Congress by wide margins. John Fitzgerald Kennedy—the youngest man to date and the first Catholic to be elected president—was free to set out for his New Frontier, provided that the die-hard conservatives in his party would join the wagon train.

## An Old General Fades Away

President Eisenhower continued to enjoy extraordinary popularity to the final curtain. Despite Democratic jibes about “eight years of golfing and goofing,” of “putting and puttering,” Eisenhower was universally admired and respected for his dignity, decency, sincerity, goodwill, and moderation.

Pessimists had predicted that Eisenhower would be a seriously crippled “lame duck” during his second term, owing to the barrier against reelection erected by the Twenty-second Amendment, ratified in 1951. (See the Appendix.) In truth, he displayed more vigor, more political know-how, and more aggressive leadership during his last two years as president than ever before. For an unprecedented six years, from 1955 to 1961, Congress remained in Democratic hands, yet Eisenhower exerted unusual control over the legislative branch. He wielded the

veto 169 times, and only twice was his nay overridden by the required two-thirds vote.

America was fabulously prosperous in the Eisenhower years, despite pockets of poverty and unemployment, recurrent recessions, and perennial farm problems. “Old Glory” could now proudly display fifty stars. Alaska attained statehood in 1959, as did Hawaii. Alaska, though gigantic, was thinly populated and noncontiguous, but these objections were overcome in a Democratic Congress that expected Alaska to vote Democratic. Hawaii had ample population (largely of Asian descent), advanced democratic institutions, and more acreage than the mainland states of Rhode Island, Delaware, or Connecticut.

Though a crusading general, Eisenhower as president mounted no moral crusade for civil rights. This was perhaps his greatest failing. Yet he was no bigot, and he had done far more than grin away problems and tread water. As a Republican president, he had further woven the reforms of the Democratic New Deal and Fair Deal into the fabric of national life. As a former general, he had exercised wise restraint in his use of military power and had soberly guided foreign policy away from countless threats to peace. The old soldier left office crestfallen at his failure to end the arms race with the Soviets. Yet he had ended one war and avoided all others. As the decades lengthened, appreciation of him grew.

*After campaigning with promises to reduce the defense budget, President Dwight Eisenhower (1890–1969) presided over unprecedented increases in military spending. In his Farewell Address on January 17, 1961, he sagely but ironically warned against the menace his own policies had nurtured:*

“This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. . . . In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.”

## Changing Economic Patterns

The continuing post–World War II economic boom wrought wondrous changes in American society in the 1950s. Prosperity triggered a fabulous surge in home construction, as a nation of renters became a nation of homeowners. One of every four homes standing in America in 1960 had been built during the 1950s, and 83 percent of those new homes were in suburbia.

More than ever, science and technology drove economic growth. The invention of the transistor in 1948 sparked a revolution in electronics, and especially in computers. The first electronic computers assembled in the 1940s were massive machines with hundreds of miles of wiring and thousands of fickle cathode ray tubes. Transistors and, later, printed circuits on silicon wafers made possible dramatic miniaturization and phenomenal computational speed. Computer giant International Business Machines (IBM) expanded robustly, becoming *the* prototype of the “high-tech” corporation in the dawning “information age.” Eventually, personal computers and even inexpensive pocket calculators contained more computing power than room-size early models. Computers transformed age-old business practices like billing and inventory control and opened genuine new frontiers in areas

like airline scheduling, high-speed printing, and telecommunications.

Aerospace industries also grew fantastically in the 1950s, thanks both to Eisenhower’s aggressive buildup of the Strategic Air Command and to a robustly expanding passenger airline business—and to the connections between military and civilian aircraft production. In 1957 the Seattle-based Boeing Company brought out the first large passenger jet, the “707.” Its design owed much to the previous development of SAC’s long-range strategic bomber, the B-52. Two years later Boeing delivered the first presidential jet, a specially modified 707. “Air Force One” dazzled President Eisenhower with its speed and comfort.

The nature of the work force was also changing. A sort of quiet revolution was marked in 1956 when “white-collar” workers for the first time outnumbered “blue-collar” workers, signaling the passage from an industrial to a postindustrial era. Keeping pace with that fundamental transformation, organized labor withered along with the smokestack industries that had been its sustenance. Union membership as a percentage of the labor force

**Occupational Distribution of Workingwomen, 1900–1998\***

	1900	1920	1940	1960	1980	1998
Total white-collar workers <sup>†</sup>	17.8%	38.8%	44.9%	52.5%	65.6%	73.8%
Clerical workers	4.0	18.7	21.5	28.7	30.5	38.9
Manual workers	27.8	23.8	21.6	18.0	14.8	9.7
Farm workers	18.9	13.5	4.0	1.8	1.0	1.0
Service workers <sup>‡</sup>	35.5	23.9	29.4	21.9	18.1	15.4

\*Major categories; percentage of all women workers, age fourteen and older, in each category.

<sup>†</sup>Includes clerical, sales, professional, and technical workers, managers and officials.

<sup>‡</sup>Includes domestic servants.

(Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

peaked at about 35 percent in 1954 and then went into steady decline. Some observers concluded that the union movement had played out its historic role of empowering workers and ensuring economic justice, and that unions would eventually disappear altogether in the postindustrial era.

The surge in white-collar employment opened special opportunities for women. When World War II ended, most women, including those who had worked in war plants, returned to highly conventional female roles as wives and mothers—the remarkably prolific mothers of the huge “baby-boom” generation. A “cult of domesticity” emerged in popular culture to celebrate those eternal feminine functions. When 1950s television programs like “Ozzie and Harriet” or “Leave It to Beaver” depicted idyllic suburban families with a working husband, two children, and a wife who did not work outside the home, they did so without irony; much of middle-class America really did live that way. But as the 1950s progressed, another quiet revolution was gaining momentum that was destined to transform women’s roles and even the character of the American family.

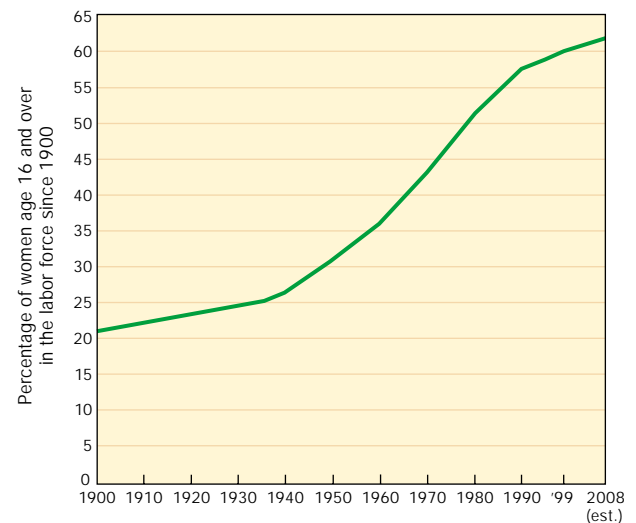
Of some 40 million new jobs created in the three decades after 1950, more than 30 million were in clerical and service work. Women filled the huge majority of these new positions. They were the principal employment beneficiaries of the postwar era, creating an extensive “pink-collar ghetto” of occupations that were dominated by women.

Exploding employment opportunities for women in the 1950s unleashed a groundswell of

social and psychological shocks that mounted to tidal-wave proportions in the decades that followed. From one perspective, women’s surge into the workplace was nothing new at all, but only a return to the days when the United States was an agricultural nation, and men and women alike toiled on the family farm. But the urban age was not the agricultural age, and women’s new dual role as *both* workers *and* homemakers raised urgent questions about family life and about traditional definitions of gender differences.

**Women in the Labor Force, 1900–2008 (est.)**

(Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)



Feminist Betty Friedan gave focus and fuel to women's feelings in 1963 when she published *The Feminine Mystique*, a runaway best-seller and a classic of feminist protest literature that launched the modern women's movement. Friedan spoke in rousing accents to millions of able, educated

women who applauded her indictment of the stifling boredom of suburban housewifery. Many of those women were already working for wages, but they were also struggling against the guilt and frustration of leading an "unfeminine" life as defined by the postwar "cult of domesticity."

## Consumer Culture in the Fifties

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The 1950s witnessed a huge expansion of the middle class and the blossoming of a consumer culture. Diner's Club introduced the plastic credit card in 1950, and four years later the first McDonald's hamburger stand opened in San Bernardino, California. Also in 1955, Disneyland opened its doors in Anaheim, California. These innovations—easy credit, high-volume “fast-food” production, and new forms of recreation—were harbingers of an emerging new lifestyle of leisure and affluence that was in full flower by the decade's end.

Crucial to the development of that lifestyle was the rapid rise of the new technology of television. Only 6 TV stations were broadcasting in 1946; a decade later 442 stations were operating. TV sets were rich people's novelties in the 1940s, but 7 million sets were sold in 1951. By 1960 virtually every American home had one, in a stunning display of the speed with which new technologies can pervade and

transform modern societies. Attendance at movies sank as the entertainment industry changed its focus from the silver screen to the picture tube. By the mid-1950s, advertisers annually spent \$10 billion to hawk their wares on television, while critics fumed that the wildly popular new mass medium was degrading the public's aesthetic, social, moral, political, and educational standards. To the question, “Why is television called a medium?” pundits replied, “Because it's never rare or well done.”

Even religion capitalized on the powerful new electronic pulpit. “Televangelists” like the Baptist Billy Graham, the Pentecostal Holiness preacher Oral Roberts, and the Roman Catholic Fulton J. Sheen took to the airwaves to spread the Christian gospel. Television also catalyzed the commercialization of professional sports, as viewing audiences that once numbered in the stadium-capacity thousands could now be counted in the couch-potato millions.

Sports also reflected the shift in population toward the West and South. In 1958 baseball's New



York Giants moved to San Francisco and the Brooklyn Dodgers abandoned Flatbush for Los Angeles. Those moves touched off a new westward movement of sports franchises. Shifting population and spreading affluence led eventually to substantial expansion of the major baseball leagues and the principal football and basketball leagues as well.

Popular music was dramatically transformed in the fifties. The chief revolutionary was Elvis Presley, a white singer born in 1935 in Tupelo, Mississippi. Fusing black rhythm and blues with white bluegrass and country styles, Elvis created a new musical idiom known forever after as rock and roll. Rock was “crossover” music, carrying its heavy beat and driving rhythms across the cultural divide that separated black and white musical traditions. Listening and dancing to it became a kind of religious rite for the millions of baby boomers coming of age in the 1950s, and Presley—with his fleshy face, pouting lips, and antic, sexually suggestive gyrations—was its high priest. Bloated by fame, fortune, and drugs, he died in 1977 at the age of forty-two.

Traditionalists were repelled by Presley, and they found much more to upset them in the affluent fifties. Movie star Marilyn Monroe, with her ingenuous smile and mandolin-curved hips, helped to

popularize—and commercialize—new standards of sensuous sexuality. So did *Playboy* magazine, first published in 1955. As the decade closed, Americans were well on their way to becoming free-spending consumers of mass-produced, standardized products, which were advertised on the electronic medium of television and often sold for their alleged sexual allure.

Many critics lamented the implications of this new consumerist lifestyle. Harvard sociologist David Riesman portrayed the postwar generation as a pack of conformists in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), as did William H. Whyte, Jr., in *The Organization Man*. Novelist Sloan Wilson explored a similar theme in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955). Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith questioned the relation between private wealth and the public good in a series of books beginning with *The Affluent Society* (1958). The postwar explosion of prosperity, Galbraith claimed, had produced a troublesome combination of private opulence amid public squalor. Americans had televisions in their homes but garbage in their streets. They ate rich food but breathed foul air. Galbraith’s call for social spending to match private purchasing proved highly influential in the 1960s. Sociologist Daniel Bell, in *The*

*Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), found even deeper paradoxes of prosperity. The hedonistic “consumer ethic” of modern capitalism, he argued, might undermine the older “work ethic” and thus destroy capitalism’s very productive capacity. Collusion at the highest levels of the “military-industrial complex” was the subject of *The Power Elite* (1956), an influential piece of modern muckraking by radical sociologist C. Wright Mills, who became a hero to “New Left” student activists in the 1960s.

### **The Life of the Mind in Postwar America**

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America’s affluence in the heady post–World War II decades was matched by a mother lode of literary gems. In fiction writing some of the prewar realists continued to ply their trade, notably Ernest Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). A Nobel laureate in 1954, Hemingway was dead by his own duck gun in 1961. John Steinbeck, another prewar writer who persisted in graphic portrayals of American society, such as *East of Eden* (1952) and *Travels with Charley* (1962), received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962, the seventh American to be so honored.

Curiously, World War II did not inspire the same kind of literary outpouring that World War I had. Searing realism, the trademark style of war writers in the 1920s, characterized the earliest novels that portrayed soldierly life in World War II, such as Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) and James Jones’s *From Here to Eternity* (1951). But as time passed, realistic writing fell from favor. Authors tended increasingly to write about the war in fantastic and even psychedelic prose. Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961) dealt with the improbable antics and anguish of American airmen in the wartime Mediterranean. A savage satire, it made readers hurt when they laughed. The supercharged imagination of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., poured forth works of puzzling complexity in sometimes impenetrably inventive prose, including the dark comedy war tale *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969).

The dilemmas created by the new mobility and affluence of American life were explored by Pennsylvania-born John Updike in books like *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and *Couples* (1968), and by Massachusetts-bred John Cheever in *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957) and *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964). Louis Auchincloss

wrote elegantly about upper-class New Yorkers. Gore Vidal penned a series of intriguing historical novels, as well as several impish and always iconoclastic works, including *Myra Breckinridge* (1968), about a reincarnated transsexual. Together, these writers constituted the rear guard of an older, WASP (white Angle-Saxon Protestant) elite that had long dominated American writing.

Poetry also flowered in the postwar era, though poets were often highly critical, even deeply despairing, about the character of American life. Older poets were still active, including cantankerous Ezra Pound, jailed after the war in a U.S. Army detention center near Pisa, Italy, for alleged collaboration with the Fascists. Connecticut insurance executive Wallace Stevens and New Jersey pediatrician William Carlos Williams continued after 1945 to pursue second careers as prolific poets of world-class stature. But younger poets were coming to the fore during the postwar period. Pacific northwestern Theodore Roethke wrote lyrically about the

land until his death by drowning in Puget Sound in 1963. Robert Lowell, descended from a long line of patrician New Englanders, sought to apply the wisdom of the Puritan past to the perplexing present in allegorical poems like *For the Union Dead* (1964). Troubled Sylvia Plath crafted the moving verses of *Ariel* (published posthumously in 1966) and a disturbing novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963), but her career was cut short when she took her own life in 1963. Anne Sexton produced brooding autobiographical poems until her death by apparent suicide in 1974. Another brilliant poet of the period, John Berryman, ended it all in 1972 by leaping from a Minneapolis bridge onto the frozen bank of the Mississippi River. Writing poetry seemed to be a dangerous pursuit in modern America. The life of the poet, it was said, began in sadness and ended in madness.

Playwrights were also active. Tennessee Williams wrote a series of searing dramas about psychological misfits struggling to hold themselves together amid the disintegrating forces of modern life. Noteworthy were *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Arthur Miller brought to the stage searching probes of American values, notably *Death of a Salesman*

(1949) and *The Crucible* (1953), which treated the Salem witch trials as a dark parable warning against the dangers of McCarthyism. Lorraine Hansberry offered an affecting portrait of African-American life in *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). In the 1960s Edward Albee exposed the rapacious underside of middle-class life in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

Books by black authors also made the best-seller lists, beginning with Richard Wright's chilling portrait of a black Chicago killer in *Native Son* (1940). Ralph Ellison depicted the black individual's quest for personal identity in *Invisible Man* (1952), one of the most haunting novels of the postwar era. James Baldwin won plaudits as a novelist and essayist, particularly for his sensitive reflections on the racial question in *The Fire Next Time* (1963). Black nationalist LeRoi Jones, who changed his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka, crafted powerful plays like *Dutchman* (1964).

The South boasted a literary renaissance, led by veteran Mississippi author William Faulkner, who was a Nobel recipient in 1950. Fellow Mississippians Walker Percy and Eudora Welty grasped the falling torch from the failing Faulkner, who died in 1962. Tennessean Robert Penn Warren immortalized

Louisiana politico Huey Long in *All the King's Men* (1946). Flannery O'Connor wrote perceptively of her native Georgia, and Virginian William Styron confronted the harsh history of his home state in a controversial fictional representation of an 1831 slave rebellion, *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967).

Especially bountiful was the harvest of books by Jewish novelists. Some critics quipped that a knowledge of Yiddish was becoming necessary to understand much of the dialogue presented in modern American novels. J. D. Salinger painted an unforgettable portrait of a sensitive, upper-class, Anglo-Saxon adolescent in *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), but other Jewish writers found their favorite subject matter in the experience of lower- and middle-class Jewish immigrants. Bernard Malamud rendered a touching portrait of a family of New York Jewish storekeepers in *The Assistant* (1957). Malamud also explored the mythic qualities of the culture of base-

ball in *The Natural* (1952). Philip Roth wrote comically about young New Jersey suburbanites in *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959) and penned an uproarious account of a sexually obsessed middle-aged New Yorker in *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). Chicagoan Saul Bellow contributed masterful sketches of Jewish urban and literary life in landmark books like *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) and *Herzog* (1962). Bellow became the eighth American Nobel laureate for literature in 1977. Isaac Bashevis Singer immigrated to America from Poland in the 1930s and continued to write in Yiddish. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1978. E. L. Doctorow employed Old Testament themes in his fictional account of atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, *The Book of Daniel* (1971), and later he imaginatively recast other modern historical materials in books like *Ragtime* (1975), *World's Fair* (1985), and *Billy Bathgate* (1989).

## Chronology

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|---|---|
| <p><b>1952</b> Eisenhower defeats Stevenson for presidency<br/>Hemingway publishes <i>The Old Man and the Sea</i></p>   | <p><b>1957</b> Little Rock school desegregation crisis<br/>Civil Rights Act passed<br/>Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) formed<br/>Eisenhower Doctrine<br/>Soviet Union launches <i>Sputnik</i> satellites</p> |
| <p><b>1953</b> CIA-engineered coup installs shah of Iran</p>  | <p><b>1958</b> U.S. troops sent to Lebanon<br/>NDEA authorizes loans and grants for science and language education<br/>Galbraith publishes <i>The Affluent Society</i></p>  |
| <p><b>1954</b> French defeated in Vietnam<br/>Army-McCarthy hearings<br/><i>Brown v. Board of Education</i><br/>SEATO formed<br/>First McDonald's hamburger stand opens<br/>CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala</p>                                     | <p><b>1958-</b></p>   |
| <p><b>1955</b> Montgomery bus boycott by blacks begins; emergence of Martin Luther King, Jr.<br/>Geneva summit meeting<br/>Warsaw Pact signed<br/>AF of L merges with CIO<br/>Tennessee Williams's <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> first performed</p> | <p><b>1959</b> Berlin crisis</p> <p><b>1959</b> Castro leads Cuban revolution<br/>Landrum-Griffin Act<br/>Alaska and Hawaii attain statehood</p>  |
| <p><b>1956</b> Soviets crush Hungarian revolt<br/>Suez crisis<br/>Eisenhower defeats Stevenson for presidency<br/>Mills publishes <i>The Power Elite</i></p>  | <p><b>1960</b> Sit-in movement for civil rights begins<br/>U-2 incident sabotages Paris summit<br/>OPEC formed<br/>Kennedy defeats Nixon for presidency</p>   |

For further reading, see page A26 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

# The Stormy Sixties

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1960–1968

*Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend  
and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a  
new generation of Americans.*

JOHN F. KENNEDY, INAUGURAL 1961

Complacent and comfortable as the 1950s closed, Americans elected in 1960 a young, vigorous president who pledged “to get the country moving again.” Neither the nation nor the new president had any inkling as the new decade opened just how action-packed it would be, both at home and abroad. The 1960s would bring a sexual revolution, a civil rights revolution, the emergence of a “youth culture,” a devastating war in Vietnam, and the beginnings, at least, of a feminist revolution. By the end of the stormy sixties, many Americans would yearn nostalgically for the comparative calm of the fifties.

## Kennedy’s “New Frontier” Spirit

Hatless and topcoatless in the twenty-two-degree chill, John F. Kennedy delivered a stirring inaugural address on January 20, 1961. Tall, elegantly handsome, speaking crisply and with staccato finger jabs

at the air, Kennedy personified the glamour and vitality of the new administration. The youngest president ever elected, he assembled one of the youngest cabinets, including his thirty-five-year-old brother, Robert, as attorney general. “Bobby,” the president quipped, would find “some legal experience” useful when he began to practice law. The new attorney general set out, among other reforms, to recast the priorities of the FBI. The bureau deployed nearly a thousand agents on “internal security” work but targeted only a dozen against organized crime and gave virtually no attention to civil rights violations. Robert Kennedy’s efforts were stoutly resisted by J. Edgar Hoover, who had served as FBI director longer than the new attorney general had been alive. Business whiz Robert S. McNamara left the presidency of the Ford Motor Company to take over the Defense Department. Along with other youthful, talented advisers, these appointees made up an inner circle of “the best and the brightest” men around the president.

From the outset Kennedy inspired high expectations, especially among the young. His challenge of a “New Frontier” quickened patriotic pulses. He brought a warm heart to the Cold War when he proposed the Peace Corps, an army of idealistic and mostly youthful volunteers to bring American skills to underdeveloped countries. He summoned citizens to service with his clarion call to “ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country.”

Himself Harvard-educated, Kennedy and his Ivy League lieutenants (heavily from Harvard) radiated confidence in their abilities. The president’s personal grace and wit won him the deep affection of many of his fellow citizens. A journalist called Kennedy “the most seductive man I’ve ever met. He exuded a sense of vibrant life and humor that seemed naturally to bubble up out of him.” In an unprecedented gesture,

he invited white-maned poet Robert Frost to speak at his inaugural ceremonies. The old Yankee versifier shrewdly took stock of the situation. “You’re something of Irish and I suppose something of Harvard,” he told Kennedy—and advised him to be more Irish than Harvard.

### **The New Frontier at Home**

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Kennedy came into office with fragile Democratic majorities in Congress. Southern Democrats threatened to team up with Republicans and ax New Frontier proposals such as medical assistance for the aged and increased federal aid to education. Kennedy won a first round in his campaign for a more cooperative Congress when he forced an expansion of the all-important House Rules Committee, dominated by conservatives who could have bottled up his entire legislative program. Despite this victory, the New Frontier did not expand swiftly. Key medical and education bills remained stalled in Congress.

Another vexing problem was the economy. Kennedy had campaigned on the theme of revitalizing the economy after the recessions of the Eisenhower years. While his advisers debated the best kind of economic medicine to apply, the president tried to hold the line against crippling inflation. His

*Richard Goodwin (b. 1931), a young Peace Corps staffer, eloquently summed up the buoyantly optimistic mood of the early 1960s:*

“For a moment, it seemed as if the entire country, the whole spinning globe, rested, malleable and receptive, in our beneficent hands.”

administration helped negotiate a noninflationary wage agreement in the steel industry in early 1962. The assumption was that the companies, for their part, would keep the lid on prices.

Almost immediately, steel management announced significant price increases, thereby seemingly demonstrating bad faith. The president erupted in wrath, remarking that his father had once said that “all businessmen were sons of bitches.” He called the “big steel” men onto the Oval Office carpet and unleashed his Irish temper. Overawed, the steel operators backed down, while displaying “S.O.B.” buttons, meaning “Sons of Business” or “Save Our Business.”

The steel episode provoked fiery attacks by big business on the New Frontier, but Kennedy soon appealed to believers in free enterprise when he announced his support of a general tax-cut bill. He rejected the advice of those who wished greater government spending and instead chose to stimulate the economy by slashing taxes and putting more money directly into private hands. When he announced his policy before a big business group, one observer called it “the most Republican speech since McKinley.”

For economic stimulus, as well as for military strategy and scientific prestige, Kennedy also promoted a multibillion-dollar project to land an American on the moon. When skeptics objected that the money could best be spent elsewhere, Kennedy “answered” them in a speech at Rice University in Texas: “But why, some say, the moon? . . . And they may well ask, why climb the highest mountain? Why, thirty-five years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?” Twenty-four billion dollars later, in 1969, two American astronauts triumphantly planted human footprints on the moon’s dusty surface.

### **Rumblings in Europe**

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A few months after settling into the White House, the new president met Soviet premier Khrushchev at Vienna in June 1961. The tough-talking Soviet leader adopted a belligerent attitude, threatening to make a treaty with East Germany and cut off Western access to Berlin. Though visibly shaken, the president refused to be bullied.

The Soviets backed off from their most bellicose threats but suddenly began to construct the Berlin Wall in August 1961. A barbed-wire and concrete barrier, it was designed to plug the heavy population drain from East Germany to West Germany through the Berlin funnel. But to the free world, the “Wall of Shame” looked like a gigantic enclosure around a concentration camp. The Wall stood for almost three decades as an ugly scar symbolizing the post-World War II division of Europe into two hostile camps.

Kennedy meanwhile turned his attention to Western Europe, now miraculously prospering after the tonic of Marshall Plan aid and the growth of the American-encouraged Common Market, the free-trade area later called the European Union. He finally secured passage of the Trade Expansion Act in 1962, authorizing tariff cuts of up to 50 percent to promote trade with Common Market countries. This legislation led to the so-called Kennedy Round of tariff negotiations, concluded in 1967, and to a significant expansion of European-American trade.

But not all of Kennedy’s ambitious designs for Europe were realized. American policymakers were dedicated to an economically and militarily united “Atlantic Community,” with the United States the dominant partner. But they found their way blocked

by towering, stiff-backed Charles de Gaulle, president of France. He was suspicious of American intentions in Europe and on fire to recapture the *gloire* of Napoleonic France. With a haughty “*non*,” he vetoed British application for Common Market membership in 1963, fearing that the British “special relationship” with the United States would make Britain a Trojan horse for deepening American control over European affairs. He likewise dashed cold water on a U.S. proposal to develop a multinational nuclear arm within NATO. De Gaulle deemed the Americans unreliable in a crisis, so he tried to preserve French freedom of action by developing his own small atomic force (“*farce*,” scoffed his critics). Despite the perils of nuclear proliferation or Soviet domination, de Gaulle demanded an independent Europe, free of Yankee influence.

### **Foreign Flare-ups and “Flexible Response”**

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Special problems for U.S. foreign policy emerged from the worldwide decolonization of European overseas possessions after World War II. The African



Congo received its independence from Belgium in 1960 and immediately exploded into violence. The United Nations sent in a peacekeeping force, to which Washington contributed much money but no manpower. The United States was picking up the tab for U.N. operations, while the organization itself was becoming dominated by the numerous nascent nations emerging in once-colonial Asia and Africa, which were often critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Sparsely populated Laos, freed of its French colonial overlords in 1954, was festering dangerously by the time Kennedy came into office. The Eisenhower administration had drenched this jungle kingdom with dollars but failed to cleanse the country of an aggressive communist element. A red Laos, many observers feared, would be a river on which the influence of Communist China would flood into all of Southeast Asia.

As the Laotian civil war raged, Kennedy's military advisers seriously considered sending in American troops. But the president found that he had insufficient forces to put out the fire in Asia and still honor his commitments in Europe. Kennedy thus sought a diplomatic escape hatch in the fourteen-power Geneva conference, which imposed a shaky peace on Laos in 1962.

These "brushfire wars" intensified the pressure for a shift away from Secretary Dulles's dubious doctrine of "massive retaliation." Kennedy felt hamstrung by the knowledge that in a crisis, he had the Devil's choice between humiliation and nuclear incineration. With Defense Secretary McNamara, he pushed the strategy of "flexible response"—that is, developing an array of military "options" that could be precisely matched to the gravity of the crisis at hand. To this end Kennedy increased spending on conventional military forces and bolstered the Special Forces (Green Berets). They were an elite antiguerrilla outfit trained to survive on snake meat and to kill with scientific finesse.

## **Stepping into the Vietnam Quagmire**

The doctrine of "flexible response" seemed sane enough, but it contained lethal logic. It potentially lowered the level at which diplomacy would give way to shooting. It also provided a mechanism for a progressive, and possibly endless, stepping-up of

the use of force. Vietnam soon presented grisly proof of these pitfalls.

The corrupt, right-wing Diem government in Saigon, despite a deluge of American dollars, had ruled shakily since the partition of Vietnam in 1954 (see p. 900). Anti-Diem agitators noisily threatened to topple the pro-American government from power. In a fateful decision late in 1961, Kennedy ordered a sharp increase in the number of "military advisers" (U.S. troops) in South Vietnam.

American forces had allegedly entered Vietnam to foster political stability—to help protect Diem from the communists long enough to allow him to enact basic social reforms favored by the Americans. But the Kennedy administration eventually despaired of the reactionary Diem and encouraged a successful coup against him in November 1963. Ironically, the United States thus contributed to a long process of political disintegration that its original policy had meant to prevent. Kennedy still told the South Vietnamese that it was "their war," but he had made dangerously deep political commit-



Vietnam and Southeast Asia,  
1954–1975

ments. By the time of his death, he had ordered more than fifteen thousand American men into the far-off Asian slaughterpen. A graceful pullout was becoming increasingly difficult.

### Cuban Confrontations

Although the United States regarded Latin America as its backyard, its southern neighbors feared and resented the powerful Colossus of the North. In 1961 Kennedy extended the hand of friendship with the Alliance for Progress (*Alianza para el Progreso*), hailed as a Marshall Plan for Latin America. A primary goal was to help the Good Neighbors close the gap between the callous rich and the wretched poor,

and thus quiet communist agitation. But results were disappointing; there was little alliance and even less progress. American handouts had little positive impact on Latin America's immense social problems.

President Kennedy also struck below the border with the mailed fist. He had inherited from the Eisenhower administration a CIA-backed scheme to topple Fidel Castro from power by invading Cuba with anticommunist exiles. Trained and armed by Americans and supported by American air power, the invaders would trigger a popular uprising in Cuba and sweep to victory—or so the planners predicted.

On April 17, 1961, some twelve hundred exiles landed at Cuba's Bay of Pigs. Kennedy had decided from the outset against *direct* intervention, and the ancient aircraft of the anti-Castroites were no match

for Castro's air force. In addition, no popular uprising greeted the invaders. With the invasion bogged down at the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy stood fast in his decision to keep hands off, and the bullet-riddled band of anti-Castroites surrendered. Most of the invaders rotted for two years in Cuban jails but were eventually "ransomed" for some \$62 million worth of American pharmaceutical drugs and other humanitarian supplies. President Kennedy assumed full responsibility for the failure, remarking that "victory has a hundred fathers, and defeat is an orphan."

The Bay of Pigs blunder, along with continuing American covert efforts to assassinate Castro and overthrow his government, naturally pushed the Cuban leader even further into the Soviet embrace. Wily Chairman Khrushchev lost little time in taking full advantage of his Cuban comrade's position just ninety miles off Florida's coast. In October 1962 the aerial photographs of American spy planes revealed that the Soviets were secretly and speedily installing nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba. The Soviets evidently intended to use these devastating weapons to shield Castro and to blackmail the United States into backing down in Berlin and other trouble spots.

Kennedy and Khrushchev now began a nerve-racking game of "nuclear chicken." The president flatly rejected air force proposals for a "surgical" bombing strike against the missile-launching sites. Instead, on October 22, 1962, he ordered a naval

"quarantine" of Cuba and demanded immediate removal of the threatening weaponry. He also served notice on Khrushchev that any attack on the United States from Cuba would be regarded as coming from the Soviet Union and would trigger nuclear retaliation against the Russian heartland.

For an anxious week, Americans waited while Soviet ships approached the patrol line established by the U.S. Navy off the island of Cuba. Seizing or sinking a Soviet vessel on the high seas would unquestionably be regarded by the Kremlin as an act of war. The world teetered breathlessly on the brink of global atomization. Only in 1991 did the full dimensions of this nuclear peril become known, when the Russians revealed that their ground forces in Cuba already had operational nuclear weapons at their disposal and were authorized to launch them if attacked.

In this tense eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, Khrushchev finally flinched. On October 28 he agreed to a partially face-saving compromise, by which he would pull the missiles out of Cuba. The United States in return agreed to end the quarantine and not invade the island. The American government also quietly signaled that it would remove from Turkey some of its own missiles targeted on the Soviet Union.

Fallout from the Cuban missile crisis was considerable. A disgraced Khrushchev was ultimately hounded out of the Kremlin and became an "unper-

son.” Hard-liners in Moscow, vowing never again to be humiliated in a nuclear face-off, launched an enormous program of military expansion. The Soviet buildup reached a crescendo in the next decade, stimulating, in turn, a vast American effort to “catch up with the Russians.” The Democrats did better than expected in the midterm elections of November 1962—allegedly because the Republicans were “Cubanized.” Kennedy, apparently sobered by the appalling risks he had just run, pushed harder for a nuclear test-ban treaty with the Soviet Union. After prolonged negotiations in Moscow, a pact prohibiting nuclear explosions in the atmosphere was signed in late 1963. Another barometer indicating a thaw in the Cold War was the installation (August 1963) of a Moscow-Washington “hot line,” permitting immediate teletype communication in case of crisis.

Most significant was Kennedy’s speech at American University, Washington, D.C., in June 1963. The president urged Americans to abandon a view of the Soviet Union as a Devil-ridden land filled with fanatics and instead to deal with the world “as it is, not as it might have been had the history of the last eighteen years been different.” Kennedy thus tried to lay the foundations for a realistic policy of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union. Here were the modest origins of the policy that later came to be known as “détente” (French for “relaxation”).

## The Struggle for Civil Rights

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Kennedy had campaigned with a strong appeal to black voters, but he proceeded gingerly to redeem his promises. Although he had pledged to eliminate racial discrimination in housing “with a stroke of the pen,” it took him nearly two years to find the right pen. Civil rights groups meanwhile sent thousands of pens to the White House in an “Ink for Jack” protest against the president’s slowness.

Political concerns stayed the president’s hand on civil rights. Elected by a wafer-thin margin, and with shaky control over Congress, Kennedy needed the support of southern legislators to pass his economic and social legislation, especially his medical and educational bills. He believed, perhaps justifiably, that those measures would eventually benefit black Americans at least as much as specific legislation on civil rights. Bold moves for racial justice would have to wait.

But events soon scrambled these careful calculations. Following the wave of sit-ins that surged across the South in 1960, groups of Freedom Riders fanned out to end segregation in facilities serving interstate bus passengers. A white mob torched a Freedom Ride bus near Anniston, Alabama, in May 1961, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy’s

personal representative was beaten unconscious in another anti-Freedom Ride riot in Montgomery. When southern officials proved unwilling or unable to stem the violence, Washington dispatched federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders.

Reluctantly but fatefully, the Kennedy administration had now joined hands with the civil rights movement. Because of that partnership, the Kennedys proved ultra-wary about the political associates of Martin Luther King, Jr. Fearful of embarrassing revelations that some of King's advisers had communist affiliations, Robert Kennedy ordered FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to wiretap King's phone in late 1963. But for the most part, the relationship between King and the Kennedys was a fruitful one. Encouraged by Robert Kennedy, and with financial backing from Kennedy-prodded private foundations, SNCC and other civil rights groups inaugurated a Voter Education Project to register the South's historically disfranchised blacks. Because of his support for civil rights, President Kennedy told a group of black leaders in 1963, "I may lose the next election . . . I don't care."


Integrating southern universities threatened to provoke wholesale slaughter. Some desegregated painlessly, but the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss") became a volcano. A twenty-nine-year-old air force veteran, James Meredith, encountered violent opposition when he attempted to register in October 1962. In the end President Kennedy was

*In his civil rights address of June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) said,*

"If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public; if he cannot send his children to the best public school available; if he cannot vote for the public officials who represent him; if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?"

forced to send in 400 federal marshals and 3,000 troops to enroll Meredith in his first class—in colonial American history. He ultimately graduated, with a sheepskin that cost the lives of 2 men, scores of injuries, and some 4 million taxpayer dollars.

In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., launched a campaign against discrimination in Birmingham, Alabama, the most segregated big city in America. Although blacks constituted nearly half of the city's population, they made up fewer than 15 percent of the city's voters. Previous attempts to crack the city's rigid racial barriers had produced more than fifty cross burnings and eighteen bomb



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

### **Conflicting Press Accounts of the “March on Washington,”**

**1963** The day after the March on Washington of August 28, 1963 (see p. 926), newspapers all over the country carried reports of this historic assembly of more than 200,000 people to demand civil rights and equal job opportunities for African-Americans. Although the basic outlines of the story were the same in most papers, ancillary articles, photographs, and editorials revealed deep-seated biases in coverage. Shown here are continuations from the front page stories in *The New York Times*, a bastion of northeastern liberalism (below), and *The Atlanta Constitution*, a major southern newspaper (right). While the *Times* called the march “orderly” in its headline, the *Constitution’s* story in its right columns highlighted the potential for violence and the precautions taken by police. The article read: “There was such a force of uniformed officers on hand to cope with any possible trouble that one senator was prompted to comment: ‘It almost looks like we had a military coup d’état during the night.’” In addition to stressing the march’s potential for disruption, the *Constitution* ran an advertisement right below the March on Washington story for a National Ku Klux Klan Rally two days hence, featuring prominent speakers and a cross burning. This comparison of newspaper coverage of a controversial event serves as a reminder that press reporting must always be scrutinized for biases when it is used as historical evidence. What other differences in coverage separated these two newspapers? What factors contribute to press biases?

attacks since 1957. “Some of the people sitting here will not come back alive from this campaign,” King advised his organizers. Events soon confirmed this grim prediction of violence. Watching developments on television screens, a horrified world saw peaceful civil rights marchers repeatedly repelled by police with attack dogs and electric cattle prods. Most fearsome of all were the high-pressure water hoses directed at the civil rights demonstrators. They delivered water with enough force to knock bricks loose from buildings or strip bark from trees at a distance of one hundred feet. Water from the hoses bowled little children down the street like tumbleweed.

Jolted by these vicious confrontations, President Kennedy delivered a memorable televised speech to the nation on June 11, 1963. In contrast to Eisenhower’s cool aloofness from the racial question, Kennedy called the situation a “moral issue” and committed his personal and presidential prestige to finding a solution. Drawing on the same spiritual traditions as Martin Luther King, Jr., Kennedy declared that the principle at stake “is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution.” He called for new civil rights legislation to protect black citizens. In August King led 200,000 black and white demonstrators on a peaceful “March on Washington” in support of the proposed legislation. In an electrifying speech from the Lincoln Memorial, King declared, “I have a dream that

my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Still the violence continued. On the very night of Kennedy’s stirring television address, a white gunman shot down Medgar Evers, a black Mississippi civil rights worker. In September 1963 an explosion blasted a Baptist church in Birmingham, killing four black girls who had just finished their lesson called “The Love That Forgives.” By the time of Kennedy’s death, his civil rights bill was making little headway, and frustrated blacks were growing increasingly impatient.

### **The Killing of Kennedy**

Violence haunted America in the mid-1960s, and it stalked onto center stage on November 22, 1963. While riding in an open limousine in downtown Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was shot in the brain by a concealed rifleman and died within seconds. As a stunned nation grieved, the tragedy grew still more unbelievable. The alleged assassin, a furtive figure named Lee Harvey Oswald, was himself shot to death in front of television cameras by a self-appointed avenger, Jack Ruby. So bizarre were the events surrounding the two murders that even

an elaborate official investigation conducted by Chief Justice Warren could not quiet all doubts and theories about what had really happened.

Vice President Johnson was promptly sworn in as president on a waiting airplane and flown back to Washington with Kennedy's body. Although he mistrusted "the Harvards," Johnson retained most of the bright Kennedy team. The new president managed a dignified and efficient transition, pledging continuity with his slain predecessor's policies.

For several days the nation was steeped in sorrow. Not until then did many Americans realize how fully their young, vibrant president and his captivating wife had cast a spell over them. Chopped down in his prime after only slightly more than a thousand days in the White House, Kennedy was acclaimed more for the ideals he had enunciated and the spirit he had kindled than for the concrete goals he had achieved. He had laid one myth to rest forever—that a Catholic could not be trusted with the presidency of the United States.

In later years revelations about Kennedy's womanizing and allegations about his involvement with organized crime figures tarnished his reputation. But despite those accusations, his vigor, charisma, and idealism made him an inspirational figure for the generation of Americans who came of age in the 1960s—including Bill Clinton, who as a boy had briefly met President Kennedy and would himself be elected president in 1992.

## The LBJ Brand on the Presidency

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The torch passed to craggy-faced Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Texan who towered six feet three inches. The new president hailed from the populist hill country of west Texas, whose people had first sent him to Washington as a twenty-nine-year-old congressman in 1937. Franklin D. Roosevelt was his political "Daddy," Johnson claimed, and he had supported New Deal measures down the line. But when LBJ lost a Senate race in 1941, he learned the sobering lesson that liberal political beliefs did not necessarily win elections in Texas. He trimmed his sails to the right and squeezed himself into a Senate seat in 1948 with a questionable eighty-seven-vote margin—hence the ironic nickname "Landslide Lyndon."

Entrenched in the Senate, Johnson developed into a masterful wheeler-dealer. He became the

Democratic majority leader in 1954, wielding power second only to that of Eisenhower in the White House. He could move mountains or checkmate opponents as the occasion demanded, using what came to be known as the "Johnson treatment"—a flashing display of backslapping, flesh-pressing, and arm-twisting that overbore friend and foe alike. His ego and vanity were legendary. On a visit to the Pope, Johnson was presented with a precious fourteenth-century painting from the Vatican art collection; in return, LBJ gave the Pope a bust—of LBJ!

As president, Johnson quickly shed the conservative coloration of his Senate years to reveal the latent liberal underneath. "No memorial oration or eulogy," Johnson declared to Congress, "could more



eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long.” After a lengthy conservative filibuster, Congress at last passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. The act banned racial discrimination in most private facilities open to the public, including theaters, hospitals, and restaurants. It strengthened the federal government’s power to end segregation in schools and other public places. It created the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to eliminate discrimination in hiring. When conservatives tried to derail the legislation by adding a prohibition on *sexual*, as well as racial, discrimination, the tactic backfired. The bill’s opponents cynically calculated that liberals would not be able to support a bill that threatened to wipe out laws that singled out women for special protection because of their sex. But the act’s Title VII passed with the sexual clause intact. It soon proved to be a powerful instrument of federally enforced gender equality, as well as racial equality. Johnson struck another blow for women and minorities in 1965 when he issued an executive order requiring all federal contractors to take “affirmative action” against discrimination.

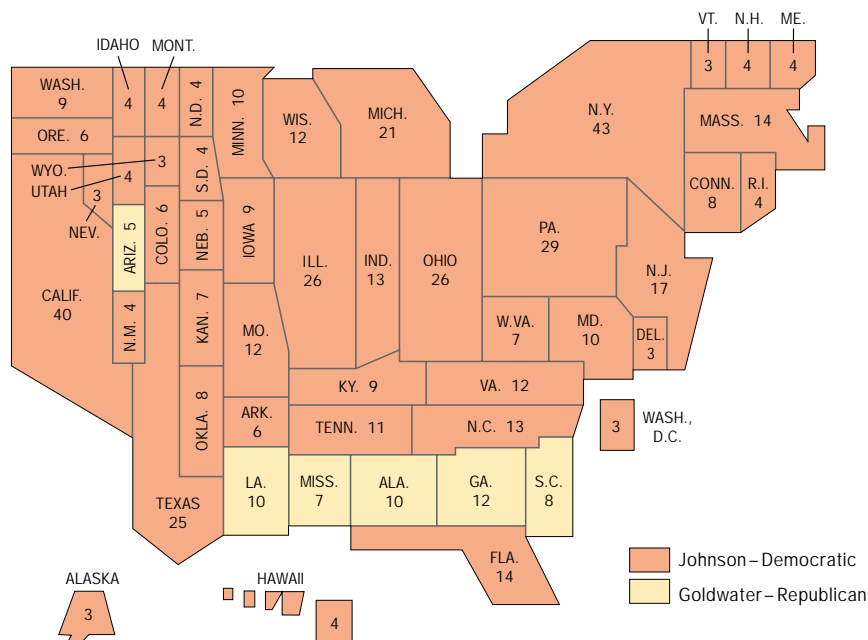
Johnson also rammed Kennedy’s stalled tax bill through Congress and added proposals of his own

for a billion-dollar “War on Poverty.” Johnson voiced special concern for Appalachia, where the sickness of the soft-coal industry had left tens of thousands of mountain folk on the human slag heap.

Johnson dubbed his domestic program the “Great Society”—a sweeping set of New Dealish economic and welfare measures aimed at transforming the American way of life. Public support for LBJ’s antipoverty war was aroused by Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962), which revealed that in affluent America 20 percent of the population—and over 40 percent of the black population—suffered in poverty.

### Johnson Battles Goldwater in 1964

Johnson’s nomination by the Democrats in 1964 was a foregone conclusion; he was chosen by acclamation in Atlantic City as his birthday present. Thanks to the tall Texan, the Democrats stood foursquare on their most liberal platform since Truman’s Fair Deal days. The Republicans, convening in San Francisco’s Cow Palace, nominated box-jawed Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, a bronzed and bespectacled champion of rock-ribbed conservatism. The



#### Presidential Election of 1964

States are distorted according to the number of electoral votes indicated on each state. In New Orleans, toward the end of the campaign, a gutsy Johnson displayed his commitment to civil rights when he told a story about an old senator who once said of his Deep South constituents, “I would like to go back down there and make them just one more Democratic speech. . . . The poor old State, they haven’t heard a Democratic speech in 30 years. All they hear at election time is Negro, Negro, Negro!” Johnson’s open voicing of sentiments like this contributed heavily to his losses in the traditionally Democratic “solid South.”

American stage was thus set for a historic clash of political principles.

Goldwater's forces had galloped out of the Southwest to ride roughshod over the moderate Republican "eastern establishment." Insisting that the GOP offer "a choice not an echo," Goldwater attacked the federal income tax, the Social Security system, the Tennessee Valley Authority, civil rights legislation, the nuclear test-ban treaty, and, most loudly, the Great Society. His fiercely dedicated followers proclaimed, "In Your Heart You Know He's Right," which prompted the Democratic response, "In Your Guts You Know He's Nuts." Goldwater warmed right-wing hearts when he announced that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And . . . moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

Democrats gleefully exploited the image of Goldwater as a trigger-happy cowboy who would "Barry us" in the debris of World War III. Johnson cultivated the contrasting image of a resolute statesman by seizing upon the Tonkin Gulf episode early in August 1964. Unbeknownst to the American public or Congress, U.S. Navy ships had been cooperating with South Vietnamese gunboats in provocative raids along the coast of North Vietnam. Two of these American destroyers were allegedly fired upon by the North Vietnamese on August 2 and 4, although exactly what happened still remains unclear. Later investigations strongly suggested that the North Vietnamese fired in self-defense on August 2 and that the "attack" of August 4 never happened. Johnson later reportedly wisecracked, "For all I know, the Navy was shooting at whales out there."

Johnson nevertheless promptly called the attack "unprovoked" and moved swiftly to make political hay out of this episode. He ordered a "limited" retaliatory air raid against the North Vietnamese bases, loudly proclaiming that he sought "no wider war"—thus implying that the truculent Goldwater did. Johnson also used the incident to spur congressional passage of the all-purpose Tonkin Gulf Resolution. With only two dissenting votes in both houses, the lawmakers virtually abdicated their war-declaring powers and handed the president a blank check to use further force in Southeast Asia. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Johnson boasted, was "like grandma's nightshirt—it covered everything."

The towering Texan rode to a spectacular victory in November 1964. The voters were herded into Johnson's column by fondness for the Kennedy

legacy, faith in Great Society promises, and fear of Goldwater. A stampede of 43,129,566 Johnson votes trampled the Republican ticket with its 27,178,188 supporters. The tally in the Electoral College was 486 to 52. Goldwater carried only his native Arizona and five other states—all of them, significantly, in the racially restless South. This cracking of the once solidly Democratic South afforded the Republicans about the only faint light in an otherwise bleak political picture. Johnson's record-breaking 61 percent of the popular vote swept lopsided Democratic majorities into both houses of Congress.

### **The Great Society Congress**

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Johnson's huge victory temporarily smashed the conservative congressional coalition of southern Democrats and northern Republicans. A wide-open legislative road stretched before the Great Society programs, as the president skillfully ringmastered his two-to-one Democratic majorities. Congress poured out a flood of legislation, comparable only to the output of the New Dealers in the Hundred Days Congress of 1933. Johnson, confident that a growing economy gave him ample fiscal and political room for maneuver, delivered at last on long-deferred Democratic promises of social reform.

Escalating the War on Poverty, Congress doubled the appropriation of the Office of Economic Opportunity to \$2 billion and granted more than \$1 billion to redevelop the gutted hills and hollows of Appalachia. A tireless Johnson also prodded the Congress into creating two new cabinet offices: the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to which he named the first black cabinet secretary in the nation's history, respected economist Robert C. Weaver. Other noteworthy laws established the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, designed to lift the level of American cultural life.

Even more impressive were the Big Four legislative achievements that crowned LBJ's Great Society program: aid to education, medical care for the elderly and indigent, immigration reform, and a new voting rights bill.

Johnson neatly avoided the thorny question of separation of church and state by channeling educational aid to students, not schools, thus allowing funds to flow to hard-pressed parochial institutions.

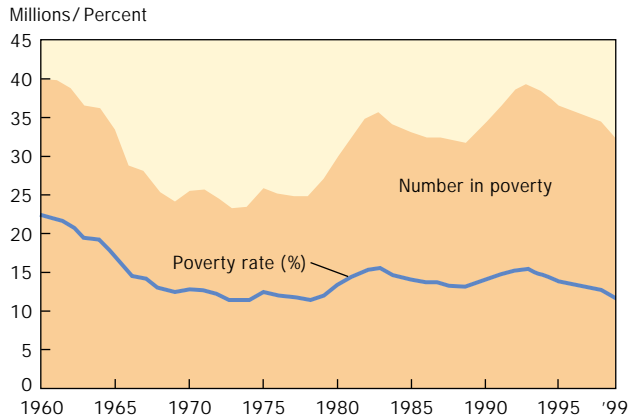
(Catholic John F. Kennedy had not dared to touch this prickly issue.) With a keen eye for the dramatic, LBJ signed the education bill in the humble one-room Texas schoolhouse he had attended as a boy.

Medicare for the elderly, accompanied by Medicaid for the poor, became a reality in 1965. Although they were bitter pills for the American Medical Association to swallow, the new programs were welcomed by millions of older Americans who had no health insurance (half of those over the age of sixty-five in 1965) and by the poor who could not afford proper medical treatment. Like the New Deal's Social Security program, Medicare and Medicaid created "entitlements." That is, they conferred rights on certain categories of Americans virtually in perpetuity, without the need for repeated congressional approval. These programs were part of a spreading "rights revolution" that materially improved the lives of millions of Americans—but also eventually undermined the federal government's financial health.

Immigration reform was the third of Johnson's Big Four feats. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished at last the "national-origins" quota system that had been in place since 1921 (see p. 731). The act also doubled (to 290,000) the number of immigrants allowed to enter annually, while for the first time setting limits on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere (120,000). The new law fur-

ther provided for the admission of close relatives of United States citizens, outside those numerical limits. To the surprise of many of the act's architects, more than 100,000 persons per year took advantage of its "family unification" provisions in the decades after 1965, and the immigrant stream swelled beyond expectations. Even more surprising to the act's sponsors, the sources of immigration soon shifted heavily from Europe to Latin America and Asia, dramatically changing the racial and ethnic composition of the American population.

Great Society programs came in for rancorous political attack in later years. Conservatives charged that poverty could not be papered over with greenbacks and that the billions spent for "social engineering" had simply been flushed down the waste pipe. Yet the poverty rate declined measurably in the ensuing decade. Medicare made especially dramatic reductions in the incidence of poverty among America's elderly. Other antipoverty programs, among them Project Head Start, sharply improved the educational performance of underprivileged youth. Infant mortality rates also fell in minority communities as general health conditions improved. Lyndon Johnson was not fully victorious in the war against poverty, and he doubtless fought some costly and futile campaigns, but he did win several noteworthy battles.



### Poverty in the United States, 1960–1999

The poverty rate for 1999 (11.8%) was the lowest since 1979. These figures refer to the number of people who live in families whose total income is lower than a set “poverty threshold,” which is tied to the Consumer Price Index, so it varies with inflation. The “poverty rate” means the percentage of all Americans living below that threshold. (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.)

## Battling for Black Rights

With the last of his Big Four reforms, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Johnson made heartening headway against one of the most persistent American evils, racial discrimination. In Johnson’s native South, the walls of segregation were crumbling, but not fast enough for long-suffering African-Americans. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave the federal government more muscle to enforce school-desegregation orders and to prohibit racial discrimination in all kinds of public accommodations and employment. But the problem of voting rights remained. In Mississippi, which had the largest black minority of any state, only about 5 percent of eligible blacks were registered to vote. The lopsided pattern was similar throughout the South. Ballot-denying devices like the poll tax, literacy tests, and barefaced intimidation still barred black people from the political process. Mississippi law required the names of prospective black registrants to be published for two weeks in local newspapers—a device that virtually guaranteed economic reprisals, or worse.

Beginning in 1964, opening up the polling booths became the chief goal of the black movement in the South. The Twenty-fourth Amendment,

ratified in January 1964, abolished the poll tax in federal elections. (See the Appendix.) Blacks joined hands with white civil rights workers—many of them student volunteers from the North—in a massive voter-registration drive in Mississippi during the “Freedom Summer” of 1964. Singing “We Shall Overcome,” they zealously set out to soothe generations of white anxieties and black fears.

But events soon blighted bright hopes. In late June 1964, one black and two white civil rights workers disappeared in Mississippi. Their badly beaten bodies were later found buried beneath an earthen dam. FBI investigators eventually arrested twenty-one white Mississippians, including the local sheriff, in connection with the killings. But white juries refused to convict whites for these murders. In August an integrated “Mississippi Freedom Democratic party” delegation was denied its seat at the national Democratic convention. Only a handful of black Mississippians had succeeded in registering to vote.

Early in 1965 Martin Luther King, Jr., resumed the voter-registration campaign in Selma, Alabama, where blacks made up 50 percent of the population but only 1 percent of the voters. State troopers with tear gas and whips assaulted King’s demonstrators as they marched peacefully to the state capital at Montgomery. A Boston Unitarian minister was killed, and a few days later a white Detroit woman was shotgunned to death by Klansmen on the highway near Selma.

As the nation recoiled in horror before these violent scenes, President Johnson, speaking in soft southern accents, delivered a compelling address on television. What happened in Selma, he insisted, concerned all Americans, “who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.” Then, in a stirring adaptation of the anthem of the civil rights movement, the president concluded, “And we shall overcome.” Following words with deeds, Johnson speedily shepherded through Congress the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965, signed into law on August 6. It outlawed literacy tests and sent federal voter registrars into several southern states.

The passage of the Voting Rights Act, exactly one hundred years after the conclusion of the Civil War, climaxed a century of awful abuse and robust resurgence for African-Americans in the South. “Give us the ballot,” said Martin Luther King, Jr., “and the South will never be the same again.” He was right. The act did not end discrimination and

oppression overnight, but it placed an awesome lever for change in blacks' hands. Black southerners now had power and began to wield it without fear of reprisals. White southerners began to court black votes and business as never before. In the following decade, for the first time since emancipation, African-Americans began to migrate *into* the South.

## **Black Power**

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The Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked the end of an era in the history of the civil rights movement—the era of nonviolent demonstrations, focused on the South, led by peaceful moderates like Martin Luther King, Jr., and aimed at integrating blacks into American society. As if to symbolize the turn of events, just five days after President Johnson signed the landmark voting law, a bloody riot erupted in Watts, a black ghetto in Los Angeles. Blacks enraged by police brutality burned and looted their own neighborhoods for nearly a week. When the smoke finally cleared over the Los Angeles basin, thirty-one blacks and three whites lay dead, more than a thousand people had been injured, and hundreds of buildings stood charred and gutted. The Watts explosion heralded a new phase of the black struggle—increasingly marked by militant confrontation, focusing on northern and western cities, led by radical and sometimes violent spokespersons, and often aiming not at interracial cooperation but at black separatism.

The pious Christian moderation of Martin Luther King, Jr., came under heavy fire from this second wave of younger black leaders, who privately mocked the dignified Dr. King as “de Lawd.” Deepening division among black leaders was highlighted by the career of Malcolm X. Born Malcolm Little, he was at first inspired by the militant black nationalists in the Nation of Islam. Like the Nation’s founder, Elijah Muhammed (born Elijah Poole), Malcolm changed his surname to advertise his lost African identity in white America. A brilliant and charismatic preacher, Malcolm X trumpeted black separatism and inveighed against the “blue-eyed white devils.” Eventually Malcolm distanced himself from Elijah Muhammed’s separatist preachings and moved toward mainstream Islam. (By the 1990s Islam was among America’s fastest-growing religions and counted some 2 million African-

American converts—or “reverts” as Muslims described it—in its ranks.) Malcolm changed his name yet again, to El Haj Malik El-Shabazz, and began to preach a more conciliatory message. But in early 1965, he was cut down by rival Nation of Islam gunmen while speaking to a large crowd in New York City.

With frightening frequency, violence or the threat of violence raised its head in the black community. The Black Panther party openly brandished weapons in the streets of Oakland, California. The following year Trinidad-born Stokely Carmichael, a leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “snick”), urged the abandonment of peaceful demonstrations and instead promoted “Black Power.”

The very phrase “Black Power” unsettled many whites, and their fears increased when Carmichael was quoted as gloating that Black Power “will smash

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) and Malcolm X (1925–1965) not only differed in the goals they held out to their fellow African-Americans—King urging racial integration and Malcolm X black separatism—but also in the means they advocated to achieve them. In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech during the interracial March on Washington on August 28, 1963, King proclaimed to a quarter of a million people assembled at the Lincoln Memorial, “In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. . . . We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”*

*About three months later, Malcolm X angrily rejected King’s “peaceful, turn-the-other-cheek revolution”:*

*“Revolution is bloody, revolution is hostile, revolution knows no compromise, revolution overturns and destroys everything that gets in its way. And you, sitting around here like a knot on the wall, saying, ‘I’m going to love these folks no matter how much they hate me.’ . . . Whoever heard of a revolution where they lock arms, . . . singing ‘We shall overcome?’ You don’t do that in a revolution. You don’t do any singing, you’re too busy swinging.”*

emphasized African-American distinctiveness, promoted “Afro” hairstyles and dress, shed their “white” names for new African identities, and demanded black studies programs in schools and universities.

Ironically, just as the civil rights movement had achieved its greatest legal and political triumphs, more city-shaking riots erupted in the black ghettos of several American cities. A bloody outburst in Newark, New Jersey, in the summer of 1967, took twenty-five lives. Federal troops restored order in Detroit, Michigan, after forty-three people died in the streets. As in Los Angeles, black rioters torched their own neighborhoods, attacking police officers and even firefighters, who had to battle both flames and mobs howling, “Burn, baby, burn.”

These riotous outbursts angered many white Americans, who threatened to retaliate with their own “backlash” against ghetto arsonists and killers. Inner-city anarchy baffled many northerners, who had considered racial problems a purely “southern” question. But black concerns had moved north—as had nearly half the nation’s black people. In the North the Black Power movement now focused less on civil rights and more on economic demands.

everything Western civilization has created.” Some advocates of Black Power insisted that they simply intended the slogan to describe a broad-front effort to exercise the political and economic rights gained by the civil rights movement and to speed the integration of American society. But other African-Americans, recollecting previous black nationalist movements like that of Marcus Garvey earlier in the century (see p. 748), breathed a vibrant separatist meaning into the concept of Black Power. They

Black unemployment, for example, was nearly double that for whites. These oppressive new problems seemed even less likely to be solved peaceably than the struggle for voting rights in the South.

Despair deepened when the magnetic and moderate voice of Martin Luther King, Jr., was forever silenced by a sniper's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968. A martyr for justice, he had bled and died against the peculiarly American thorn of race. The killing of King cruelly robbed the American people of one of the most inspirational leaders in their history—at a time when they could least afford to lose him. This outrage triggered a nationwide orgy of ghetto-gutting and violence that cost over forty lives.

Rioters noisily made news, but thousands of other blacks quietly made history. Their voter registration in the South shot upward, and by the late 1960s several hundred blacks held elected office in the Old South. Cleveland, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana, elected black mayors. By 1972 nearly half of southern black children sat in integrated classrooms. Actually, more schools in the South were integrated than in the North. About a third of black families had risen economically into the ranks of the middle class—though an equal proportion remained below the “poverty line.” King left a shining legacy of racial progress, but he was cut down when the job was far from completed.

## **Combating Communism in Two Hemispheres**

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Violence at home eclipsed Johnson's legislative triumphs, while foreign flare-ups threatened his political life. Discontented Dominicans rose in revolt against their military government in April 1965. Johnson speedily announced that the Dominican Republic was the target of a Castrolike coup by “Communist conspirators,” and he dispatched American troops, ultimately some 25,000, to restore order. But the evidence of a communist takeover was fragmentary at best. Johnson was widely condemned, at home and in Latin America, for his temporary reversion to the officially abandoned “gunboat diplomacy.” Critics charged that the two-fisted Texan was far too eager to back right-wing regimes with rifle-toting troops.

At about the same time, Johnson was floundering deeper into the monsoon mud of Vietnam. Viet Cong guerrillas attacked an American air base at Pleiku, South Vietnam, in February 1965. The president immediately ordered retaliatory bombing raids against military installations in North Vietnam and for the first time ordered attacking U.S. troops to land. By the middle of March 1965, the Americans had “Operation Rolling Thunder” in full swing—regular full-scale bombing attacks against North Viet-

nam. Before 1965 ended, some 184,000 American troops were involved, most of them slogging through the jungles and rice paddies of South Vietnam searching for guerrillas clad in black pajamas.

Johnson had now taken the first fateful steps down a slippery path. He and his advisers believed that a fine-tuned, step-by-step “escalation” of American force would drive the enemy to defeat with a minimum loss of life on both sides. But the president reckoned without due knowledge of the toughness, resiliency, and dedication of the Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam and their North Vietnamese allies. Aerial bombardment actually strengthened the communists’ will to resist. The enemy matched every increase in American firepower with more men and more williness in the art of guerrilla warfare.

The South Vietnamese themselves were meanwhile becoming spectators in their own war, as the fighting became increasingly Americanized. Corrupt and collapsible governments succeeded each other in Saigon with bewildering rapidity. Yet American officials continued to talk of defending a faithful democratic ally. Washington spokespeople also defended America’s action as a test of Uncle Sam’s “commitment” and of the reliability of his numerous treaty pledges to resist communist encroachment. If the United States were to cut and run from Vietnam, claimed prowar “hawks,” other nations would doubt America’s word and crumble under communist pressure (the so-called domino theory), which would ostensibly drive America’s first line of defense back to Waikiki Beach, in Hawaii, or even to the coast of California. Persuaded by such panicky thinking, Johnson steadily raised the military stakes in Vietnam. By 1968 he had poured more than half a million troops into Southeast Asia, and the annual bill for the war was exceeding \$30 billion. Yet the end was nowhere in sight.

### **Vietnam Vexations**

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America could not defeat the enemy in Vietnam, but it seemed to be defeating itself. World opinion grew increasingly hostile; the blasting of an underdeveloped country by a mighty superpower struck many critics as obscene. Several nations expelled American Peace Corps volunteers. Haughty Charles de Gaulle, ever suspicious of American intentions, ordered NATO off French soil in 1966.

Overcommitment in Southeast Asia also tied America’s hands elsewhere. Capitalizing on American distractions in Vietnam, the Soviet Union expanded its influence in the Mediterranean area, especially in Egypt. Tiny Israel stunned the Soviet-backed Egyptians in a devastating Six-Day War in June 1967. When the smoke had cleared, Israel occupied new territories in the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank of the Jordan River, including Jerusalem (see the map on p. 983). Although the Israelis eventually withdrew from the Sinai, they refused to relinquish the other areas and even introduced Jewish settlers into the heavily Arab district of the West Bank. The Arab Palestinians already living in the West Bank and their Arab allies elsewhere complained loudly about these Israeli policies, but to no avail. The Middle East was becoming an ever more dangerously packed powder keg that the war-plagued United States was powerless to defuse.

Domestic discontent festered as the Vietnamese entanglement dragged on. Antiwar demonstrations had begun on a small scale with campus “teach-ins” in 1965, and gradually these protests mounted to tidal-wave proportions. As the long arm of the military draft dragged more and more young men off to the Southeast Asian slaughterpen, resistance stiffened. Thousands of draft registrants fled to Canada; others publicly burned their draft cards. Hundreds of thousands of marchers filled the streets of New York, San Francisco, and other cities, chanting, “Hell no, we won’t go” and “Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?” Countless citizens felt the pinch of war-spawned inflation. Many Americans also felt pangs of conscience at the spectacle of their countrymen burning peasant huts and blistering civilians with ghastly napalm.

Opposition in Congress to the Vietnam involvement centered in the influential Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, headed by a former Rhodes scholar, Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas. A constant thorn in the side of the president, he staged a series of widely viewed televised hearings in 1966 and 1967, during which prominent personages aired their views, largely antiwar. Gradually the public came to feel that it had been deceived about the causes and “winnability” of the war. A yawning “credibility gap” opened between the government and the people. New flocks of antiwar “doves” were hatching daily.

Even within the administration, doubts were deepening about the wisdom of the war in Vietnam.



When Defense Secretary McNamara expressed increasing discomfiture at the course of events, he was quietly eased out of the cabinet. (Years later McNamara wrote that “we were wrong, terribly wrong,” about Vietnam.) President Johnson did announce “bombing halts” in early 1966 and early 1967, supposedly to lure the enemy to the peace table. But Washington did not pursue its “peace offensive” with much energy, and the other side did not respond with any encouragement. Both sides used the bombing pauses to funnel more troops into South Vietnam.

By early 1968 the brutal and futile struggle had become the longest and most unpopular foreign war in the nation’s history. The government had failed utterly to explain to the people what was supposed to be at stake in Vietnam. Many critics wondered if any objective could be worth the vast price, in blood and treasure, that America was paying. Casualties, killed and wounded, already exceeded 100,000. More bombs had been dropped on Vietnam than on all enemy territory in World War II.

The war was also ripping apart the fabric of American society and even threatening to shred the Constitution. In 1967 President Johnson ordered the CIA, in clear violation of its charter as a *foreign* intelligence agency, to spy on domestic antiwar activists. He also encouraged the FBI to turn its counterintelligence program, code-named “Cointelpro,” against

the peace movement. “Cointelpro” had been launched by J. Edgar Hoover in the 1950s to infiltrate communist organizations. Now under presidential directive, it sabotaged peace groups by conducting “black bag” break-ins. “Cointelpro” also subverted leading “doves” with false accusations

that they were communist sympathizers. These clandestine tactics made the FBI look like a totalitarian state's secret police rather than a guardian of American democracy.

As the war dragged on, evidence mounted that America had been entrapped in an Asian civil war, fighting against highly motivated rebels who were striving to overthrow an oppressive regime. Yet Johnson clung to his basic strategy of ratcheting up the pressure bit by bit. He stubbornly assured doubting Americans that he could see "the light at the end of the tunnel." But to growing numbers of Americans, it seemed that Johnson was bent on "saving" Vietnam by destroying it.

### **Vietnam Topples Johnson**

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Hawkish illusions that the struggle was about to be won were shattered by a blistering communist offensive launched in late January 1968, during Tet, the Vietnamese New Year. At a time when the Viet Cong were supposedly licking their wounds, they suddenly and simultaneously mounted savage attacks on twenty-seven key South Vietnamese cities, including the capital, Saigon. Although eventually beaten off with heavy losses, they demonstrated anew that victory could not be gained by Johnson's strategy of gradual escalation. The Tet offensive ended in a military defeat but a political victory for the Viet Cong. With an increasingly insistent voice, American public opinion demanded a speedy end to the war. Opposition grew so vehement that President Johnson could feel the very foundations of government shaking under his feet. He was also suffering through hells of personal agony over American casualties. He wept as he signed letters of condolence, and slipped off at night to pray with monks at a small Catholic church in Washington.

American military leaders responded to the Tet attacks with a request for 200,000 more troops. The largest single increment yet, this addition would have swollen American troop strength in Vietnam to about the three-quarter-million mark. The size of the request staggered many policymakers. Former secretary of state Dean Acheson reportedly advised the president that "the Joint Chiefs of Staff don't know what they're talking about." Johnson himself now began to doubt seriously the wisdom of continuing on his raise-the-stakes course.

The president meanwhile was being sharply challenged from within his own party. Eugene McCarthy, a little-known Democratic senator from Minnesota, had emerged as a contender for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination. The soft-spoken McCarthy, a sometime poet and devout Catholic, gathered a small army of antiwar college students as campaign workers. Going "clean for Gene," with shaven faces and shortened locks, these idealistic recruits of the "Children's Crusade" invaded the key presidential primary state of New Hampshire to ring doorbells. On March 12, 1968, their efforts gave McCarthy an incredible 42 percent of the Democratic votes and twenty of the twenty-four convention delegates. President Johnson was on the same ballot, but only as a write-in candidate. Four days later Senator Robert F. Kennedy of New York, the murdered president's younger brother and by now himself a "dove" on Vietnam, threw his hat into the ring. The charismatic Kennedy, heir to his fallen brother's mantle of leadership, stirred a passionate response among workers, African-Americans, Hispanics, and young people.

These startling events abroad and at home were not lost on LBJ. The country might explode in greater violence if he met the request of the generals for more troops. His own party was dangerously divided on the war issue. He might not even be able

maintain the maximum *acceptable* level of military activity in Vietnam with one hand, while trying to negotiate a settlement with the other.

North Vietnam responded somewhat encouragingly three days later, when it expressed a willingness to talk about peace. After a month of haggling over the site, the adversaries agreed to meet in Paris. But progress was glacially slow, as prolonged bickering developed over the very shape of the conference table.

## **The Presidential Sweepstakes of 1968**

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The summer of 1968 was one of the hottest political seasons in the nation's history. Johnson's heir apparent for the Democratic nomination was his liberal vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey, a former pharmacist, college professor, mayor, and U.S. senator from Minnesota. Loyally supporting LBJ's Vietnam policies through thick and thin, he received the support of the party apparatus, dominated as it was by the White House. Senators McCarthy and Kennedy meanwhile dueled in several state primaries, with Kennedy's bandwagon gathering ever-increasing speed. But on June 5, 1968, the night of an exciting victory in the California primary, Kennedy was shot to death by a young Arab immigrant resentful of the candidate's pro-Israel views.

Surrounded by bitterness and frustration, the Democrats met in Chicago in late August 1968. Angry antiwar zealots, deprived by an assassin's bullet of their leading candidate, streamed menacingly into Chicago. Mayor Daley responded by arranging for barbed-wire barricades around the convention hall ("Fort Daley"), as well as thousands of police and National Guard reinforcements. Many demonstrators baited the officers in blue by calling them "pigs." Other militants, chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh," shouted obscenities and hurled bags and cans of excrement at the police lines. As people the world over watched on television, the exasperated "peace officers" broke into a "police riot," clubbing and manhandling innocent and guilty alike. Acrid tear gas fumes hung heavy over the city and even drifted up to candidate Humphrey's hotel suite. Hundreds of people were arrested and scores hospitalized, but there were no casualties—except, as cynics said, the Democratic party and its candidate.

Humphrey steamrolled to the nomination on the first ballot. The dovish McCarthyites failed even

to win renomination after his relatively poor showing in New Hampshire. Yet he remained committed to victory in Vietnam, even if the light at the end of the tunnel was vanishing. How could he salvage his blind-alley policy?

Johnson's answer came in a bombshell address on March 31, 1968. He announced on nationwide television that he would finally apply the brakes to the escalating war. He would freeze American troop levels and gradually shift more responsibility to the South Vietnamese themselves. Aerial bombardment of the enemy would be drastically scaled down. Then, in a dramatic plea to unify a dangerously divided nation, Johnson startled his vast audience by firmly declaring that he would not be a candidate for the presidency in 1968.

Johnson's "abdication" had the effect of preserving the military status quo. He had held the "hawks" in check, while offering himself as a sacrifice to the militant "doves." The United States could thus

arose from his political grave to win the nomination. As a “hawk” on Vietnam and a right-leaning middle-of-the-roader on domestic policy, Nixon pleased the Goldwater conservatives and was acceptable to party moderates. He appealed to white southern voters and to the “law and order” element when he tapped as his vice-presidential running mate Maryland’s Governor Spiro T. Agnew, noted for his tough stands against dissidents and black militants. The Republican platform called for victory in Vietnam and a strong anticrime policy.

A “spoiler” third-party ticket—the American Independent party—added color and confusion to the campaign. It was headed by a scrappy expugilist, George C. Wallace, former governor of Alabama. In 1963 he had stood in the doorway to prevent two black students from entering the University of Alabama. “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” he shouted. Wallace jabbed repeatedly at “pointy-headed bureaucrats,” and he taunted hecklers as “bums” in need of a bath. Speaking behind a bulletproof screen, he called for prodding the blacks into their place, with bayonets if necessary. He and his running mate, former air force general Curtis LeMay, also proposed smashing the North Vietnamese to smithereens by “bombing them back to the Stone Age.”

## **Victory for Nixon**

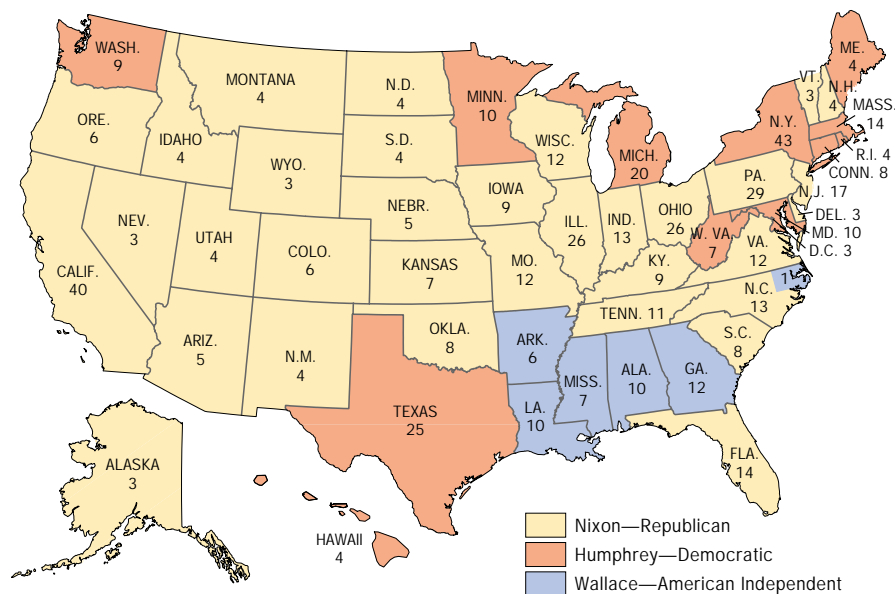
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Vietnam proved a less crucial issue than expected. Between the positions of the Republicans and the Democrats, there was little choice. Both candidates were committed to carrying on the war until the enemy settled for an “honorable peace,” which seemed to mean an “American victory.” The millions of “doves” had no place to roost, and many refused to vote at all. Humphrey, scorched by the LBJ brand, went down to defeat as a loyal prisoner of his chief’s policies, despite Johnson’s last-minute effort to bail him out by announcing a *total* bombing halt.

Nixon, who had lost a cliffhanger to Kennedy in 1960, won one in 1968. He garnered 301 electoral votes, with 43.4 percent of the popular tally (31,785,480), as compared with 191 electoral votes and 42.7 percent of the popular votes (31,275,166) for Humphrey. Nixon was the first president-elect since 1848 not to bring in on his coattails at least

to secure an antiwar platform plank. Instead the Humphrey forces, echoing the president, hammered into place their own declaration that armed force would be relentlessly applied until the enemy showed more willingness to negotiate.

Scenting victory as the Democrats divided, the Republicans had jubilantly convened in plush Miami Beach, Florida, early in August 1968. Richard M. Nixon, the former vice president whom John F. Kennedy had narrowly defeated eight years earlier,



### Presidential Election of 1968 (with electoral vote by state)

George Wallace won in five states, and he denied a clear majority to either of the two major-party candidates in twenty-five other states. A shift of some fifty thousand votes might well have thrown the election into the House of Representatives, giving Wallace the strategic bargaining position he sought.

one house of Congress for his party in an initial presidential election. He carried not a single major city, thus attesting to the continuing urban strength of the Democrats, who also won about 95 percent of the black vote. Nixon had received no clear mandate to do anything. He was a minority president who owed his election to divisions over the war and protest against the unfair draft, crime, and rioting.

Wallace did worse than expected. Yet he won an impressive 9,906,473 popular votes and 46 electoral votes, all from five states of the Deep South, four of which the Republican Goldwater had carried in 1964. Wallace remained a formidable force, for he had amassed the largest third-party popular vote in American history. Wallace had also resoundingly demonstrated the continuing power of “populist” politics, which appealed to voters’ fears and resentments rather than to the better angels of their nature. His candidacy foreshadowed a coarsening of American political life that would take deep root in the ensuing decades.

## The Obituary of Lyndon Johnson

Talented but tragedy-struck Lyndon Johnson returned to his Texas ranch in January 1969 and died there four years later. His party was defeated, and

his “me-too” Hubert Humphrey was repudiated. Yet Johnson’s legislative leadership for a time had been remarkable. No president since Lincoln had worked harder or done more for civil rights. None had shown more compassion for the poor, blacks, and the ill educated. LBJ seemed to suffer from an inferiority complex about his own arid cultural background, and he strove furiously to prove that he could be a great “people’s president” in the image of his idol, Franklin Roosevelt. His legislative achievements in his first three years in office indeed invited comparison with those of the New Deal.

But by 1966 Johnson was already sinking into the Vietnam quicksands. The Republicans had made gains in Congress, and a white “backlash” had begun to form against the black movement. Great Society programs began to wither on the vine, as soaring war costs sucked tax dollars into the military machine. Johnson had promised both guns and butter but could not keep that promise. Ever-creeping inflation blighted the prospects of prosperity, and the War on Poverty met resistance that was as stubborn as the Viet Cong and eventually went down to defeat. Great want persisted alongside great wealth.

Johnson had crucified himself on the cross of Vietnam. The Southeast Asian quagmire engulfed his noblest intentions. Committed to some degree by his two predecessors, he had chosen to defend

the American foothold and enlarge the conflict rather than be run out. He was evidently persuaded by his brightest advisers, both civilian and military, that a “cheap” victory was possible. It would be achieved by massive aerial bombing and large, though limited, troop commitments. His decision not to escalate the fighting further offended the “hawks,” and his refusal to back off altogether antagonized the “doves.” Like the Calvinists of colonial days, luckless Lyndon Johnson was damned if he did and damned if he did not.

### **The Cultural Upheaval of the 1960s**

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The struggles of the 1960s against racism, poverty, and the war in Vietnam had momentous cultural consequences. The decade came to be seen as a watershed dividing two distinct eras in terms of values, morals, and behavior.

Everywhere in 1960s America, a newly negative attitude toward all kinds of authority took hold. Disillusioned by the discovery that American society was not free of racism, sexism, imperialism, and oppression, many young people lost their traditional moral rudders. Neither families nor churches nor schools seemed to be able to define values and shape behavior with the certainty of shared purpose

that many people believed had once existed. The upheaval even churned the tradition-bound Roman Catholic church, among the world’s oldest and most conservative institutions. Clerics abandoned their Roman collars and Latin lingo, folk songs replaced Gregorian chants, and meatless Fridays became ancient history. No matter what the topic, conventional wisdom and inherited ideas came under fire. “Trust no one over thirty” was a popular sneer of rebellious youth.

Skepticism about authority had deep historical roots in American culture, and it had even bloomed in the supposedly complacent and conformist 1950s. “Beat” poets like Allen Ginsberg and iconoclastic novelists like Jack Kerouac had voiced dark disillusion with the materialistic pursuits and “establishment” arrogance of the Eisenhower era. In movies like *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), the attractive young actor James Dean expressed the restless frustration of many young people.

The disaffection of the young reached crisis proportions in the tumultuous 1960s. One of the first organized protests against established authority broke out at the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, in the so-called Free Speech Movement. Leader Mario Savio, condemning the impersonal university “machine” more tied to corporate interests than humane values, urged his fellow students to “put your bodies upon the gears and upon the

wheels, . . . and you've got to make it stop." But in only a few years, the clean-cut Berkeley activists and their sober-minded sit-ins would seem downright quaint. Fired by outrage against the war in Vietnam, some sons and daughters of the middle class became radical political rebels, while others turned to mind-bending drugs, tuned in to "acid rock," and dropped out of "straight" society. Others "did their own thing" in communes or "alternative" institutions. Patriotism became a dirty word. Beflowered women in trousers and long-haired men with earrings heralded the rise of a self-conscious "counter-culture" blatantly opposed to traditional American ways.

The 1960s also witnessed a "sexual revolution," though its novelty and scale are often exaggerated. Without doubt, the introduction of the birth-control pill in 1960 made unwanted pregnancies much easier to avoid and sexual appetites easier to satisfy. But as early as 1948, Indiana University sexologist Dr. Alfred Kinsey had published sensational revelations about American sexual habits in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, followed five years later by *Sexual*

*The alternative newspaper The Village Voice captured the momentousness of one aspect of the sexual revolution on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Rebellion in June 1969, the day when homosexuals had fought back against a police attack and thereby launched a new gay and lesbian liberation movement:*

"They stretched in a line, from Gimbels to Times Square, thousands and thousands and thousands, chanting, waving, screaming—the outrageous and the outraged, splendid in their flaming colors, splendid in their delirious up-front birthday celebration of liberation. . . . No one could quite believe it, eyes rolled back in heads, Sunday tourists traded incredulous looks, wondrous faces poked out of air-conditioned cars. My God, are those really homosexuals? Marching? Up Sixth Avenue?"

*Behavior in the Human Female.* Based on thousands of interviews, Kinsey's findings about the incidence of premarital sex and adultery caused a ruckus at the time and have been hotly debated ever since. Most controversial was Kinsey's estimate that 10 percent of American males were homosexuals. Whatever the exact number, by the 1960s gay men and lesbians were increasingly emerging from the closet and demanding sexual tolerance. The Mattachine Society, founded in Los Angeles in 1951, was a pioneering advocate for gay rights. A brutal attack on gay men by off-duty police officers at New York's Stonewall Inn in 1969 powerfully energized gay and lesbian militancy. Widening worries in the 1980s about sexually transmitted diseases like genital herpes and AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) finally slowed, but did not reverse, the sexual revolution.

Launched in youthful idealism, many of the cultural "revolutions" of the 1960s sputtered out in violence and cynicism. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), once at the forefront of the antipoverty and antiwar campaigns, had by decade's end spawned an underground terrorist group called the Weathermen. Peaceful civil rights demonstra-

tions had given way to blockbusting urban riots. What started as apparently innocent experiments with drugs like marijuana and LSD had fried many youthful brains and spawned a loathsome underworld of drug lords and addicted users.

Straight-laced guardians of respectability denounced the self-indulgent romanticism of the "flower children" as the beginning of the end of modern civilization. Sympathetic observers hailed the "greening" of America—the replacement of materialism and imperialism by a new consciousness of human values. The upheavals of the 1960s could be largely attributed to three *Ps*: the youthful population bulge, protest against racism and the Vietnam War, and the apparent permanence of prosperity. As the decade flowed into the 1970s, the flower children grew older and had children of their own, the civil rights movement fell silent, the war ended, and economic stagnation blighted the bloom of prosperity. Young people in the 1970s seemed more concerned with finding a job in the system than with tearing the system down. But if the "counterculture" had not managed fully to replace older values, it had weakened their grip, perhaps permanently.



## Chronology

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| <p><b>1961</b> Berlin crisis and construction of the Berlin Wall<br/>Alliance for Progress<br/>Bay of Pigs<br/>Kennedy sends “military advisers” to South Vietnam</p>          | <p><b>1964</b> Johnson defeats Goldwater for presidency<br/>War on Poverty begins<br/>Civil Rights Act</p>  |
| <p><b>1962</b> Pressure from Kennedy results in a rollback of steel prices<br/>Trade Expansion Act<br/>Laos neutralized<br/>Cuban missile crisis</p>                           | <p><b>1965</b> Great Society legislation<br/>Voting Rights Act<br/>U.S. troops occupy Dominican Republic</p>  |
| <p><b>1963</b> Anti-Diem coup in South Vietnam<br/>Civil rights march in Washington, D.C.<br/>Kennedy assassinated; Johnson assumes presidency</p>                             | <p><b>1965-</b> Race riots in U.S. cities<br/><b>1968</b> Escalation of the Vietnam War</p>   |
| <p><b>1964</b> Twenty-fourth Amendment (abolishing poll tax in federal elections) ratified<br/>“Freedom Summer” voter registration in the South<br/>Tonkin Gulf Resolution</p> | <p><b>1967</b> Six-Day War between Israel and Egypt<br/><b>1968</b> Tet offensive in Vietnam<br/>Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy assassinated<br/>Nixon defeats Humphrey and Wallace for presidency</p> |
|  | <p><b>1969</b> Astronauts land on moon</p>  |

## VARYING VIEWPOINTS

### The Sixties: Constructive or Destructive?

The 1960s were convulsed by controversy, and they have remained controversial ever since. Conflicts raged in that turbulent decade between social classes, races, sexes, and generations. More than three decades later, the shock waves from the 1960s still reverberate through American society. The “Contract with America” that swept conservative Republicans to power in 1994 amounted to nothing less than a wholesale repudiation of the government activism that marked the sixties decade and a resounding reaffirmation of the “traditional values” that sixties culture supposedly trashed. Liberal Democrats, on the other hand, continue to press affirmative action for women and minorities, protection for the environment, an expanded welfare state, and sexual tolerance—all legacies of the stormy sixties.

Four issues dominate historical discussion of the 1960s: the struggle for civil rights, the Great

Society’s “War on Poverty,” the Vietnam War and the antiwar movement, and the emergence of the “counterculture.”

Although most scholars praise the civil rights achievements of the 1960s, they disagree over the civil rights movement’s turn away from nonviolence and its embrace of separatism and Black Power. The Freedom Riders and Martin Luther King, Jr., find much more approval in most history books than do Malcolm X and the Black Panther party. But some scholars, notably William L. Van Deburg in *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (1992), argue that the “flank effect” of radical Black Power advocates like Stokely Carmichael actually enhanced the bargaining position of moderates like Dr. King. Deburg also suggests that the enthusiasm of Black Power advocates for African-American cultural uniqueness reshaped both black self-consciousness and the broader cul-

ture, as it provided a model for the feminist and multiculturalist movements of the 1970s and later.

Johnson's War on Poverty has found its liberal defenders in scholars like Allen Matusow (*The Unraveling of America*, 1984) and John Schwarz (*America's Hidden Success*, 1988). Schwarz demonstrates, for example, that Medicare and Social Security reforms virtually eliminated poverty among America's elderly. But the Great Society has also provoked strong criticism from writers such as Charles Murray (*Losing Ground*, 1984) and Lawrence Meade (*Beyond Entitlements*, 1986). As those conservative critics see the poverty issue, to use a phrase popular in the 1960s, the Great Society was part of the problem, not part of the solution. In their view the War on Poverty did not simply fail to eradicate poverty among the so-called underclass; it actually deepened the dependency of the poor on the welfare state and even generated a multigenerational "cycle" of poverty. In this argument Johnson's Great Society stands indicted of creating, in effect, a permanent welfare class.

For many young people of the 1960s, the antiwar movement protesting America's policy in Vietnam provided their initiation into politics and their introduction to "movement culture," with its sense of community and shared purpose. But scholars disagree over the movement's real effectiveness in checking the war. Writers like John Lewis Gaddis

(*Strategies of Containment*, 1982) explain America's eventual withdrawal from Vietnam essentially without reference to the protesters in the streets. Others, like Todd Gitlin (*The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, 1987), insist that mass protest was the force that finally pressed the war to a conclusion.

Debate over the counterculture not only pits liberals against conservatives but also pits liberals against radicals. A liberal historian like William O'Neill (*Coming Apart*, 1971) might sympathize with what he considers some of the worthy values pushed by student activists, such as racial justice, nonviolence, and the antiwar movement, but he also claims that much of the sixties "youth culture" degenerated into hedonism, arrogance, and social polarization. In contrast, younger historians such as Michael Kazin and Maurice Isserman argue that cultural radicalism and political radicalism were two sides of the same coin. Many young people in the sixties made little distinction between the personal and the political. As Sara Evans demonstrates in *Personal Politics* (1980), "the personal was the political" for many women. She finds the roots of modern feminism in the sexism women activists encountered in the civil rights and antiwar movements.

While critics may argue over the "good" versus the "bad" sixties, there is no denying the degree to which that tumultuous time, for better or worse, shaped the world in which we now live.

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For further reading, see page A26 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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# The Stalemated Seventies

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1968–1980

*In all my years of public life, I have never obstructed justice. People have got to know whether or not their President is a crook. Well, I'm not a crook; I earned everything I've got.*

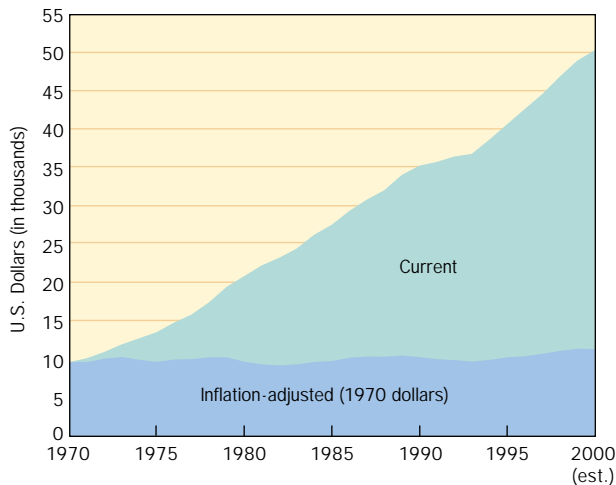
RICHARD NIXON, 1973

As the 1960s lurched to a close, the fantastic quarter-century economic boom of the post-World War II era also showed signs of petering out. By increasing their productivity, American workers had doubled their average standard of living in the twenty-five years since the end of World War II. Now, fatefully, productivity gains slowed to the vanishing point. The entire decade of the 1970s did not witness a productivity advance equivalent to even one year's progress in the preceding two decades. At the new rate, it would take five hundred more years to bring about another doubling of the average worker's standard of living. The median income of the average American family stagnated in the two decades after 1970, and failed to decline only because of the addition of working wives' wages to the family income (see the chart on p. 947). The rising baby-boom generation now faced the depressing prospect of a living standard that would be lower

than that of their parents. As the postwar wave of robust economic growth crested by the early 1970s, at home and abroad the "can do" American spirit gave way to an unaccustomed sense of limits.

## Sources of Stagnation

What caused the sudden slump in productivity? Some observers cited the increasing presence in the work force of women and teenagers, who typically had fewer skills than adult male workers and were less likely to take the full-time, long-term jobs where skills might be developed. Other commentators blamed declining investment in new machinery, the heavy costs of compliance with government-imposed safety and health regulations, and the general shift of the American economy from



### Median Family Income, 1970–2000

During the long post–World War II economic boom (from about 1950 to 1970), family incomes increased dramatically, but after 1970 “real,” or inflation-adjusted, incomes stagnated. Prosperity at the end of the twentieth century has led to recent increases. (Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

manufacturing to services, where productivity gains were allegedly more difficult to achieve and measure. Yet in the last analysis, much mystery attends the productivity slowdown, and economists have wrestled inconclusively with the puzzle.

The Vietnam War also precipitated painful economic distortions. The disastrous conflict in Southeast Asia drained tax dollars from needed improvements in education, deflected scientific skill and manufacturing capacity from the civilian sector, and touched off a sickening spiral of inflation. Sharply rising oil prices in the 1970s also fed inflation, but its deepest roots lay in government policies of the 1960s—especially Lyndon Johnson’s insistence on simultaneously fighting the war in Vietnam and funding the Great Society programs at home, all without a tax increase to finance the added expenditures. Both military spending and welfare spending are inherently inflationary (in the absence of offsetting tax collections), because they put dollars in people’s hands without adding to the supply of goods that those dollars can buy.

When too many dollars chase too few goods, prices rise—as they did astonishingly in the 1970s. The cost of living more than tripled in the dozen years following Richard Nixon’s inauguration, in the longest and steepest inflationary cycle in American history.

Other weaknesses in the nation’s economy were also laid bare by the abrupt reversal of America’s financial fortunes in the 1970s. The competitive advantage of many major American businesses had

been so enormous after World War II that they had small incentive to modernize plants and seek more efficient methods of production. The defeated German and Japanese people had meanwhile clawed their way out of the ruins of war and built wholly new factories with the most up-to-date technology and management techniques. By the 1970s their efforts paid handsome rewards, as they came to dominate industries like steel, automobiles, and consumer electronics—fields in which the United States had once been unchallengeable.

The poor economic performance of the 1970s hung over the decade like a pall. It frustrated both policymakers and citizens who keenly remembered the growth and optimism of the quarter-century since World War II. The overachieving postwar generation had never met a problem it could not solve. But now a stalemated, unpopular war and a stagnant, unresponsive economy heralded the end of the self-confident postwar era. With it ended the liberal dream, vivid since New Deal days, that an affluent society could spend its way to social justice.

### **Nixon “Vietnamizes” the War**

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Inaugurated on January 20, 1969, Richard Nixon urged the American people, torn with dissension over Vietnam and race relations, to “stop shouting at one another.” Yet the new president seemed an unlikely conciliator of the clashing forces that appeared to be ripping apart American society. Solitary and suspicious by nature, Nixon could be brittle and testy in the face of opposition. He also harbored bitter resentments against the “liberal establishment” that had cast him into the political darkness for much of the preceding decade. Yet Nixon brought one hugely valuable asset with him to the White House—his broad knowledge and thoughtful expertise in foreign affairs. With calculating shrewdness he applied himself to putting America’s foreign-policy house in order.

The first burning need was to quiet the public uproar over Vietnam. President Nixon’s announced policy, called “Vietnamization,” was to withdraw the 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam over an extended period. The South Vietnamese—with American money, weapons, training, and advice—could then gradually take over the burden of fighting their own war.

The so-called Nixon Doctrine thus evolved. It proclaimed that the United States would honor its existing defense commitments but that in the future, Asians and others would have to fight their own wars without the support of large bodies of American ground troops.

Nixon sought not to end the war, but to win it by other means, without the further spilling of American blood. But even this much involvement was distasteful to the American “doves,” many of whom demanded a withdrawal that was prompt, complete, unconditional, and irreversible. Antiwar protesters staged a massive national Vietnam moratorium in October 1969, as nearly 100,000 people jammed the Boston Common and some 50,000 filed by the White House carrying lighted candles.

Undaunted, Nixon launched his own home-front counteroffensive. On November 3, 1969, he delivered a dramatic televised appeal to the great “silent majority,” who presumably supported the war. Though ostensibly conciliatory, Nixon’s appeal was in fact deeply divisive, as he sought to carve out a political constituency that would back his policies. His intentions soon became clear when he unleashed tough-talking Vice President Agnew to attack the “misleading” news media, as well as the “effete corps of impudent snobs” and the “nattering nabobs of negativism” who demanded quick withdrawal from Vietnam. Nixon himself in 1970

sneered at the student antiwar demonstrators as “bums.”

By January 1970 the Vietnam conflict had become the longest in American history and, with 40,000 killed and over 250,000 wounded, the third most costly foreign war in the nation's experience. It had also become grotesquely unpopular, even among troops in the field. Because draft policies largely exempted college students and men with critical civilian skills, the armed forces in Vietnam were largely composed of the least privileged young Americans. Especially in the war's early stages, African-Americans were disproportionately represented in the army and accounted for a disproportionately high share of combat fatalities. Black and white soldiers alike fought not only against the Vietnamese enemy but also against the coiled fear of floundering through booby-trapped swamps and steaming jungles, often unable to distinguish friend from foe among the Vietnamese peasants. Drug abuse, mutiny, and sabotage dulled the army's fighting edge. Morale appeared to have plummeted to rock bottom when rumors filtered out of Vietnam that soldiers were “fragging” their own officers—murdering them with fragmentation grenades.

Domestic disgust with the war was further deepened in 1970 by revelations that in 1968 American troops had massacred innocent women and children in the village of My Lai. Increasingly desperate for a quick end to the demoralizing conflict,

Nixon widened the war in 1970 by ordering an attack on Vietnam's neighbor, Cambodia.

### **Cambodianizing the Vietnam War**

For several years the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had been using Cambodia, bordering South Vietnam on the west, as a springboard for troops, weapons, and supplies. Suddenly, on April 29, 1970, without consulting Congress, Nixon ordered American forces to join with the South Vietnamese in cleaning out the enemy sanctuaries in officially neutral Cambodia.

Restless students nationwide responded to the Cambodian invasion with rock throwing, window smashing, and arson. At Kent State University in Ohio, jumpy members of the National Guard fired into a noisy crowd, killing four and wounding many more; at Jackson State College in Mississippi, the highway patrol discharged volleys at a student dormitory, killing two black students. The nation fell prey to turmoil as rioters and arsonists convulsed the land.

*A Marine Corps officer expressed the disillusion that beset many American troops in Vietnam:*

“For years we disposed of the enemy dead like so much garbage. We stuck cigarettes in the mouths of corpses, put *Playboy* magazines in their hands, cut off their ears to wear around our necks. We incinerated them with napalm, atomized them with B-52 strikes, shoved them out the doors of helicopters above the South China Sea. . . . All we did was count, count bodies. Count dead human beings. . . . That was our fundamental military strategy. Body count. And the count kept going up.”

Nixon withdrew the American troops from Cambodia on June 29, 1970, after only two months. But in America the Cambodian invasion deepened the bitterness between “hawks” and “doves,” as right-wing groups physically assaulted leftists. Disillusionment with “whitey’s war” increased ominously among African-Americans in the armed forces. The Senate (though not the House) overwhelmingly repealed the Gulf of Tonkin blank check that Congress had given Johnson in 1964 and sought ways to restrain Nixon. The youth of America, still aroused, were only slightly mollified when the government reduced draft calls and shortened the period of draftability, on a lottery basis, from eight years to one year. They were similarly pleased, though not pacified, when the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971 lowered the voting age to eighteen (see the Appendix).

In the spring of 1971, mass rallies and marches once more erupted from coast to coast. New combustibles fueled the fires of antiwar discontent in June 1971, when *The New York Times* published a top-secret Pentagon study of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. These Pentagon Papers, “leaked” to the *Times* by former Pentagon official Daniel Ellsberg, laid bare the blunders and deceptions of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations,

especially the provoking of the 1964 North Vietnamese attack in the Gulf of Tonkin.

### **Nixon’s Détente with Beijing (Peking) and Moscow**

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As the antiwar firestorm flared ever higher, Nixon concluded that the road out of Vietnam ran through Beijing and Moscow. The two great communist powers, the Soviet Union and China, were clashing bitterly over their rival interpretations of Marxism. Nixon astutely perceived that the Chinese-Soviet tension afforded the United States an opportunity to play off one antagonist against the other and to enlist the aid of both in pressuring North Vietnam into peace.

Nixon’s thinking was reinforced by his national security adviser, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. Bespectacled and German-accented, Kissinger had reached America as a youth when his parents fled Hitler’s anti-Jewish persecutions. In 1969 the former Harvard professor had begun meeting secretly on Nixon’s behalf with North Vietnamese officials in Paris to negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam. He was meanwhile preparing the president’s path to Beijing and Moscow.

Nixon, heretofore an uncompromising anti-communist, announced to a startled nation in July 1971 that he had accepted an invitation to visit China the following year. He made his historic journey in February 1972. Between glass-clinking toasts and walks on the fabled Great Wall of China, he paved the way for improved relations between Washington and Beijing.

Nixon next traveled to Moscow in May 1972 to play his “China card” in a game of high-stakes diplomacy in the Kremlin. The Soviets, hungry for American foodstuffs and alarmed over the possibility of intensified rivalry with an American-backed China, were ready to deal. Nixon’s visits ushered in an era of *détente*, or relaxed tension, with the two communist powers. *Détente* resulted in several significant agreements. One product of eased relations was the great grain deal of 1972—a three-year arrangement by which the food-rich United States agreed to sell the Soviets at least \$750 million worth of wheat, corn, and other cereals.

Far more important were steps to stem the dangerously frantic competition in nuclear arms. The

first major achievement was an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) treaty, which limited each nation to two clusters of defensive missiles. The second significant pact was an agreement, known as SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks), to freeze the numbers of long-range nuclear missiles for five years. These accords, both ratified in 1972, constituted a long-overdue first step toward slowing the arms race. Yet even though the ABM treaty forbade elaborate defensive systems, the United States forged ahead with the development of "MIRVs" (multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles), designed to overcome any defense by "saturating" it with large numbers of warheads, several to a rocket. Predictably, the Soviets proceeded to "MIRV" their own missiles, and the arms race ratcheted up to a still more perilous plateau, with over sixteen thousand nuclear warheads deployed by both sides by the end of the 1980s.

Nixon's détente diplomacy did, to some extent, deice the Cold War. Moreover, by checkmating and co-opting the two great communist powers, the president had cleverly set the stage for America's exit from Vietnam. But the concluding act in that wrenching tragedy still remained to be played.

### **A New Team on the Supreme Bench**

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Nixon had lashed out during the campaign at the "permissiveness" and "judicial activism" of the Supreme Court presided over by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Following his appointment in 1953, the jovial Warren had led the Court into a series of decisions that drastically affected sexual freedom, the rights of criminals, the practice of religion, civil rights, and the structure of political representation. The decisions of the Warren Court reflected its deep concern for the individual, no matter how lowly.



In *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), the Court struck down a state law that prohibited the use of contraceptives, even among married couples. The Court proclaimed (critics said “invented”) a “right of privacy” that soon provided the basis for decisions protecting women’s abortion rights.

In 1963 the Court held (*Gideon v. Wainwright*) that all defendants in serious criminal cases were entitled to legal counsel, even if they were too poor to afford it. More controversial were the rulings in two cases—*Escobedo* (1964) and *Miranda* (1966)—that ensured the right of the accused to remain silent and to enjoy other protections when accused of a crime. In this way safeguards were erected against confessions extorted under the rubber hose and other torture. Critics of these decisions were loud in their condemnation of “crook coddling” and demanded that the courts handcuff criminals, not the “cops.”

Freedom of the press was also emphatically endorsed by the Warren Court in the case of *New York Times v. Sullivan* (1964). The Court ruled unanimously that public figures could sue for libel only if they could prove that “malice” had motivated their defamers. The decision opened a wide door for free-wheeling criticism of the public actions as well as the private lives of politicians and other officials.

Nor did the Court shy away from explosive religious issues. In two stunning decisions, *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* (1963), it voted against required prayers and Bible reading in the public schools. These rulings were based on the First Amendment, which requires the separation of church and state, but to many religious believers they seemed to put the justices in the same bracket with atheistic communists. Cynics predicted that the “old goats in black coats” would soon be erasing “In God We Trust” from all coins.

Infuriating to many southerners was the determination of the Court, following the school-desegregation decision of 1954, to support black people in civil rights cases. Five southern state legislatures officially nullified the “sociological” Supreme Court decision, but they in turn were overruled by the high tribunal. In general, it held that the states could not deny to blacks the rights that were extended to whites. Conservatives maligned the Warren Court for not interpreting the Constitution but rewriting it, at the expense of states’ rights and other constitutional guarantees. It was acting, they

charged, too much like a legislature and not enough like a judicial body.

The Warren Court also struck at the overrepresentation in state legislatures of cow-pasture agricultural districts. Adopting the principle of one-man-one-vote, the Court in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) ruled that the state legislatures, both upper and lower houses, would have to be reapportioned according to the human population, irrespective of cows. States’ righters and assorted right-wingers raised anew the battle cry “Impeach Earl Warren.” But the legislatures grudgingly went ahead with reapportionment.

From 1954 on, the Court came under relentless criticism, the bitterest since New Deal days. Its foes made numerous but unsuccessful efforts to clip its wings through bills in Congress or through constitutional amendments. But for better or worse, the Court was grappling with stubborn social problems spawned by midcentury tensions, even—or especially—if duly elected legislatures failed to do so.

Fulfilling campaign promises, President Nixon undertook to change the Court’s philosophical complexion. Taking advantage of several vacancies, he sought appointees who would strictly interpret the Constitution, cease “meddling” in social and political questions, and not coddle radicals or criminals. The Senate in 1969 speedily confirmed his nomination of white-maned Warren E. Burger of Minnesota to succeed the retiring Earl Warren as chief justice. Before the end of 1971, the Court counted four conservative Nixon appointments out of nine members.

Yet Nixon was to learn the ironic lesson that many presidents have learned about their Supreme Court appointees: once seated on the high bench, the justices are fully free to think and decide according to their own beliefs, not according to the president’s expectations. The Burger Court that Nixon shaped proved reluctant to dismantle the “liberal” rulings of the Warren Court; it even produced the most controversial judicial opinion of modern times, the momentous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, which legalized abortion (see p. 989).

### **Nixon on the Home Front**

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Surprisingly, Nixon presided over significant expansion of the welfare programs that conservative Republicans routinely denounced. He approved

increased appropriations for entitlements like Food Stamps and Medicaid, as well as for the largest federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which especially targeted single mothers of young children. Nixon also implemented a new federal program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which gave generous benefits to the indigent aged, blind, and disabled. He signed legislation in 1972 that raised Social Security old-age pensions and provided for automatic increases when the cost of living rose more than 3 percent in any year. Ironically, though designed to protect the elderly against the ravages of inflation, this "indexing" actually helped to fuel the inflationary fires that raged out of control later in the decade. Yet in the short run, Nixon's generous expansion of Great Society programs—along with continuing economic growth—helped reduce the nation's poverty rate to 11 percent in 1973, its lowest level in modern history.

Amid much controversy, Nixon also did the Great Society one better in his attack on racial discrimination. His so-called Philadelphia Plan of 1969 required construction-trade unions working on federal contracts in Philadelphia to establish "goals and timetables" for the hiring of black apprentices. Nixon may have been motivated in part by a desire to weaken the forces of liberalism by driving a wedge between blacks and trade unions. But whatever his reasoning, the president's new policy had far-reaching implications. Soon extended to all federal contracts, the Philadelphia Plan in effect required thousands of employers to meet hiring quotas or to establish "set-asides" for minority subcontractors.

Nixon's Philadelphia Plan drastically altered the meaning of "affirmative action." Lyndon Johnson had intended affirmative action to protect *individuals* against discrimination. Nixon now transformed and escalated affirmative action into a program that conferred privileges on certain *groups*. The Supreme Court went along with Nixon's approach. In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), the black-robed justices prohibited intelligence tests or other devices that had the effect of excluding minorities or women from certain jobs. The Court's ruling strongly suggested that the only sure protection against charges of discrimination was to hire minority workers—or admit minority students—in proportion to their presence in the population.

Together the actions of Nixon and the Court opened broad employment and educational opportunities for minorities and women. They also

opened a Pandora's box of protest. Critics assailed the new style of affirmative action as "reverse discrimination." They objected especially that such a sweeping policy had been created by executive order and judicial decision, not by democratically elected representatives in the legislature. Yet what other remedy was there, defenders asked, to offset centuries of prejudice and opportunity denied?

Among the other major legacies of the Nixon years was the creation in 1970 of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a companion body, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA). Their births climaxed two decades of mounting concern for the environment, beginning with the establishment in Los Angeles of the Air Pollution Control Office in 1950. Author Rachel Carson gave the environmental movement a huge boost in 1962 when she published *Silent Spring*, an enormously effective piece of latter-day muckraking that exposed the poisonous effects of pesticides.

Legislatively armed by the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and similar laws, EPA and OSHA stood on the frontline of the battle for ecological sanity. They made notable progress in the ensuing decades on reducing automobile emissions and cleaning up befouled waterways and toxic waste sites. Impressed by the new environmentalist mood, Congress refused after 1972 to pay for any more of the huge irrigation projects that had watered—and ecologically transformed—much of the arid West over the preceding half century.

Worried about creeping inflation (then running at about 5 percent), Nixon overcame his distaste for economic controls and imposed a ninety-day wage and price freeze in 1971. To stimulate the nation's sagging exports, he next stunned the world by taking the United States off the gold standard and devaluing the dollar. These moves effectively ended the "Bretton Woods" system of international currency stabilization that had functioned for more than a quarter of a century after World War II.

Elected as a minority president, with only 43 percent of the vote in 1968, Nixon devised a clever but cynical plan—called the "southern strategy"—to achieve a solid majority in 1972. His Supreme Court nominations constituted an important part of his scheme. The southern strategy emphasized an appeal to white voters by soft-pedaling civil rights and openly opposing school busing to achieve racial balance. But as fate would have it, the southern strategy became superfluous as foreign policy dominated the presidential campaign of 1972.

## **The Nixon Landslide of 1972**

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Vietnam continued to be the burning issue. Nearly four years had passed since Nixon had promised, as a presidential candidate, to end the war and "win" the peace. Yet in the spring of 1972, the fighting escalated anew to alarming levels when the North Vietnamese, heavily equipped with foreign tanks, burst through the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Vietnams. Nixon reacted promptly by launching massive bombing attacks on strategic centers in North Vietnam, including Hanoi, the capital. Gambling heavily on foreign forbearance, he also ordered the dropping of contact mines to blockade the principal harbors of North Vietnam. Either Moscow or Beijing, or both, could have

responded explosively, but neither did, thanks to Nixon's shrewd diplomacy. The North Vietnamese offensive finally ground to a halt.

The continuing Vietnam conflict spurred the rise of South Dakota senator George McGovern to the 1972 Democratic nomination. McGovern's promise to pull the remaining American troops out of Vietnam in ninety days earned him the backing of the large antiwar element in the party. But his appeal to racial minorities, feminists, leftists, and youth alienated the traditional working-class backbone of his party. Moreover, the discovery shortly after the convention that McGovern's running mate, Missouri senator Thomas Eagleton, had undergone psychiatric care forced Eagleton's removal from the ticket and virtually doomed McGovern's candidacy.

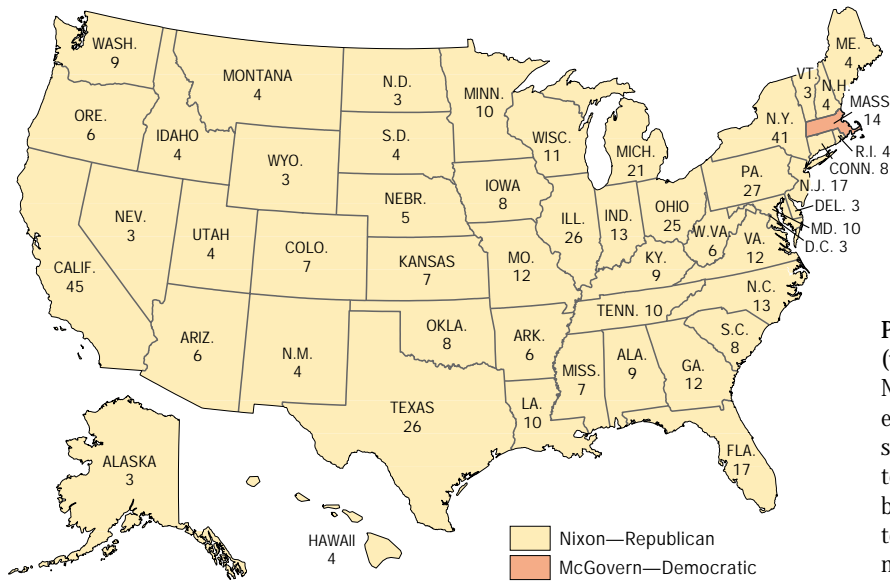
Nixon's campaign emphasized that he had wound down the "Democratic war" in Vietnam from some 540,000 troops to about 30,000. His candidacy received an added boost just twelve days before the election when the high-flying Dr. Kissinger announced that "peace is at hand" in Vietnam and that an agreement would be settled in a few days.

Nixon won the election in a landslide. His lopsided victory encompassed every state except Massachusetts and the nonstate District of Columbia. He piled up 520 electoral votes to 17 for McGovern and a popular majority of 47,169,911 to 29,170,383 votes. McGovern had counted on a large number of young people's votes, but less than half the 18–21 age group even bothered to register to vote. Nixon's claim that the election gave him an unprecedented mandate for his policies was weakened by Republican election losses in both the House and Senate.

## **Bombing North Vietnam to the Peace Table**

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The dove of peace, "at hand" in Vietnam just before the balloting, took flight after the election, when Nixon refused to be stampeded into accepting terms pocked with obvious loopholes. After the fighting on both sides had again escalated, he launched a furious two-week bombing of North Vietnam in an ironhanded effort to force the North Vietnamese back to the conference table. This attack was the heaviest of the war and resulted in substantial losses of America's big B-52 bombers. But this merciless pounding drove the North Viet-



**Presidential Election of 1972 (with electoral vote by state)**  
Nixon buried McGovern in this election, but when his administration soon thereafter began to sink in a swamp of scandals, bumper stickers appeared in Boston proclaiming, “Don’t blame me, I’m from Massachusetts.”

namese negotiators to agree to cease-fire arrangements on January 23, 1973, nearly three months after peace was prematurely proclaimed.

Nixon hailed the face-saving cease-fire agreements as “peace with honor,” but the boast rang hollow. The United States was to withdraw its remaining 27,000 or so troops and could reclaim some 560 American prisoners of war. The government of South Vietnam would be permitted to continue receiving limited U.S. support but no more U.S. fighting forces. An election was eventually to be held to determine the future of the country. The North Vietnamese were allowed to keep some 145,000 troops in South Vietnam, where they could be used to spearhead a powerful new offensive when the time seemed ripe. Ominously, the North Vietnamese still occupied about 30 percent of South Vietnam. The shaky “peace” was in reality little more than a thinly disguised American retreat.

## Watergate Woes

Nixon’s electoral triumph was soon sullied by the so-called Watergate scandals. On June 17, 1972, some two months before his renomination, a bungled burglary had occurred in the Democratic headquarters, located in the Watergate apartment-office

complex in Washington. Five men were arrested inside the building with electronic “bugging” equipment in their possession. They were working for the Republican Committee for the Re-election of the President—popularly known as CREEP—which had managed to raise tens of millions of dollars, often by secretive, unethical, or unlawful means. CREEP had also engaged in a “dirty tricks” campaign of espionage and sabotage, including faked documents, directed against Democratic candidates in the campaign of 1972.

The Watergate break-in was only the tip of an iceberg in a slimy sea of corruption that made the Grant and Harding scandals look almost respectable. Several prominently placed White House aides and advisers were forced to resign. Many were involved in the criminal obstruction of justice through tangled cover-ups or payments of hush money. By early 1974 twenty-nine people had been indicted, had pleaded guilty, or had been convicted of Watergate-related crimes.

The scandal in Washington also provoked the improper or illegal use of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency. Even the Internal Revenue Service was called upon by Nixon’s aides to audit or otherwise harass political opponents and others who had fallen into disfavor. A White House “enemies list” turned up that included innocent citizens who were to be hounded

or prosecuted in various ways. In the name of national security, Nixon's aides had authorized a burglary of the files of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, so great was the determination to destroy the man who had "leaked" the Pentagon Papers. This was the most notorious exploit of the White House "plumbers unit," created to plug up leaks of confidential information.

A select Senate committee, headed by the aging Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, conducted a prolonged and widely televised series of hearings in 1973–1974. John Dean III, a former White House lawyer with a remarkable memory, testified glibly and at great length as to the involvement of the top echelons in the White House, including the president, in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in. Dean in effect accused Nixon of the crime of obstructing justice. But the committee then had only the unsupported word of Dean against weighty White House protestations of innocence.

### **The Great Tape Controversy**

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A bombshell exploded before Senator Ervin's committee in July 1973 when a former presidential aide reported the presence in the White House of "bugging" equipment, installed under the president's

authority. President Nixon's conversations, in person or on the telephone, had been recorded on tape without notifying the other parties that electronic eavesdropping was taking place.

Nixon had emphatically denied prior knowledge of the Watergate burglary or involvement in the cover-up. Now Dean's sensational testimony could be checked against the White House tapes, and the Senate committee could better determine who was telling the truth. But for months Nixon flatly refused to produce the taped evidence. He took refuge behind various principles, including separation of powers and executive privilege (confidentiality). But all of them were at least constitutionally dubious, especially when invoked to cover up crime or obstruct justice.

The anxieties of the White House deepened when Vice President Agnew was forced to resign in October 1973 for taking bribes or "kickbacks" from Maryland contractors while governor and also as vice president. President Nixon himself was now in danger of being removed by the impeachment route, so Congress invoked the Twenty-fifth Amendment (see the Appendix) to replace Agnew with a twelve-term congressman from Michigan, Gerald ("Jerry") Ford. His record in public life was politically respectable and his financial affairs proved to be above suspicion at a time when unquestioned honesty was in short supply.

Ten days after Agnew's resignation came the famous "Saturday Night Massacre" (October 20, 1973). Archibald Cox, a Harvard law professor appointed as a "special prosecutor" by Nixon in May, issued a subpoena for relevant tapes and other documents from the White House. A cornered Nixon thereupon ordered the firing of Cox and then accepted the resignations of the attorney general and the deputy attorney general because they refused to fire Cox.

### **The Secret Bombing of Cambodia and the War Powers Act**

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As if Watergate were not enough, the constitutionality of Nixon's continued aerial battering of Cambodia came under increasing fire. In July 1973 America was shocked to learn that the U.S. Air Force had already secretly conducted some thirty-five hundred bombing raids against North Vietnamese positions in Cambodia. They had begun in March 1969 and had continued for some fourteen months prior to the open American incursion in May 1970. The most disturbing feature of these sky forays was that while they were going on, American officials, including the president, were avowing that Cambodian neutrality was being respected. Countless Americans began to wonder what kind of representative government they had if the United States was fighting a war they knew nothing about.

Defiance followed secretiveness. After the Vietnam cease-fire in January 1973, Nixon openly carried on his large-scale bombing of communist forces in order to help the rightist Cambodian government. This stretching of presidential war-making powers met furious opposition from the public and from a clear majority in both houses of Congress, which repeatedly tried to stop the bombing by cutting off appropriations. But Nixon's vetoes of such legislation were always sustained by at least one-third-plus-one votes in the House. Finally, with appropriations running short, Nixon agreed to a compromise in June 1973 whereby he would end the Cambodian bombing six weeks later and seek congressional approval of any future action in that bomb-blasted country.

The years of bombing had inflicted grisly wounds on Cambodia. Incessant American air raids had blasted its people, shredded its economy, and revolutionized its politics. The long-suffering Cambodians soon groaned under the sadistic heel of Pol Pot, a murderous tyrant who dispatched as many as 2 million of his people to their graves. He was forced from power, ironically enough, only by a full-dress Vietnamese invasion in 1978, followed by a military occupation that dragged on for a decade.

Congressional opposition to the expansion of presidential war-making powers by Johnson and Nixon led to the War Powers Act in November 1973. Passed over Nixon's veto, it required the president to report to Congress within forty-eight hours after committing troops to a foreign conflict or "substantially" enlarging American combat units in a foreign

*The Washington Post (July 19, 1973) carried this news item:*

“American B-52 bombers dropped about 104,000 tons of explosives on Communist sanctuaries in neutralist Cambodia during a series of raids in 1969 and 1970. . . . The secret bombing was acknowledged by the Pentagon the Monday after a former Air Force major . . . described how he falsified reports on Cambodian air operations and destroyed records on the bombing missions actually flown.”

country. Such a limited authorization would have to end within sixty days unless Congress extended it for thirty more days.

Compelling Nixon to end the bombing of Cambodia in August 1973 was but one manifestation of what came to be called the “New Isolationism.” The draft had ended in January 1973, although it was retained on a standby basis. Future members of the armed forces were to be well-paid volunteers—a change that greatly eased tensions among youth. Insistent demands arose in Congress for reducing American armed forces abroad, especially because some 300,000 remained in Europe more than a quarter of a century after Hitler’s downfall. The argument often heard was that the Western European countries, with more population than the Soviet Union, ought by now to be willing and able to provide for their own defense against the forces of communism. But President Nixon, fearful of a weakened hand in the high-stakes game of power politics, headed off all serious attempts at troop reduction.

### **The Arab Oil Embargo and the Energy Crisis**

Adding to Nixon’s problems, the long-rumbling Middle East erupted anew in October 1973, when the rearmed Syrians and Egyptians unleashed surprise attacks on Israel in an attempt to regain the territory they had lost in the Six-Day War of 1967. With the Israelis in desperate retreat, Kissinger, who had become secretary of state in September, hastily flew to Moscow in an effort to restrain the Soviets, who were

arming the attackers. Believing that the Kremlin was poised to fly combat troops to the Suez area, Nixon placed America’s nuclear forces on alert and ordered a gigantic airlift of nearly \$2 billion in war materials to the Israelis. This assistance helped save the day, as the Israelis aggressively turned the tide and had stormed to a stone’s throw from Cairo when American diplomacy brought about an uneasy cease-fire.

America’s policy of backing Israel against its oil-rich neighbors exacted a heavy penalty. Late in October 1973, the Arab nations suddenly clamped an embargo on oil for the United States and for other countries supporting Israel. Americans had to suffer through a long, cold winter of lowered thermostats and speedometers. Lines of automobiles at service stations lengthened as tempers shortened and a business recession deepened.

The “energy crisis” suddenly energized a number of long-deferred projects. Congress approved a costly Alaska pipeline and a national speed limit of fifty-five miles per hour to conserve fuel. Agitation mounted for heavier use of coal and nuclear power, despite the environmental threat they posed.

The five months of the Arab “blackmail” embargo in 1974 clearly signaled the end of an era—the era of cheap and abundant energy. A twenty-year surplus of world oil supplies had masked the fact that since 1948 the United States had been a net importer of oil. American oil production peaked in 1970 and then began an irreversible decline. Blissfully unaware of their dependence on foreign suppliers, Americans, like revelers on a binge, had more than tripled their oil consumption since the end of World War II. The number of automobiles increased 250 percent between 1949 and 1972, and Detroit’s engineers gave nary a thought to building more fuel-efficient engines.

By 1974 America was oil addicted and extremely vulnerable to any interruption in supplies. That stark fact colored the diplomatic and economic history of the 1980s and 1990s. The Middle East loomed ever larger on the map of America’s strategic interests, until the United States in 1990 at last found itself pulled into a shooting war with Iraq to protect its oil supplies.

The Middle Eastern sheiks, flexing their economic muscles through OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), approximately quadrupled their price for crude oil after lifting the embargo in 1974. Huge new oil bills wildly disrupted the U.S. balance of international trade and added further fuel to the already raging fires of inflation.

The United States took the lead in forming the International Energy Agency in 1974 as a counterweight to OPEC, and various sectors of the economy, including Detroit's carmakers, began their slow, grudging adjustment to the rudely dawning age of energy dependency. But full reconciliation to that uncomfortable reality was a long time coming.

### **The Unmaking of a President**

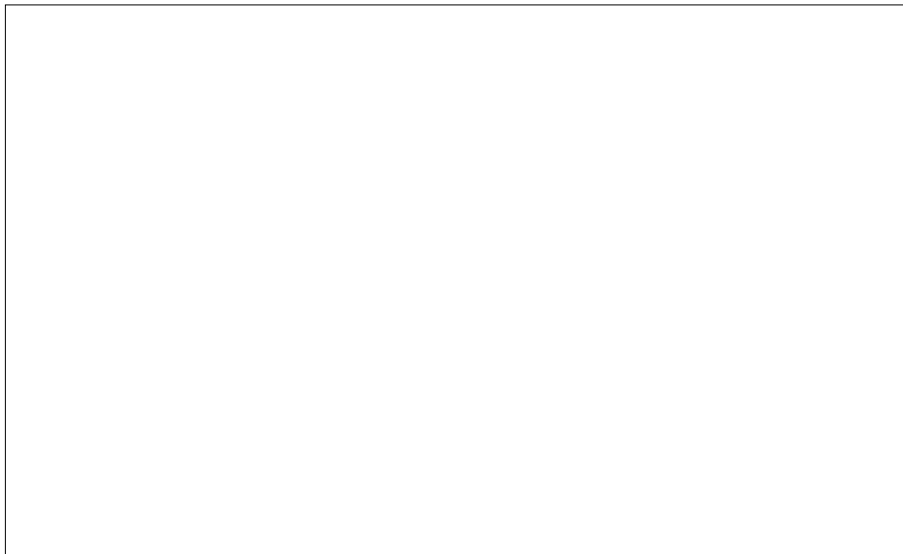
Political tribulations added to the nation's cup of woe in 1974. The continuing impeachment inquiry cast damning doubts on Nixon's integrity. Responding at last to the House Judiciary Committee's demand for the Watergate tapes, Nixon agreed in the spring of 1974 to the publication of "relevant" portions of the tapes, declaring that these would vindicate him. But substantial sections of the wanted tapes were missing, and Nixon's frequent obscenities were excised with the phrase "expletive deleted." Confronted with demands for the rest of the material, Nixon flatly refused. On July 24, 1974, the president suffered a disastrous setback when the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that "executive privilege" gave him no right to withhold from the special prosecutor portions of tapes relevant to criminal activity. Skating on thin ice over hot water, Nixon reluctantly complied.

The House Judiciary Committee pressed ahead with its articles of impeachment. The key vote came

late in July 1974, when the committee adopted the first article, which charged obstruction of "the administration of justice," including Watergate-related crimes. Two other articles were later approved by the committee accusing Nixon of having abused the powers of his office and of having shown contempt of Congress by ignoring lawful subpoenas for relevant tapes and other evidence.

Seeking to soften the impact of inevitable disclosure, Nixon voluntarily took a step, on August 5, 1974, that had a devastating effect on what remained of his credibility. He now made public three subpoenaed tapes of conversations with his chief aide on June 23, 1972. One of them had him giving orders, six days after the Watergate break-in, to use the CIA to hold back an inquiry by the FBI. Now Nixon's own tape-recorded words convicted him of having been an active party to the attempted cover-up, in itself the crime of obstructing justice. More than that, he had solemnly told the American people on television that he had known nothing of the Watergate whitewash until about nine months later.

The public backlash proved to be overwhelming. Republican leaders in Congress concluded that the guilty and unpredictable Nixon was a loose cannon on the deck of the ship of state. They frankly informed the president that his impeachment by the full House and removal by the Senate were foregone conclusions. They made it clear that he would best serve his nation, his party, and himself by resigning with honor, or a semblance of it. If convicted by the Senate, he would lose all his normal retirement





## The First Unelected President

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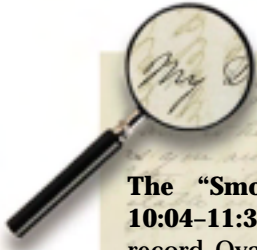
Gerald Rudolph Ford, the first man to be made president solely by a vote of Congress, entered the besmirched White House in August 1974 with serious handicaps. He was widely—and unfairly—suspected of being little more than a dim-witted former college football player. President Johnson had sneered that “Jerry” was so lacking in brainpower that he could not walk and chew gum at the same time. Worse, Ford had been selected, not elected, vice president, following Spiro Agnew’s resignation in disgrace. The sour odor of illegitimacy hung about this president without precedent.

Then, out of a clear sky, Ford granted a complete pardon to Nixon for any crimes he may have committed as president, discovered or undiscovered. Democrats were outraged. They wanted iron-toothed justice, even vengeance. They heatedly charged, without persuasive evidence, that Ford was carrying out a “buddy deal” that had been cooked up when Nixon nominated him for the vice presidency. Ford explained that he only wanted to end Nixon’s private agony, heal the festering wounds in the body

benefits; if he resigned he could retain them—more than \$150,000 a year—and retire in royal splendor.

Left with no better choice, Nixon choked back his tears and announced his resignation in a dramatic television appearance on August 8, 1974. Few presidents had flown so high, and none had sunk so low. In his Farewell Address, Nixon admitted having made some “judgments” that “were wrong” but insisted that he had always acted “in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation.” Unconvinced, countless Americans would change the song “Hail to the Chief” to “Jail to the Chief.”

The nation had survived a wrenching constitutional crisis, which proved that the impeachment machinery forged by the Founding Fathers could work when public opinion overwhelmingly demanded that it be implemented. The principles that no person is above the law and that presidents must be held to strict accountability for their acts were strengthened. The United States of America, on the eve of its two-hundredth birthday as a republic, had given an impressive demonstration of self-discipline and self-government to the rest of the world.



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**The “Smoking Gun” Tape, June 23, 1972, 10:04–11:39 A.M.** The technological capability to record Oval Office conversations combined with Richard Nixon’s obsession with documenting his presidency to give the public—and the Senate committee investigating his role in the break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Office Tower—rare access to personal conversations between the president and his closest advisers. This tape, which undeniably exposed Nixon’s central role in constructing a “cover-up” of the Watergate break-in, was made on Nixon’s first day back in Washington after the botched burglary of June 17, 1972. In this conversation with White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, Nixon devised a plan to block a widening F.B.I. investigation by instructing the director of the C.I.A. to deflect any further F.B.I. snooping on the grounds that it would endanger sensitive C.I.A. operations. Nixon refused to turn over this and other tapes to Senate investigators until so ordered by the Supreme Court on July 24, 1974. Within four days of its release on August 5, Nixon was forced to resign. After eighteen months of protesting his innocence of the crime and his ignorance of any effort to obstruct justice, Nixon was finally undone by the evidence in this incriminating “smoking gun” tape. While tapes documented two straight years of Nixon’s Oval Office conversations, other presidents, such as Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, recorded important meetings and crisis deliberations. Since Watergate, however, it is unlikely that any president has permitted extensive tape recording, depriving historians of a unique insight into the inner-workings of the White House. Should taped White House discussions be part of the public record of a presidency, and if so, who should have access to them? What else might historians learn from a tape like this one, besides analyzing the Watergate cover-up?

Haldeman: . . . yesterday, they concluded it was not the White House, but are now convinced it is a CIA thing, so the CIA turn off would . . .

President: Well, not sure of their analysis, I’m not going to get that involved. I’m (unintelligible).

Haldeman: No, sir. We don’t want you to.

President: You call them in.

President: Good. Good deal! Play it tough. That’s the way they play it and that’s the way we are going to play it.

Haldeman: O.K. We’ll do it.

President: Yeah, when I saw that news summary item, I of course knew it was a bunch of crap, but I thought ah, well it’s good to have them off on this wild hair thing because when they start bugging us, which they have, we’ll know our little boys will not know how to handle it. I hope they will though. You never know. Maybe, you think about it. Good!

President: When you get in these people when you . . . get these people in, say: “Look, the problem is that this will open the whole, the whole Bay of Pigs thing, and the President just feels that” ah, without going into the details . . . don’t, don’t lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement, but just say this is sort of a comedy of errors, bizarre, without getting into it, “the President believes that it is going to open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again. And, ah because these people are plugging for, for keeps and that they should call the FBI in and say that we wish for the country, don’t go any further into this case,” period!

politic, and let the country get on with its business, undistracted by a possibly sensational trial. But lingering suspicions about the circumstances of the pardon cast a dark shadow over Ford's prospects of being elected president in his own right in 1976.

Ford at first sought to enhance the so-called *détente* with the Soviet Union that Nixon had crafted. In July 1975 President Ford joined leaders from thirty-four other nations in Helsinki, Finland, to sign several sets of historic accords. One group of agreements officially wrote an end to World War II by finally legitimizing the Soviet-dictated boundaries of Poland and other Eastern European countries. In return, the Soviets signed a "third basket" of agreements, guaranteeing more liberal exchanges of people and information between East and West and protecting certain basic "human rights." The Helsinki accords kindled small dissident movements in Eastern Europe and even in the USSR itself, but the Soviets soon poured ice water on these sputtering flames of freedom. Moscow's restrictions on Jewish emigration had already, in December 1974, prompted Congress to add punitive restrictions to a U.S.-Soviet trade bill.

Western Europeans, especially the West Germans, cheered the Helsinki conference as a milestone of *détente*. But in the United States, critics increasingly charged that *détente* was proving to be a one-way street. American grain and technology

flowed across the Atlantic to the USSR, and little of comparable importance flowed back. And Soviet ships and planes continued to haul great quantities of arms and military technicians to procommunist forces around the globe.

Despite these difficulties, Ford at first clung stubbornly to *détente*. But the American public's fury over Moscow's double-dealing so steadily mounted that by the end of his term, the president was refusing even to pronounce the word *détente* in public. The thaw in the Cold War was threatening to prove chillingly brief.

### **Defeat in Vietnam**

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Early in 1975 the North Vietnamese gave full throttle to their long-expected drive southward. President Ford urged Congress to vote still more weapons for Vietnam, but his plea was in vain, and without the crutch of massive American aid, the South Vietnamese quickly and ingloriously collapsed.

The dam burst so rapidly that the remaining Americans had to be frantically evacuated by helicopter, the last of them on April 29, 1975. Also rescued were about 140,000 South Vietnamese, most of them so dangerously identified with the Americans that they feared a bloodbath by the victorious com-

munists. Ford compassionately admitted these people to the United States, where they added further seasoning to the melting pot. Eventually some 500,000 arrived (see "Makers of America: The Vietnamese," pp. 964–965).

America's longest, most frustrating war thus ended not with a bang but a whimper. In a technical sense, the Americans had not lost the war; their client nation had. The United States had fought the North Vietnamese to a standstill and had then withdrawn its troops in 1973, leaving the South Vietnamese to fight their own war, with generous shipments of costly American aircraft, tanks, and other munitions. The estimated cost to America was \$118 billion in current outlays, together with some 56,000 dead and 300,000 wounded. The people of the United States had in fact provided just about everything, except the will to win—and that could not be injected by outsiders.

Technicalities aside, America had lost more than a war. It had lost face in the eyes of foreigners, lost its own self-esteem, lost confidence in its military prowess, and lost much of the economic muscle that had made possible its global leadership since World War II. Americans reluctantly came to realize that their power as well as their pride had been deeply wounded in Vietnam and that recovery would be slow and painful.

## Feminist Victories and Defeats

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As the army limped home from Vietnam, there was little rejoicing on the college campuses, where demonstrators had once braved tear gas and billy clubs to denounce the war. The antiwar movement, like many of the other protest movements that convulsed the country in the 1960s, had long since splintered and stalled. One major exception to this pattern stood out: although they had their differences, American feminists showed vitality and momentum. They won legislative and judicial victories and provoked an intense rethinking of gender roles. (On the roots of this movement, see "Makers of America: The Feminists," pp. 968–969.)

Thousands of women marched in the Women's Stride for Equality on the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage in 1970. In 1972 Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments, prohibiting sex discrimination in any federally assisted educational program or activity. Perhaps this act's biggest impact was to create opportunities for girls' and women's athletics at schools and colleges, giving birth to a new "Title IX generation" that would reach maturity in the 1980s and 1990s and help professionalize women's sports as well. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution won congressional approval

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Vietnamese

At first glance the towns of Westminster and Fountain Valley, California, seem to resemble other California communities nearby. Tract homes line residential streets; shopping centers flank the busy thoroughfares. But these are no ordinary American suburbs. Instead they make up “Little Saigons,” vibrant outposts of Vietnamese culture in the contemporary United States. Shops offer exotic Asian merchandise; restaurants serve such delicacies as lemongrass chicken. These neighborhoods, living reminders of America’s anguish in Vietnam, are a rarely acknowledged consequence of that sorrowful conflict.

Before South Vietnam fell in 1975, few Vietnamese ventured across the Pacific. Only in 1966 did U.S. immigration authorities even designate “Vietnamese” as a separate category of newcomers, and most early immigrants were the wives and children of U.S. servicemen. But as the communists

closed in on Saigon, many Vietnamese, particularly those who had worked closely with American or South Vietnamese authorities, feared for their future. Gathering together as many of their extended-family members as they could assemble, thousands of Vietnamese fled for their lives. In a few hectic days in 1975, some 140,000 Vietnamese escaped before the approaching gunfire, a few dramatically clinging to the bottoms of departing helicopters. From Saigon they were conveyed to military bases in Guam and the Philippines. Another 60,000 less fortunate Vietnamese escaped at the same time over land and sea to Hong Kong and Thailand, where they waited nervously for permission to move on. To accommodate the refugees, the U.S. government set up camps across the nation. Arrivals were crowded into army barracks affording little room and less privacy. These were boot camps not for military service but for assimilation into American society. A rigorous program trained the Vietnamese in English, forbade children from speaking their native language in the classroom, and even immersed them in American slang. Many resented this attempt to mold them, to strip them of their culture.

Their discontent boiled over when authorities prepared to release the refugees from camps and board them with families around the nation. The resettlement officials had decided to find a sponsor for each Vietnamese family—an American family that would provide food, shelter, and assistance for the refugees until they could fend for themselves. But the Vietnamese people cherish their traditional extended families—grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins living communally with parents and children. Few American sponsors would accommodate a large extended family; fewer Vietnamese families would willingly separate.

The refugees were dispersed to Iowa, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Washington, and Califor-

nia. But the settlement sites, many of them tucked away in rural districts, offered scant economic opportunities. The immigrants, who had held mainly skilled or white-collar positions in Vietnam, bristled as they were herded into menial labor. As soon as they could, they relocated, hastening to established Vietnamese enclaves around San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Dallas.

Soon a second throng of Vietnamese immigrants pushed into these Little Saigons. Fleeing from the ravages of poverty and from the oppressive communist government, these stragglers had crammed themselves and their few possessions into little boats, hoping to reach Hong Kong or get picked up by ships. Eventually many of these “boat people” reached the United States. Usually less educated than the first arrivals and receiving far less resettlement aid from the U.S. government, they were, however, more willing to start at the bottom. Today these two groups total more than half a million people. Differing in experience and expectations, the Vietnamese share a new home in a strange land. Their uprooting is an immense, unreckoned consequence of America’s longest war.

nists blamed the women's movement for the rising divorce rate, which tripled between 1960 and 1976. And the Catholic Church and the religious right organized a powerful grassroots movement to oppose the legalization of abortion.

For many feminists, the most bitter defeat was the death of the ERA. With ratification by thirty-eight state legislatures, the amendment would have become part of the Constitution. Conservative spokeswoman Phyllis Schlafly led the campaign to stop the ERA. Its advocates, she charged, were just “bitter women seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems.” In 1979 Congress extended the deadline for ratification, but ERA opponents dug in their heels. The amendment died in 1982, three states short of success.

### **The Seventies in Black and White**

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Although the civil rights movement had fractured, race remained an explosive issue in the 1970s. The Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) blindsided school integrationists when it ruled that desegregation plans could not require students to move across school-district lines. The decision effectively exempted suburban districts from shouldering any part of the burden of desegregating inner-city schools, thereby reinforcing “white flight” from cities to suburbs. By the same token, the decision distilled all the problems of desegregation into the least prosperous districts, often pitting the poorest, most disadvantaged elements of the white and black communities against one another. Boston and other cities were shaken to their foundations by attempts to implement school-desegregation plans under these painful conditions.

Affirmative action programs also remained highly controversial. White workers who were denied advancement and white students who were refused college admission continued to raise the cry of “reverse discrimination.” They charged that their rights had been violated by employers and admissions officers who put more weight on racial or ethnic background than on ability or achievement.

One white Californian, Allan Bakke, made headlines in 1978 when the Supreme Court, by the narrowest of margins (five to four) upheld his claim that his application to medical school had been turned down because of an admissions program that partially favored minority applicants. In a tortured deci-

in 1972. It declared, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Twenty-eight states quickly ratified the amendment, first proposed by suffragists in 1923. Hopes rose that the ERA might soon become the law of the land.

Even the Supreme Court seemed to be on the movement's side. In *Reed v. Reed* (1971) and *Fron-tiero v. Richardson* (1973), the Court challenged sex discrimination in legislation and employment. And in the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Court struck down laws prohibiting abortion, arguing that a woman's decision to terminate a pregnancy was protected by the constitutional right of privacy.

But the feminist movement soon faced a formidable backlash. In 1972 President Nixon vetoed a proposal to set up nationwide public day care, saying it would weaken the American family. Antifemi-

sion, reflecting the troubling moral ambiguities and insoluble political complexities of this issue, the Court ordered the University of California at Davis medical school to admit Bakke, and declared that preference in admissions could not be given to members of any group, minority or majority, on the basis of ethnic or racial identity alone. Yet at the same time, the Court said that racial factors might be taken into account in a school's overall admissions policy. Among the dissenters on the sharply divided bench was the Court's only black justice, Thurgood Marshall. He warned in an impassioned opinion that the denial of racial preferences might sweep away years of progress by the civil rights movement. But many conservatives cheered the decision as affirming the principle that justice is colorblind.

One of the most remarkable developments of the 1970s was the resurgence of Native American political power. Inspired by the civil rights movement, American Indians learned to use the courts and well-planned acts of civil disobedience to advance their aims. But while blacks had fought against segregation, Indians used the tactics of the civil rights movement to assert their status as separate semisovereign peoples. Indian activists captured the nation's attention by seizing the island of Alcatraz in 1970 and the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1972. A series of victories in the courts consolidated the decade's gains. In the case of *United States v. Wheeler* (1978), the Supreme

Court declared that Indian tribes possessed a "unique and limited" sovereignty, subject to the will of Congress but not to individual states.

### **The Bicentennial Campaign and the Carter Victory**

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America's two-hundredth birthday, in 1976, fell during a presidential election year—a fitting coincidence for a proud democracy. Gerald Ford energetically sought nomination for the presidency in his own right and won the Republican nod at the Kansas City convention.

The Democratic standard-bearer was fifty-one-year-old James Earl Carter, Jr., a dark-horse candidate who galloped out of obscurity during the long primary-election season. Carter, a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia, had served as his state's governor from 1971 to 1975. Flashing a toothy smile and insisting on humble "Jimmy" as his first name, this born-again Baptist touched many people with his down-home sincerity. He ran against the memory of Nixon and Watergate as much as he ran against Ford. His most effective campaign pitch was his promise that "I'll never lie to you." Untainted by ties with a corrupt and cynical Washington, he attracted voters as an outsider who would clean the disorderly house of "big government."



# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Feminists

**A** well-to-do housewife and mother of seven, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) was an unlikely revolutionary. Yet this founding mother of American feminism devoted seven decades of her life to the fight for women's rights.

Young Elizabeth Cady drew her inspiration from the fight against slavery. In 1840 she married fellow abolitionist Henry Stanton. Honeymooning in London, they attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention, where women were forced to sit in a screened-off balcony above the convention floor. This insult awakened Stanton to the cause that would occupy her life. With Lucretia Mott and other female abolitionists, Stanton went on to organize the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. There she pre-

sented her Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence and proclaiming that “all men *and women* are created equal.” She demanded for women the right to own property, to enter the professions, and, most daring of all, to vote.

As visionaries of a radically different future for women, early feminists encountered a mountain of hostility and tasted bitter disappointment. Stanton failed in her struggle to have women included in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted African-Americans equal citizenship. She died before seeing her dream of woman suffrage realized in the Nineteenth Amendment (1920). Yet by imagining women's emancipation as an expansion of America's founding principles of citizenship, Stanton

charted a path that other feminists would follow a century later.

Historians use the terms “first wave” and “second wave” to distinguish the women’s movement of the nineteenth century from that of the late twentieth century. The woman most often credited with launching the “second wave” is Betty Friedan (b. 1921). Growing up in Peoria, Illinois, Friedan had seen her mother grow bitter over sacrificing a journalism career to raise her family. Friedan, a suburban housewife, went on to write the 1963 best-seller *The Feminine Mystique*, exposing the quiet desperation of millions of housewives trapped in the “comfortable concentration camp” of the suburban home. The book struck a resonant chord and catapulted its author onto the national stage. In 1966 Friedan cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the chief political arm of second-wave feminism.

Just as first-wave feminism grew out of abolitionism, the second wave drew ideas, leaders, and tactics from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Civil rights workers and feminists alike focused on equal rights. NOW campaigned vigorously for an Equal Rights Amendment that in 1982 fell just three states short of ratification.

Second-wave feminism also had an avowedly radical wing, supported by younger women who were eager to challenge almost every traditional male and female gender role and to take the feminist cause to

the streets. Among these women was Robin Morgan (b. 1941). As a college student in the 1960s, Morgan was active in civil rights organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Civil rights activism provided Morgan with a model for crusading against social injustice. It also exposed her to the same sexism that plagued society at large. Women in the movement who protested against gender discrimination met ridicule, as in SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael’s famous retort, “The only position for women in SNCC is prone.” Morgan went on to found WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist

Conspiracy from Hell), made famous by its protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. There demonstrators crowned a sheep Miss America and threw symbols of women’s oppression—bras, girdles, dishcloths—into trash cans. (Contrary to news stories, they did not burn the bras.)

As the contrast between WITCH and NOW suggests, second-wave feminism was a remarkably diverse movement. Feminists in the late twentieth century disagreed over many issues—from pornography and marriage to how much to expect from government, capitalism, and men. Some feminists placed a priority on gender equality, for example, full female service in the military. Others defended a feminism of gender difference—such as maternity leaves and other special protections for women in the workplace.

Still, beyond these differences feminists had much in common. Most advocated a woman’s right to choose in the battle over abortion rights. Most regarded the law as the key weapon against gender discrimination. By century’s end radical and moderate feminists alike could take pride in a host of achievements that had changed the landscape of gender relations beyond what most people could have imagined at midcentury. Yet, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, second-wave feminists also shared the burden of understanding that the goals of genuine equality would take more than a lifetime to achieve.

Carter squeezed out a narrow victory on election day, with 51 percent of the popular vote. The electoral count stood at 297 to 240. The winner swept every state except Virginia in his native South. Especially important were the votes of African-Americans, 97 percent of whom cast their ballots for Carter.

Carter enjoyed hefty Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. Hopes ran high that the stalemate of the Nixon-Ford years between a Republican White House and a Democratic Capitol Hill would now be ended. At first Carter enjoyed notable political success. Congress granted his request to create a new cabinet-level Department of Energy. Calling the American tax system “a disgrace to the human race,” Carter also proposed tax reform and reduction. Congress eventually obliged him, in part, with an \$18 billion tax cut in 1978. The new president’s popularity remained exceptionally high during his first few months in office, even when he courted public disfavor by courageously keeping his campaign promise to pardon some ten thousand draft evaders of the Vietnam War era.

But Carter’s honeymoon did not last long. An inexperienced outsider, he had campaigned against the Washington “establishment” and never quite made the transition to being an insider himself. He

repeatedly rubbed congressional fur the wrong way, especially by failing to consult adequately with the leaders. Critics charged that he isolated himself in a shallow pool of fellow Georgians, whose ignorance of the ways of Washington compounded the problems of their greenhorn chief.

### **Carter’s Humanitarian Diplomacy**

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As a committed Christian, President Carter displayed from the outset an overriding concern for “human rights” as the guiding principle of his foreign policy. In the African nations of Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and South Africa, Carter and his eloquent U.N. ambassador, Andrew Young, championed the oppressed black majority.

The president’s most spectacular foreign-policy achievement came in September 1978 at Camp David, the woodsy presidential retreat in the Maryland highlands. Relations between Egypt and Israel had deteriorated so far that another blowup in the misery-drenched Middle East seemed imminent. So grave was the danger that Carter courageously risked humiliating failure by inviting President

of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Détente fell into disrepute as thousands of Cuban troops, assisted by Soviet advisers, appeared in Angola, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in Africa to support revolutionary factions. Arms control negotiations with Moscow stalled in the face of this Soviet military meddling.

## **Economic and Energy Woes**

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Adding to Carter's mushrooming troubles was the failing health of the economy. Prices had been rising feverishly, increasing at a rate of more than 10 percent a year by 1974 ("double-digit" inflation). Crippling oil-price hikes from OPEC in that same year dealt the reeling economy another body blow. A stinging recession during Gerald Ford's presidency brought the inflation rate down temporarily, but virtually from the moment of Carter's inauguration, prices resumed their dizzying ascent, driving the inflation rate well above 13 percent by 1979. The soaring bill for imported oil plunged America's balance of payments deeply into the red (an unprecedented \$40 billion in 1978), as Americans paid more for foreign products than they were able to earn from selling their own goods overseas.

The "oil shocks" of the 1970s taught Americans a painful but necessary lesson: that they could never again seriously consider a policy of economic isolation, as they had tried to do in the decades between the two world wars. For most of its history, America's foreign trade had accounted for no more than 10 percent of gross national product (GNP). But huge foreign-oil bills drove that figure steadily upward in the 1970s and thereafter. By the century's end, some 27 percent of GNP depended on foreign trade. The nation's new economic interdependence meant that the United States could not dominate international trade and finance as easily as it had in the post-World War II decades. Americans, once happily insulated behind their ocean moats, would have to master foreign languages and study foreign cultures if they wanted to prosper in the rapidly globalizing economy.

Yawning deficits in the federal budget, reaching nearly \$60 billion in 1980, further aggravated the U.S. economy's inflationary ailments. Americans living on fixed incomes—mostly elderly people or workers without a strong union to go to bat for

Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel to a summit conference at Camp David.

Skillfully serving as go-between, Carter after thirteen days persuaded the two visitors to sign an accord (September 17, 1978) that held considerable promise of peace. Israel agreed in principle to withdraw from territory conquered in the 1967 war, and Egypt in return promised to respect Israel's borders. Both parties pledged themselves to sign a formal peace treaty within three months. The president crowned this diplomatic success by resuming full diplomatic relations with China in early 1979 after a nearly thirty-year interruption. Carter also successfully proposed two treaties turning over complete ownership and control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians by the year 2000.

Despite these dramatic accomplishments, trouble stalked Carter's foreign policy. Overshadowing all international issues was the ominous reheating

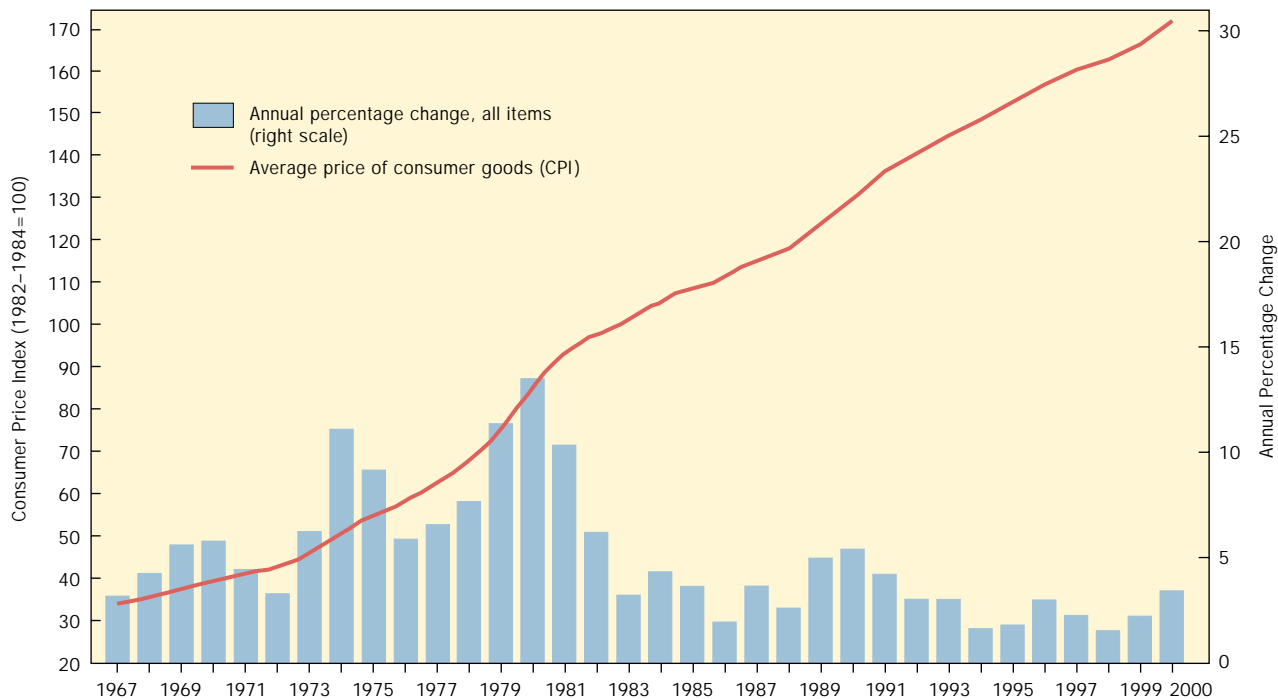
them—suffered from the shrinking dollar. People with money to lend pushed interest rates ever higher, hoping to protect themselves from being repaid in badly depreciated dollars. The “prime rate” (the rate of interest that banks charge their very best customers) vaulted to an unheard-of 20 percent in early 1980. The high cost of borrowing money shoved small businesses to the wall and strangled the construction industry, heavily dependent on loans to finance new housing and other projects.

From the outset Carter diagnosed America’s economic disease as stemming primarily from the nation’s costly dependence on foreign oil. Accordingly, one of the first acts of his presidency was a dramatic appeal to embark on an energy crusade that he called “the moral equivalent of war.” The president called for legislation to improve energy conservation, especially by curtailing the manufacture of large, gas-guzzling automobiles. But these proposals, in April 1977, ignited a blaze of indifference among the American people, who had already forgotten the long gasoline lines of 1973. Public apathy and congress-

sional hostility smothered President Carter’s hopes of quickly initiating an energetic energy program.

Events in Iran jolted Americans out of their complacency about energy supplies in 1979. The imperious Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, installed as shah of Iran with help from America’s CIA in 1953, had long ruled his oil-rich land with a will of steel. His repressive regime was finally overthrown in January 1979. Violent revolution was spearheaded in Iran by Muslim fundamentalists who fiercely resented the shah’s campaign to westernize and secularize his country. Denouncing the United States as the “Great Satan” that had abetted the shah’s efforts, these extremists engulfed Iran in chaos in the wake of his departure. The crippling upheavals soon spread to Iran’s oil fields. As Iranian oil stopped flowing into the stream of world commerce, shortages appeared, and OPEC again seized the opportunity to hike petroleum prices. Americans once more found themselves waiting impatiently in long lines at gas stations or buying gasoline only on specified days.

**The History of the Consumer Price Index, 1967–2000** This graph shows both the annual percentage of inflation and the cumulative shrinkage in the dollar’s value since 1967. (By 2000, it took more than five dollars to buy what one dollar purchased in 1967.) (Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)



miad.” He chided his fellow citizens for falling into a “moral and spiritual crisis” and for being too concerned with “material goods.”

While Carter’s address stunned and even perplexed the nation, he let drop another shoe a few days later. In a bureaucratic massacre of almost unprecedented proportions, he fired four cabinet secretaries. At the same time, he circled the wagons of his Georgian advisers more tightly about the White House by reorganizing and expanding the power of his personal staff. Critics began to wonder aloud whether Carter, the professed man of the people, was losing touch with the popular mood of the country.

### **Foreign Affairs and the Iranian Imbrolio**

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Hopes for a less dangerous world rose slightly in June 1979, when President Carter met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in Vienna to sign the long-stalled SALT II agreements, limiting the levels of

As the oil crisis deepened, President Carter sensed the rising temperature of popular discontent. In July 1979 he retreated to the presidential mountain hideaway at Camp David, where he remained largely out of public view for ten days. Like a royal potentate of old, summoning the wise men of the realm for their counsel in a time of crisis, Carter called in over a hundred leaders from all walks of life to give him their views. Meanwhile, the nation waited anxiously for the results of these extraordinary deliberations.

Carter came down from the mountaintop on July 15, 1979. He revealed his thoughts to the American people in a remarkable television address, which amounted to a kind of old-fashioned “jere-

*President Jimmy Carter (b. 1924) delivered what became known as his “malaise” speech (although he never used the word) on television in 1979. In time cultural conservatives would take up his theme to support their call for a return to “traditional values”:*

“In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose. . . . The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us.”

lethal strategic weapons in the Soviet and American arsenals. But conservative critics of the president's defense policies, still deeply suspicious of the Soviet Union, which they regarded as the Wicked Witch of the East, unsheathed their long knives to carve up the SALT II treaty when it came to the Senate for debate in the summer of 1979. Their hand was strengthened when news reports broke that a Soviet "combat brigade" was stationed in Castro's Cuba.

Political earthquakes in the petroleum-rich Persian Gulf region finally buried all hopes of ratifying the SALT II treaty. On November 4, 1979, a howling mob of rabidly anti-American Muslim militants stormed the United States embassy in Teheran, Iran, and took all of its occupants hostage. The captors then demanded that the American authorities ship back to Iran the exiled shah, who had arrived in the United States two weeks earlier for medical treatment. The shaky Iranian government, barely visible through the smoke of revolution and religious upheaval then rocking the country, refused to intervene against the militants. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the white-bearded Muslim holy man who inspired the revolutionaries, even accused the United States of masterminding an attack on the sacred Muslim city of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

World opinion hotly condemned the diplomatic felony in Iran, while Americans agonized over both the fate of the hostages and the stability of the entire Persian Gulf region, so dangerously close to the Soviet Union. The Soviet army then aroused the West's worst fears on December 27, 1979, when it blitzed into the mountainous nation of Afghanistan, next door to Iran, and appeared to be poised for a thrust at the oil-jugular of the gulf.

President Carter reacted vigorously to these alarming events. He slapped an embargo on the export of grain and high-technology machinery to the USSR and called for a boycott of the upcoming Olympic Games in Moscow. He proposed the creation of a "Rapid Deployment Force" to respond to suddenly developing crises in faraway places and requested that young people (including women) be made to register for a possible military draft. The president proclaimed that the United States would "use any means necessary, including force," to protect the Persian Gulf against Soviet incursions. He grimly conceded that he had misjudged the Soviets,

and the SALT II treaty became a dead letter in the Senate. Meanwhile, the Soviet army met unexpectedly stiff resistance in Afghanistan and bogged down in a nasty, decade-long guerrilla war that came to be called “Russia’s Vietnam.” But though the Soviets were stalled in Afghanistan, the crisis in Iran ground on.

The Iranian hostage episode was Carter’s—and America’s—bed of nails. The captured Americans languished in cruel captivity, while the nightly television news broadcasts in the United States showed humiliating scenes of Iranian mobs burning the American flag and spitting on effigies of Uncle Sam.

Carter at first tried to apply economic sanctions and the pressure of world public opinion against the Iranians, while waiting for the emergence of a stable government with which to negotiate. But the political turmoil in Iran rumbled on endlessly, and the

president’s frustration grew. Carter at last ordered a daring rescue mission. A highly trained commando team penetrated deep into Iran’s sandy interior. Their plan required ticktock-perfect timing to succeed, and when equipment failures prevented some members of the team from reaching their destination, the mission had to be scrapped. As the commandos withdrew in the dark desert night, two of their aircraft collided, killing eight of the would-be rescuers.

This disastrous failure of the rescue raid proved anguishing for Americans. The episode seemed to underscore the nation’s helplessness and even incompetence in the face of a mortifying insult to the national honor. The stalemate with Iran dragged on throughout the rest of Carter’s term, providing an embarrassing backdrop to the embattled president’s struggle for reelection.

## Chronology

**1970** Nixon orders invasion of Cambodia  
Kent State and Jackson State incidents  
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
created  
Clean Air Act

**1971** Pentagon Papers published  
Twenty-sixth Amendment (lowering voting age  
to eighteen) passed

**1972** Nixon visits China and the Soviet Union  
ABM and SALT I treaties ratified  
Nixon defeats McGovern for presidency  
Equal Rights Amendment passes Congress  
Title IX of Education Amendments passed

**1973** Vietnam cease-fire and U.S. withdrawal  
Agnew resigns; Ford appointed  
vice president  
War Powers Act  
Arab-Israeli war and Arab oil embargo  
Endangered Species Act  
*Frontiero v. Richardson*  
*Roe v. Wade*

**1973-**  
**1974** Watergate hearings and investigations

**1974** Nixon resigns; Ford assumes presidency  
First OPEC oil-price increase  
International Energy Agency formed  
*Milliken v. Bradley*

**1975** Helsinki accords  
South Vietnam falls to communists

**1976** Carter defeats Ford for presidency

**1978** Egyptian-Israeli Camp David agreement  
*United States v. Wheeler*

**1979** Iranian revolution and oil crisis  
SALT II agreements signed (never ratified by  
Senate)  
Soviet Union invades Afghanistan

**1979-**  
**1981** Iranian hostage crisis

For further reading, see page A27 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.



# The Resurgence of Conservatism

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1980–2000

*It will be my intention to curb the size and influence of the federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the federal government and those reserved to the states or to the people.*

RONALD REAGAN, INAUGURAL, 1981

“It’s morning in America” was the slogan of Republican candidate Ronald Reagan in his 1980 presidential campaign. Certainly the 1980s were a new day for America’s conservative right. Census figures confirmed that the average American was older than in the stormy sixties and much more likely to live in the South or West, the traditional bastions of the “Old Right,” where many residents harbored suspicions of federal power. The conservative cause drew added strength from the emergence of a “New Right” movement, partly in response to the counter-cultural protests of the 1960s. Spearheading the New Right were evangelical Christian groups such as the Moral Majority, dedicated believers who enjoyed startling success as political fund-raisers and organizers.

Many New Right activists were far less agitated about economic questions than about cultural con-

*In a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983, President Ronald Reagan (b. 1911) defined his stand on school prayer:*

“The Declaration of Independence mentions the Supreme Being no less than four times. ‘In God We Trust’ is engraved on our coinage. The Supreme Court opens its proceedings with a religious invocation. And the Members of Congress open their sessions with a prayer. I just happen to believe the school-children of the United States are entitled to the same privileges as Supreme Court Justices and Congressmen.”

cerns—the so-called social issues. They denounced abortion, pornography, homosexuality, feminism, and especially affirmative action. They championed prayer in the schools and tougher penalties for criminals. Together, the Old and New Right added up to a powerful political combination, devoted to changing the very character of American society.

## **The Election of Ronald Reagan, 1980**

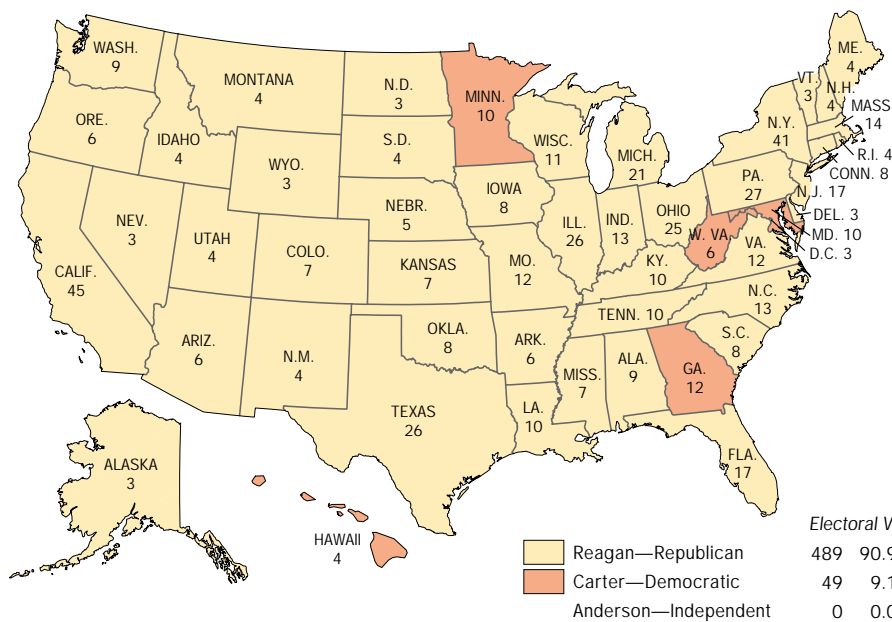
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Ronald Reagan was well suited to lead the gathering conservative crusade. Reared in a generation whose values were formed well before the upheavals of the 1960s, he naturally sided with the new right on social issues. In economic and social matters alike, he denounced the activist government and failed “social engineering” of the 1960s. He skillfully mobilized political resentments in a manner reminiscent of his early political hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Both Roosevelt and Reagan championed the “common man” against vast impersonal menaces that overshadowed the individual. But where the Democratic Roosevelt had branded big business the foe of the “forgotten man,” the Republican Reagan depicted big government as the archvillain. He preached a “populist” political philosophy that condemned federal intervention in local affairs, favoritism for minorities, and the elitism of arrogant bureaucrats. He aimed especially to win over from the Democratic column working-class and lower-middle-class white voters by implying that the Democratic party had become the exclusive tool of its minority constituents.

Though Reagan was no intellectual, he drew on the ideas of a small but influential group of thinkers known as “neoconservatives.” Their ranks included Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary* magazine, and Irving Kristol, editor of *The Public Interest*. Reacting against what they saw as the excesses of 1960s liberalism, the neoconservatives championed free-market capitalism liberated from government restraints, and they took tough, harshly anti-Soviet positions in foreign policy. They also questioned liberal welfare programs and affirmative-action policies and called for reassertion of traditional values of individualism and the centrality of the family.

An actor-turned-politician, Reagan enjoyed enormous popularity with his crooked grin and aw-shucks manner. The son of a ne'er-do-well, improv-

erished Irish-American father with a fondness for the bottle, he had grown up in a small Illinois town. Reagan got his start in life in the depressed 1930s as a sports announcer for an Iowa radio station. Good looks and a way with words landed him acting jobs in Hollywood, where he became a B-grade star in the 1940s. He displayed a flair for politics as president of the Screen Actors Guild in the McCarthy era of the early 1950s, when he helped purge communists and other suspected “reds” from the film industry. In 1954 he became a spokesman for the General Electric Corporation at a salary of some \$150,000 per year. In that position he began to abandon his New Dealish political views and increasingly to preach a conservative, antigovernment line. Reagan's huge visibility and growing skill



**Presidential Election of 1980**  
 (with electoral vote by state)  
 This map graphically displays Reagan's landslide victory over both Carter and Anderson.

at promoting the conservative cause made him attractive to a group of wealthy California businessmen, who helped launch his political career as governor of California from 1966 to 1974.

By 1980 the Republican party was ready to challenge the Democrats' hold on the White House. Bedeviled abroad and becalmed at home, Jimmy Carter's administration struck many Americans as bungling and befuddled. Carter's inability to control double-digit inflation was especially damaging. Frustrated critics bellyached loudly about the Georgian's alleged mismanagement of the nation's affairs.

Disaffection with Carter's apparent ineptitude ran deep even in his own Democratic party, where an "ABC" (Anybody but Carter) movement gathered steam. The liberal wing of the party found its champion in Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, the last survivor of the assassin-plagued Kennedy brothers. He and Carter slugged it out in a series of bruising primary elections, while delighted Republicans decorously proceeded to name Reagan their presidential nominee. In the end Kennedy's candidacy fell victim to the country's conservative mood and to lingering suspicions about a 1969 automobile accident on Chappaquiddick Island, Massachusetts, in which a young woman assistant was drowned when Kennedy's car plunged off a bridge. A badly battered Carter, his party divided and in disarray, was left to do battle with Reagan.

The Republican candidate proved to be a formidable campaigner. He used his professional acting skills to great advantage in a televised "debate" with the colorless Carter. Reagan attacked the incumbent's fumbling performance in foreign policy and blasted the "big-government" philosophy of the Democratic party (a philosophy that Carter did not fully embrace). Galloping inflation, sky-high interest rates, and a faltering economy also put the incumbent president on the defensive. Carter countered ineffectively with charges that Reagan was a trigger-happy cold warrior who might push the country into nuclear war.

Carter's spotty record in office was no defense against Reagan's popular appeal. On election day the Republican rang up a spectacular victory, bagging over 51 percent of the popular vote, while 41 percent went to Carter and 7 percent to moderate independent candidate John Anderson. The electoral count stood at 489 for Reagan and 49 for Carter. (Anderson failed to gain a single electoral vote.) Carter managed to win only six states and the District of Columbia, a defeat almost as crushing as George McGovern's loss to Richard Nixon in 1972. He was the first elected president to be unseated by the voters since Herbert Hoover was ejected from office in 1932. Equally startling, the Republicans gained control of the Senate for the first time in twenty-five years. Leading Democratic liberals who

had been targeted for defeat by well-heeled new-right groups went down like dead timber in the conservative windstorm that swept the country.

Carter showed dignity in defeat, delivering a thoughtful Farewell Address that stressed his efforts to scale down the deadly arms race, to promote human rights, and to protect the environment. In one of his last acts in office, he signed a bill preserving some 100 million acres of Alaska land for national parks, forests, and wildlife refuges. An unusually intelligent, articulate, and well-meaning president, he had been hampered by his lack of managerial talent and had been badly buffeted by events beyond his control, such as the soaring price of oil, runaway inflation, and the galling insult of the continuing hostage crisis in Iran. If Carter was correct in believing that the country was suffering from a terrible “malaise,” he never found the right medicine to cure the disease.

## The Reagan Revolution

Reagan’s arrival in Washington was triumphal. The Iranians contributed to the festive mood by releasing the hostages on Reagan’s Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, after 444 days of captivity.

Reagan assembled a conservative cabinet of the “best and the rightest” and relied on these and other advisers to make important decisions. The cabinet included a highly controversial Coloradan, James Watt, as secretary of the interior. Watt was a product of the “Sagebrush Rebellion,” a fiercely anti-Washington movement that had sprung up to protest federal control over the rich mineral and timber resources in the western states. Environmentalists howled loudly about Watt’s schemes to hobble the Environmental Protection Agency and to permit oil drilling in scenic places. After bitter protests they succeeded in halting Watt’s plan to allow oil exploration off the California coastline. Watt blithely rebuffed critics by saying, “I make lots of mistakes because I make lots of decisions.” He made one mistake too many in 1983, when he thoughtlessly told an offensive ethnic joke in public and was forced to resign.

The new president, a hale and hearty sixty-nine-year-old, was devoted to fiscal fitness. A major goal of Reagan’s political career was to reduce the size of the government by shrinking the federal budget

and slashing taxes. He declared, “Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.” Years of New Deal-style tax-and-spend programs, Reagan jested, had created a federal government that reminded him of the definition of a baby as a creature who was all appetite at one end, with no sense of responsibility at the other.

By the early 1980s, this antigovernment message found a receptive audience. In the two decades since 1960, federal spending had risen from about 18 percent of gross national product to nearly 23 percent. At the same time, the composition of the federal budget had been shifting from defense to entitlement programs, including Social Security and Medicare (see chart p. 1033). In 1973 the budget of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare surpassed that of the Department of Defense. Citizens increasingly balked at paying the bills for further extension of government “benefits.” After four decades of advancing New Deal and Great Society programs, a strong countercurrent took hold. Californians staged a “tax revolt” in 1978 (known by its official ballot title of Proposition 13) that slashed

Congress and the public on his budget, the outpouring of sympathy and support was enormous.

## The Battle of the Budget

Swept along on a tide of presidential popularity, Congress swallowed Reagan's budget proposals, approving expenditures of some \$695 billion, with a projected deficit of about \$38 billion. To hit those financial targets, drastic surgery was required, and Congress plunged its scalpel deeply into Great Society–spawned social programs. Wounded Democrats wondered if the president's intention was to cut the budget or to gut the budget.

Reagan's triumph amazed political observers, especially defeated Democrats. The new president had descended upon Washington like an avenging angel of conservatism, kicking up a blinding whirlwind of political change. He sought nothing less than the dismantling of the welfare state and the reversal of the political evolution of the preceding half-century. His impressive performance demonstrated the power of the presidency with a skill not seen since Lyndon Johnson's day. Out the window went the textbooks that had concluded, largely on the basis of the stalemated 1970s, that this office had been eclipsed by a powerful, uncontrollable Congress.

property taxes and forced painful cuts in government services. The California “tax quake” jolted other state capitals and even rocked the pillars of Congress in faraway Washington, D.C. Ronald Reagan had ridden this political shock wave to presidential victory in 1980 and now proceeded to rattle the “welfare state” to its very foundations.

With near-religious zeal and remarkable effectiveness, Reagan set out to persuade Congress to legislate his smaller-government policies into law. He proposed a new federal budget that necessitated cuts of some \$35 billion, mostly in social programs like food stamps and federally funded job-training centers. Reagan worked naturally in harness with the Republican majority in the Senate, but to get his way in the Democratic House, he undertook some old-fashioned politicking. He enterprisingly wooed a group of mostly southern conservative Democrats (dubbed “boll weevils”), who abandoned their own party's leadership to follow the president.

Then on March 6, 1981, a deranged gunman shot the president as he was leaving a Washington hotel. A .22-caliber bullet penetrated beneath Reagan's left arm and collapsed his left lung. With admirable courage and grace, and with impressive physical resilience for a man his age, Reagan seemed to recover rapidly from his violent ordeal. Twelve days after the attack, he walked out of the hospital and returned to work. When he appeared a few days later on national television to address the

Reagan hardly rested to savor the sweetness of his victory. The second part of his economic program called for deep tax cuts, amounting to 25 percent across-the-board reductions over a period of three years. Once again, Reagan displayed his skill as a performer and a persuader in a highly effective television address in July 1981, when he pleaded for congressional passage of the tax-cut bill. Democrats, he quipped, “had never met a tax they didn’t hike.” Thanks largely to the continued defection of the “boll weevils” from the Democratic camp, the president again had his way. In August 1981 Congress approved a set of far-reaching tax reforms that lowered individual tax rates, reduced federal estate taxes, and created new tax-free savings plans for small investors. Reagan’s “supply-side” economic advisers assured him that the combination of budgetary discipline and tax reduction would stimulate new investment, boost productivity, foster dramatic economic growth, and reduce the federal deficit.

But at first “supply-side” economics seemed to be a beautiful theory mugged by a gang of brutal facts, as the economy slid into its deepest recession since the 1930s. Unemployment reached nearly 11 percent in 1982, businesses folded, and several bank failures jolted the nation’s entire financial system. The automobile industry, once the brightest jewel in America’s industrial crown, turned in its dimmest performance in history. Battling against Japanese imports, major automakers reported losses in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Fuming and frustrated Democrats angrily charged that the president’s budget cuts slashed especially cruelly at the poor and the handicapped and that his tax cuts favored the well-to-do. They accused Reagan of trying to make those Americans with the frailest shoulders carry the heaviest burden in the fight for fiscal reform. In fact, the anti-inflationary “tight money” policies that precipitated the “Reagan recession” of 1982 had been initiated by the Federal Reserve Board in 1979, on Carter’s watch.

Ignoring the yawning pack of Democratic critics, President Reagan and his economic advisers serenely waited for their supply-side economic policies (“Reaganomics”) to produce the promised results. The supply-siders seemed to be vindicated when a healthy economic recovery finally got under way in 1983. Yet the economy of the 1980s was not uniformly sound. For the first time in the twentieth century, income gaps widened between the richest and the poorest Americans. The poor got poorer and

the very rich grew fabulously richer, while middle-class incomes largely stagnated. Symbolic of the new income stratification was the emergence of “yuppies,” or young, urban professionals. Sporting Rolex watches and BMW sports cars, they made a near-religion out of conspicuous consumption. Though numbering only about 1.5 million people and being something of a stereotype, yuppies showcased the values of materialism and the pursuit of wealth that came to symbolize the high-rolling 1980s.

Some economists located the sources of the economic upturn neither in the president’s budget cuts and tax reforms nor in the go-get-’em avarice of the yuppies. It was massive military expenditures, they argued, that constituted the real foundation of 1980s prosperity. Reagan cascaded nearly 2 trillion budget dollars onto the Pentagon in the 1980s, asserting the need to close a “window of vulnerability” in the armaments race with the Soviet Union. Ironically, this conservative president thereby plunged the government into a red-ink bath of deficit spending that made the New Deal look downright stingy. Federal budget deficits topped \$100 billion in 1982, and the government’s books were nearly \$200 billion out of balance in every subsequent year of the 1980s. Massive government borrowing to cover those deficits kept interest rates high, and high interest rates in turn elevated the value of the dollar to record altitudes in the international money markets. The soaring dollar was good news for American tourists and buyers of foreign cars, but it dealt crippling blows to American exporters, as the American international trade deficit reached a record \$152 billion in 1987. The masters of international commerce and finance for a generation after World War II, Americans suddenly became the world’s heaviest borrowers in the global economy of the 1980s.

## **Reagan Renews the Cold War**

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Hard as nails toward the Soviet Union in his campaign speeches, Reagan saw no reason to soften up after he checked in at the White House. As the Soviets carried on their war in Afghanistan, Reagan continued to condemn the Kremlin. In one of his first presidential news conferences, he claimed that the Soviets were “prepared to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat,” in pursuit of their goals of world conquest.

In a later speech, he characterized the Soviet Union as the “focus of evil in the modern world.”

Reagan believed in negotiating with the Soviets—but only from a position of overwhelming strength. Accordingly, his strategy for dealing with Moscow was simple: by enormously expanding U.S. military capabilities, he could threaten the Soviets with a fantastically expensive new round of the arms race. The American economy, theoretically, could better bear this new financial burden than could the creaking Soviet system. Desperate to avoid economic ruin, Kremlin leaders would come to the bargaining table and sing Reagan’s tune.

This strategy resembled a riverboat gambler’s ploy. It wagered the enormous sum of Reagan’s defense budgets on the hope that the other side would not call Washington’s bluff and initiate a new cycle of arms competition. Reagan played his trump card in this risky game in March 1983, when he announced his intention to pursue a high-technology missile-defense system called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as Star Wars. The plan called for orbiting battle stations in space that could fire laser beams or other forms of concentrated energy to vaporize intercontinental missiles on liftoff. Reagan described SDI as offering potential salvation from the nuclear nightmare by throwing an “astrodome” defense shield over American cities. Most scientists considered this an impossible goal. But the deeper logic of SDI lay in its fit

with Reagan’s overall Soviet strategy. By pitching the arms contest onto a stratospheric plane of high technology and astronomical expense, it would further force the Kremlin’s hand.

By emphasizing defense rather than offense, SDI upset four decades of strategic thinking about nuclear weaponry. Many experts remained deeply skeptical about the plan. Those who did not dismiss it as ludicrous feared that Star Wars research might be ruinously costly, ultimately unworkable, and fatally destabilizing to the distasteful but effective “balance of terror” that had kept the nuclear peace since World War II. Scientific and strategic doubts combined to constrain congressional funding for SDI through the remainder of Reagan’s term.

Relations with the Soviets further nose-dived in late 1981, when the government of Poland, needed for over a year by a popular movement of working-people organized into a massive union called “Solidarity,” clamped martial law on the troubled country. Reagan saw the heavy fist of the Kremlin inside this Polish iron glove, and he imposed economic sanctions on Poland and the USSR alike. Notably absent from the mandated measures was a resumption of the grain embargo, which would have pinched the pocketbooks of too many American farmers.

Dealing with the Soviet Union was additionally complicated by the inertia and ill health of the aging oligarchs in the Kremlin, three of whom were swept away by death between late 1982 and early 1985. Relations grew even more tense when the Soviets, in September 1983, blasted from the skies a Korean passenger airliner that had inexplicably violated Soviet airspace. Hundreds of civilians, including many Americans, plummeted to their deaths in the frigid Sea of Okhotsk. By the end of 1983, all arms-control negotiations with the Soviets were broken off. The deepening chill of the Cold War was further felt in 1984, when, in response to the Western boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, USSR and Soviet-bloc athletes boycotted the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

## **Troubles Abroad**

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The volatile Middle Eastern pot continued to boil ominously. Israel badly strained its bonds of friendship with the United States by continuing to allow new settlements to be established in the occupied territory of the Jordan River’s West Bank. Israel further raised the stakes in the Middle East in June 1982



**The Middle East** A combination of political instability and precious petroleum resources has made the region from Egypt to Afghanistan an “arc of crisis.”

when it invaded neighboring Lebanon, seeking to suppress once and for all the guerrilla bases from which Palestinian fighters harassed beleaguered Israel. The Palestinians were bloodily subdued, but Lebanon, already pulverized by years of episodic civil war, was plunged into armed chaos. President Reagan was obliged to send American troops to

Lebanon in 1983 as part of an international peace-keeping force, but their presence did not bring peace. A suicide bomber crashed an explosives-laden truck into a United States Marine barracks on October 23, 1983, killing more than two hundred marines. President Reagan soon thereafter withdrew the remaining American troops, while miraculously



**Central America and the Caribbean** This region of historical importance to the United States experienced dramatic political upheavals in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.



suffering no political damage from this horrifying and humiliating attack. His mystified Democratic opponents began to call him the “Teflon president,” to whom nothing hurtful could stick.

Central America, in the United States’ own backyard, also rumbled menacingly. A leftist revolution had deposed the long-time dictator of Nicaragua in 1979. President Carter had tried to ignore the hotly anti-American rhetoric of the revolutionaries, known as “Sandinistas,” and to establish good diplomatic relations with them. But cold warrior Reagan took their rhetoric at face value and hurled back at them some hot language of his own. He accused the Sandinistas of turning their country into a forward base for Soviet and Cuban military penetration of all of Central America. Brandishing photographs taken from high-flying spy planes, administration spokespeople claimed that Nicaraguan leftists were shipping weapons to revolutionary forces in tiny El Salvador, torn by violence since a coup in 1979.

Reagan sent military “advisers” to prop up the pro-American government of El Salvador. He also provided covert aid, including the CIA-engineered mining of harbors, to the “contra” rebels opposing the anti-American government of Nicaragua. Reagan flexed his military muscles elsewhere in the turbulent Caribbean. In a dramatic display of American might, in October 1983 he dispatched a heavy-firepower invasion force to the island of Grenada, where a military coup had killed the prime minister and brought Marxists to power. Swiftly overrunning the tiny island and ousting the insurgents, American troops vividly demonstrated Reagan’s determination to assert the dominance of the United States in the Caribbean, just as Theodore Roosevelt had done.

## **Round Two for Reagan**

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A confident Ronald Reagan, bolstered by a buoyant economy at home and by the popularity of his muscular posture abroad, handily won the Republican nomination in 1984 for a second White House term. His opponent was Democrat Walter Mondale, who made history by naming as his vice-presidential running mate Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro of New York. She was the first woman ever to appear on a major-party presidential ticket. But even this dramatic gesture could not salvage Mondale’s candidacy, which was fatally tainted by his service as vice president in the deeply discredited Carter

administration. On election day Reagan walked away with 525 electoral votes to Mondale’s 13, winning everywhere except in Mondale’s home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia. Reagan also overwhelmed Mondale in the popular vote—52,609,797 to 36,450,613.

Shrinking the federal government and reducing taxes had been the main objectives of Reagan’s first term; foreign-policy issues dominated the news in his second term. The president soon found himself contending for the world’s attention with a charismatic new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, installed as chairman of the Soviet Communist party in March 1985. Gorbachev was personable, energetic, imaginative, and committed to radical reforms in the Soviet Union. He announced two policies with remarkable, even revolutionary, implications. *Glasnost*, or “openness,” aimed to ventilate the secretive, repressive stuffiness of Soviet society by introducing free speech and a measure of political liberty. *Perestroika*, or “restructuring,” was intended to revive the moribund Soviet economy by adopting many of the free-market practices—such as the profit motive and an end to subsidized prices—of the capitalist West.

Both *glasnost* and *perestroika* required that the Soviet Union shrink the size of its enormous military machine and redirect its energies to the dismal civilian economy. That requirement, in turn, necessitated an end to the Cold War. Gorbachev accordingly made warm overtures to the West, including an announcement in April 1985 that the Soviet Union would cease to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) targeted on Western Europe, pending an agreement on their complete elimination. He pushed this goal when he met with Ronald Reagan at the first of four summit meetings, in Geneva in November 1985. A second summit meeting, in Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986 broke down in a stalemate. But at a third summit, in Washington, D.C., in December 1987, the two leaders at last signed the INF treaty, banning all intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe. This was a result long sought by both sides; it marked a victory for American policy, for Gorbachev’s reform program, and for the peoples of Europe and indeed all the world, who now had at least one less nuclear weapons system to worry about.

Reagan and Gorbachev capped their new friendship in May 1988 at a final summit in Moscow. There Reagan, who had entered office condemning the “evil empire” of Soviet communism, warmly

praised Gorbachev. Reagan, the consummate cold warrior, had been flexible and savvy enough to seize a historic opportunity to join with the Soviet chief to bring the Cold War to a kind of conclusion. For this, history would give both leaders high marks.

Reagan made other decisive moves in foreign policy. His administration provided strong backing in February 1986 for Corazon Aquino's ouster of dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Reagan ordered a lightning air raid against Libya in 1986, in retaliation for alleged Libyan sponsorship of terrorist attacks, including a bomb blast in a West Berlin discotheque that killed a U.S. serviceman. In the summer of 1987, U.S. naval vessels began escorting oil tankers through the Persian Gulf, inflamed by a long, brutal war between Iran and Iraq.

Congress repeatedly refused, and the administration grew increasingly frustrated, even obsessed, in its search for a means to help the contras.

Unknown to the American public, some Washington officials saw a possible linkage between the two thorny problems of the Middle Eastern hostages and the Central American Sandinistas. In 1985 American diplomats secretly arranged arms

### **The Iran-Contra Imbrolio**

Two foreign-policy problems seemed insoluble to Reagan: the continuing captivity of a number of American hostages, seized by Muslim extremist groups in bleeding, battered Lebanon; and the continuing grip on power of the left-wing Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The president repeatedly requested that Congress provide military aid to the contra rebels fighting against the Sandinista regime.

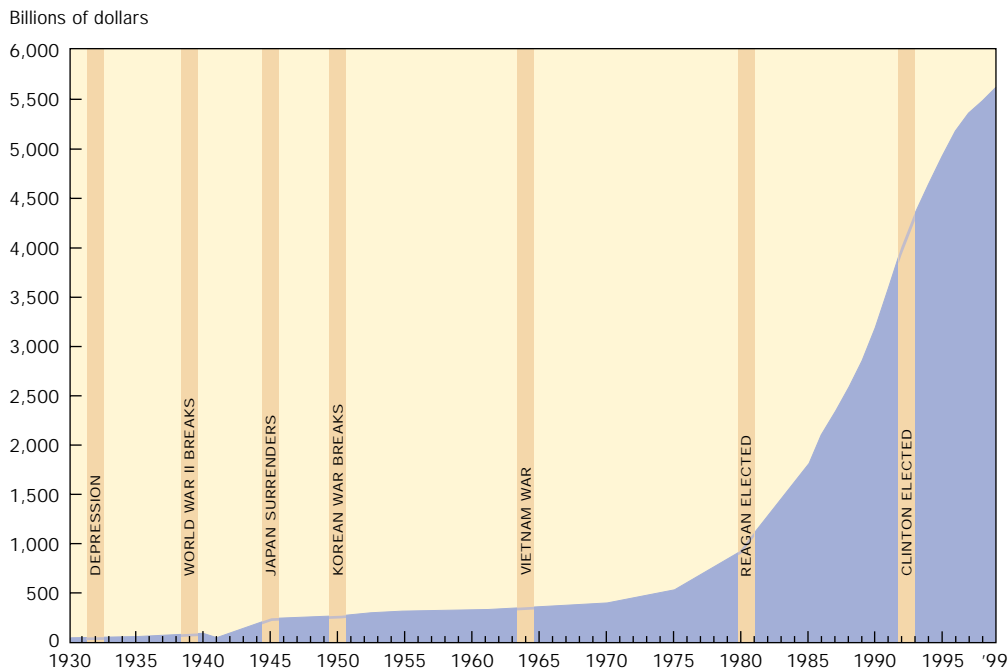
*On March 4, 1987, President Ronald Reagan somewhat confusingly tried to explain his role (or lack of role) in the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran:*

“A few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that is true, but the facts and the evidence tell me it is not.”

sales to the embattled Iranians in return for Iranian aid in obtaining the release of American hostages held by Middle Eastern terrorists. At least one hostage was eventually set free. Meanwhile, money from the payment for the arms was diverted to the

contras. These actions brazenly violated a congressional ban on military aid to the Nicaraguan rebels—not to mention Reagan’s repeated vow that he would never negotiate with terrorists.

News of these secret dealings broke in November 1986 and ignited a firestorm of controversy. President Reagan claimed he was innocent of wrongdoing and ignorant about the activities of his subordinates, but a congressional committee condemned the “secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law” displayed by administration officials and concluded that “if the president did not know what his national security advisers were doing, he should have.” Criminal indictments were later brought against several individuals tarred by the Iran-contra scandal, including marine colonel Oliver North; North’s boss at the National Security Council, Admiral John Poindexter; and even Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger. North and Poindexter were both found guilty of criminal behavior, though all their convictions were eventually reversed on appeal.



**The National Debt, 1930–1999** World War II provided the first major boost to the national debt. But it was the policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations, 1981–1993, that explosively expanded the debt to the \$4 trillion level. By the 1990s, 14 percent of federal revenues went to interest payments on the debt, though the budget surpluses created by the booming economy of the second Clinton administration raised the prospect that the debt might be paid off. (Sources: *Historical Statistics of the United States* and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years; 1996 and 1997 figures from *Economic Indicators*, Council of Economic Advisors.)

Weinberger received a presidential pardon before he was formally tried.

The Iran-contra affair cast a dark shadow over the Reagan record in foreign policy, tending to obscure the president's outstanding achievement in establishing a new relationship with the Soviets. Out of the several Iran-contra investigations, a picture emerged of Reagan as a lazy, perhaps even senile, president who napped through meetings and paid little or no attention to the details of policy. Reagan's critics pounced on this portrait as proof that the movie-star-turned-politician was a mental lightweight who had merely acted his way through the role of the presidency without really understanding the script. But despite these damaging revelations, Reagan remained among the most popular and beloved presidents in modern American history.

### **Reagan's Economic Legacy**

Ronald Reagan had taken office vowing to invigorate the American economy by rolling back government regulations, lowering taxes, and balancing the budget. He did ease many regulatory rules, and he pushed major tax reform bills through Congress in 1981 and 1986. But a balanced budget remained grotesquely out of reach. Supply-side economic theory had promised that lower taxes would actually *increase* government revenue because they would so stimulate the economy as a whole. But in fact the combination of tax reduction and huge increases in military spending opened a vast "revenue hole" of \$200 billion annual deficits. In his eight years in office, President Reagan added nearly \$2 trillion to the national debt—more than all of his predecessors combined, including those who had fought protracted global wars (see the chart on p. 986).

The staggering deficits of the Reagan years assuredly constituted a great economic failure. And because so much of the Reagan-era debt was financed by foreign lenders, especially the Japanese, the deficits virtually guaranteed that future generations of Americans would either have to work harder than their parents, lower their standard of living, or both, to pay their foreign creditors when the bills came due. The yawning deficits prompted Congress in 1986 to pass legislation mandating a balanced budget by 1991. Yet even this drastic measure proved pitifully inadequate to the task of clos-

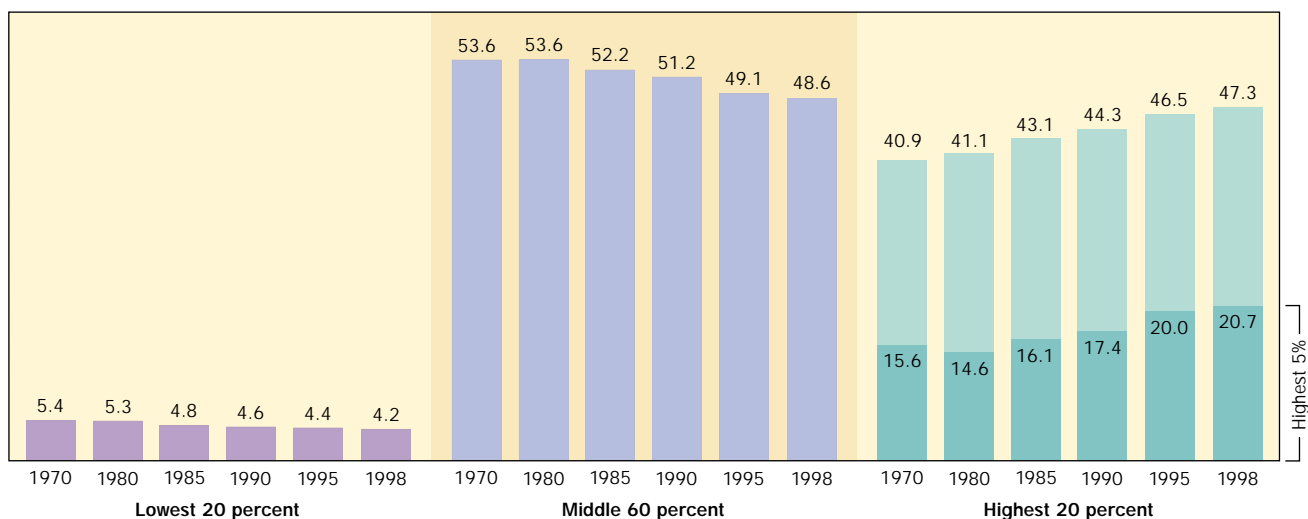
ing the gap between the federal government's income and expenditures, and the national debt continued to grow.

But if the deficits represented an economic failure, they also constituted, strangely enough, a kind of political triumph. Among the paramount goals of Reagan's political life was his ambition to slow the growth of government, and especially to block or even repeal the social programs launched in the era of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. By appearing to make new social spending both practically and politically impossible for the foreseeable future, the deficits served exactly that purpose. They achieved, in short, Reagan's highest political objective: the containment of the welfare state. Ronald Reagan thus ensured the long-term perpetuation of his dearest political values to a degree that few presidents have managed to achieve. For better or worse, the consequences of "Reaganomics" would be large and durable.

Yet another legacy of the 1980s was a sharp reversal of a long-term trend toward a more equitable distribution of income (see the chart on p. 988) and an increasing squeeze on the middle class. In the early 1990s, median household income (in 1993 dollars) actually declined, from about \$33,500 in 1989 to about \$31,000 in 1993. Whether that disturbing trend should be attributed to Reagan's policies or to more deeply running economic currents remained controversial.

*Hollywood director Oliver Stone's (b. 1946) film Wall Street both romanticized and vilified the business culture of the 1980s. The character of Gordon Gekko, inspired by real-life corporate raider Ivan Boesky, captured the spirit of the times:*

"Ladies and gentlemen, greed is good. Greed works, greed is right. . . . Greed for life, money, love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind—and greed, mark my words, will save the malfunctioning corporation called the U.S.A."



Share of Received Income by Families, by Quintile, 1970–1998 (Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2000.)

## The Religious Right

Religion pervaded American politics in the 1980s. Especially conspicuous was a coalition of conservative, evangelical Christians known as the religious right. In 1979 the Reverend Jerry Falwell, an evangelical minister from Lynchburg, Virginia, founded a political organization called the Moral Majority. Falwell preached with great success against sexual permissiveness, abortion, feminism, and the spread of gay rights. In its first two years, the Moral Majority registered between 2 million and 3 million voters. Using radio, direct-mail marketing, and cable TV, “tel-evangelists” reached huge audiences in the 1980s, collected millions of dollars, and became aggressive political advocates of conservative causes.

Members of the religious right were sometimes called “movement conservatives,” a term that recalls the left-wing protest movements of the 1960s. In many ways the religious right of the 1980s was a reflection of, or answer to, sixties radicalism. Feminists in the 1960s declared that “the personal was political.” The religious right did the same. What had in the past been personal matters—gender roles, homosexuality, and prayer—became the organizing ground for a powerful political movement. Like advocates of multiculturalism and affirmative action, the religious right practiced a form of “iden-

tity politics.” But rather than defining themselves as Hispanic voters or gay voters, they declared themselves Christian or pro-life voters. The New Right also mimicked the New Left in some of its tactics. If the left had consciousness-raising sessions, the right had prayer meetings. Adherents articulated their positions in a language of rights and entitlements, as in the “right-to-life” (or anti-abortion) movement. They even mirrored the tactics of civil disobedience. Protesters in the 1960s blocked entrances to draft offices; protesters in the 1980s blocked entrances to abortion clinics.

Several leaders of the religious right fell from grace in the latter part of the decade. One tearfully admitted to repeated trysts with prostitutes. Another went to prison following revelations of his own financial and sexual misconduct. But such scandals would not shake the faith of America’s conservative Christians or diminish the new political clout of activist, evangelical religionists.

## Conservatism in the Courts

If the budget was Reagan’s chief weapon in the war against the welfare state, the courts became his principal instrument in the “cultural wars” demanded by the religious right. By the time he left

office, Reagan had appointed a near-majority of all sitting judges. Equally important, he had named three conservative-minded justices to the U.S. Supreme Court. They included Sandra Day O'Connor, a brilliant, public-spirited Arizona judge. When she was sworn in on September 25, 1981, she became the first woman to ascend to the high bench in the Court's nearly two-hundred-year history.

Reaganism repudiated two great icons of the liberal political culture: affirmative action and abortion. The Court showed its newly conservative colors in 1984, when it decreed, in a case involving Memphis fire fighters, that union rules about job seniority could outweigh affirmative-action concerns in guiding promotion policies in the city's fire department. In two cases in 1989 (*Ward's Cove Packing v. Antonia* and *Martin v. Wilks*), the Court made it more difficult to prove that an employer practiced racial discrimination in hiring and made it easier for white males to argue that they were the victims of reverse discrimination by employers who followed affirmative-action practices. Congress passed legislation in 1991 that partially reversed the effects of those decisions.

The contentious issue of abortion also reached the Court in 1989. In the case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the Supreme Court had prohibited states from making laws that interfered with a woman's right to an abortion during the early months of pregnancy. For nearly two decades, that decision had been the bedrock principle on which "pro-choice" advocates built their case for abortion rights. It had also provoked bitter criticism from Roman Catholics and various "right-to-life" groups, who wanted a virtually absolute ban on all abortions. In *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, the Court in July 1989 did not entirely overturn *Roe*, but it seriously compromised *Roe's* protection of abortion rights. By approving a Missouri law that imposed certain restrictions on abortion, the Court signaled that it was inviting the states to legislate in an area in which *Roe* had previously forbidden them to legislate. The Court renewed that invitation in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992, when it ruled that states could restrict access to abortion as long as they did not place an "undue burden" on the woman. Using this standard, the Court held that Pennsylvania could not compel a wife to notify her husband about an abortion but could require a minor child to notify parents, as well as other restrictions.

Right-to-life advocates were at first delighted by the *Webster* decision. But the Court's ruling also gal-

*Speaking to the National Association of Evangelicals, President Ronald Reagan said the following about abortion:*

"More than a decade ago, a Supreme Court decision [*Roe v. Wade*, 1973] literally wiped off the books of fifty states statutes protecting the rights of unborn children. Abortion on demand now takes the lives of up to 1½ million unborn children a year. Human life legislation ending this tragedy will some day pass the Congress, and you and I must never rest until it does. Unless and until it can be proven that the unborn child is not a living entity, then its right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness must be protected."

vanized pro-choice organizations into a new militancy. Bruising, divisive battles loomed as state legislatures across the land confronted abortion. This painful cultural conflict over the unborn was also part of the Reagan era's bequest to the future.

## Referendum on Reaganism in 1988

Republicans lost control of the Senate in the off-year elections of November 1986. Hopes rose among Democrats that the "Reagan Revolution" might be showing signs of political vulnerability at last. The newly Democratic majority in the Senate flexed its political muscle in 1987 when it rejected Robert Bork, Reagan's ultraconservative nominee for a Supreme Court vacancy.

Democrats also relished the prospect of making political hay out of both the Iran-contra scandal and the allegedly unethical behavior that tainted an unusually large number of Reagan's "official family." Top administrators of the Environmental Protection Agency resigned in disgrace over a misappropriation of funds. Reagan's secretary of labor stepped down in 1985 to stand trial on charges of fraud and larceny. (He was eventually acquitted.) The president's personal White House aide was convicted of perjury in 1988. The nation's chief law enforcement

officer, Attorney General Edwin Meese, came under investigation by a federal special prosecutor on charges of influence-peddling. Reagan's secretary of housing and urban development was also investigated on charges of fraud and favoritism in the awarding of lucrative federal housing grants.

Disquieting signs of economic trouble also seemed to open political opportunities for Democrats. The “twin towers” of deficits—the federal budget deficit and international trade deficit—continued to mount ominously. Falling oil prices blighted the economy of the Southwest, slashing real estate values and undermining hundreds of savings-and-loans (S&L) institutions. The damage to the S&Ls was so massive that a federal rescue operation was eventually estimated to carry a price tag of well over \$500 billion. Meanwhile, many American banks found themselves holding near-worthless loans they had unwisely foisted upon Third World countries, especially in Latin America. In 1984 it took federal assistance to save Continental Illinois Bank from a catastrophic failure. More banks and savings institutions were folding than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s. A wave of mergers, acquisitions, and leveraged buyouts washed over Wall Street, leaving many brokers and traders megarich and many companies saddled with megadebt. A cold spasm of fear struck the money markets on “Black Monday,” October 19, 1987, when the leading stock-market index plunged 508 points—the largest one-day decline in history. This crash, said *Newsweek* magazine, heralded “the final collapse of the money culture . . . , the death knell of the 1980s.” But as Mark Twain famously commented about his own obituary, this announcement proved premature.

Hoping to cash in on these ethical and economic anxieties, a pack of Democrats—dubbed the “Seven Dwarfs” by derisive Republicans—chased after their party's 1988 presidential nomination. But the Reaganites proved to have no monopoly on shady behavior. Ironically enough, the handsome and charismatic Democratic front-runner, former Colorado senator Gary Hart, was himself forced to drop out of the race in May 1987 after charges of sexual misconduct.

Black candidate Jesse Jackson, a rousing speechmaker who hoped to forge a “rainbow coalition” of minorities and the disadvantaged, campaigned energetically, but the Democratic nomination in the end went to the coolly cerebral governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis. Republicans nominated

Reagan's vice president, George Bush, who ran largely on the Reagan record of tax cuts, strong defense policies, toughness on crime, opposition to abortion, and a long-running if hardly robust economic expansion. Dukakis made little headway exploiting the ethical and economic sorespots and came across to television viewers as almost supernaturally devoid of emotion. On election day the voters gave him just 41,016,000 votes to 47,946,000 for Bush. The Electoral College count was 111 to 426.

### **George Bush and the End of the Cold War**

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George Herbert Walker Bush was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father had served as a U.S. senator from Connecticut, and young George had enjoyed a first-rate education at Yale. After service in World War II, he had amassed a modest fortune of his own in the oil business in Texas. His deepest commitment, however, was to public service; he left the business world to serve briefly as a congressman and then held various posts in several Republican administrations, including emissary to China, ambassador to the United Nations, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and vice president. He capped this long political career when he was inau-

gured as president in January 1989, promising to work for “a kinder, gentler America.”

In the first months of the Bush administration, the communist world commanded the planet’s fascinated attention. Everywhere in the communist bloc, it seemed, astoundingly, that the season of democracy had arrived.

In China hundreds of thousands of prodemocracy demonstrators thronged through Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989. They proudly flourished a thirty-foot-high “Goddess of Democracy,” modeled on the Statue of Liberty, as a symbol of their aspirations.

But in June of that year, China’s aging and autocratic rulers brutally crushed the prodemocracy movement. Tanks rolled over the crowds, and machine-gunners killed hundreds of protesters. In the following weeks, scores of arrested demonstrators were publicly executed after perfunctory “trials.”

World opinion roundly condemned the bloody suppression of the prodemocracy demonstrators. President Bush joined in the criticism. Yet despite angry demands in Congress for punitive restrictions on trade with China, the president insisted on maintaining normal relations with Beijing.

Stunning changes also shook Eastern Europe. Long oppressed by puppet regimes propped up by Soviet guns, the region was revolutionized in just a

few startling months in 1989. The Solidarity movement in Poland led the way when it toppled Poland’s communist government in August. With dizzying speed, communist regimes collapsed in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and even hyper-repressive Romania. In December 1989, jubilant Germans danced atop the hated Berlin Wall, symbol of the division of Germany and all of Europe into two armed and hostile camps. The Wall itself soon came down, heralding the imminent end of the forty-five-year-long Cold War. Chunks of the Wall’s concrete became instant collectors’ items—gray souvenirs of a grim episode in Europe’s history. With the approval of the victorious Allied powers of World War II, the two Germanies, divided since 1945, were at last reunited in October 1990.



*In his state of the union address on January 31, 1990, President George Bush (b. 1924) declared,*

“The events of the year just ended, the revolution of '89, have been a chain reaction, changes so striking that it marks the beginning of a new era in the world's affairs.”

*Just six months later, speaking at Stanford University, Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931) said,*

“The Cold War is now behind us. Let us not wrangle over who won it. It is in the common interest of our two countries and nations not to fight this trend toward cooperation, but rather to promote it.”

Most startling of all were the changes that rolled over the heartland of world communism, the Soviet Union itself. Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* had set in motion a groundswell that surged out of his control. Old-guard hard-liners, in a last-gasp effort to preserve the tottering communist system, attempted to dislodge Gorbachev with a military coup in August 1991. With the support of Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Republic (one of the several republics that composed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or USSR), Gorbachev foiled the plotters. But his days were numbered. In December 1991 Gorbachev resigned as Soviet president. He had become a leader without a country as the Soviet Union dissolved into its component parts, some fifteen republics loosely confederated in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), with Russia the most powerful state and Yeltsin the dominant leader. To varying degrees, all the new governments in the CIS repudiated communism and embraced democratic reforms and free-market economies.

These developments astonished the “experts,” who had long preached that the steely vise-grip of communist rule never could be peacefully broken. Yet suddenly and almost miraculously, the totalitarian tonnage of communist oppression had been rendered politically weightless. Most spectacularly, the demise of the Soviet Union wrote a definitive finish

to the Cold War era. More than four decades of nail-biting tension between two nuclear superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, evaporated when the USSR dismantled itself. With the Soviet Union swept into the dustbin of history and communism all but extinct, Bush spoke hopefully of a “new world order,” where democracy would reign and diplomacy would supersede weaponry. Some observers even saw in these developments “the end of history,” in the sense that democracy, victorious in its two-century-long struggle against foes on the left and right, had no ideological battles left to fight.

Exultant Americans joked that the USSR had become the “USS *were*.” But the disintegration of the Soviet Union was no laughing matter. Rankling

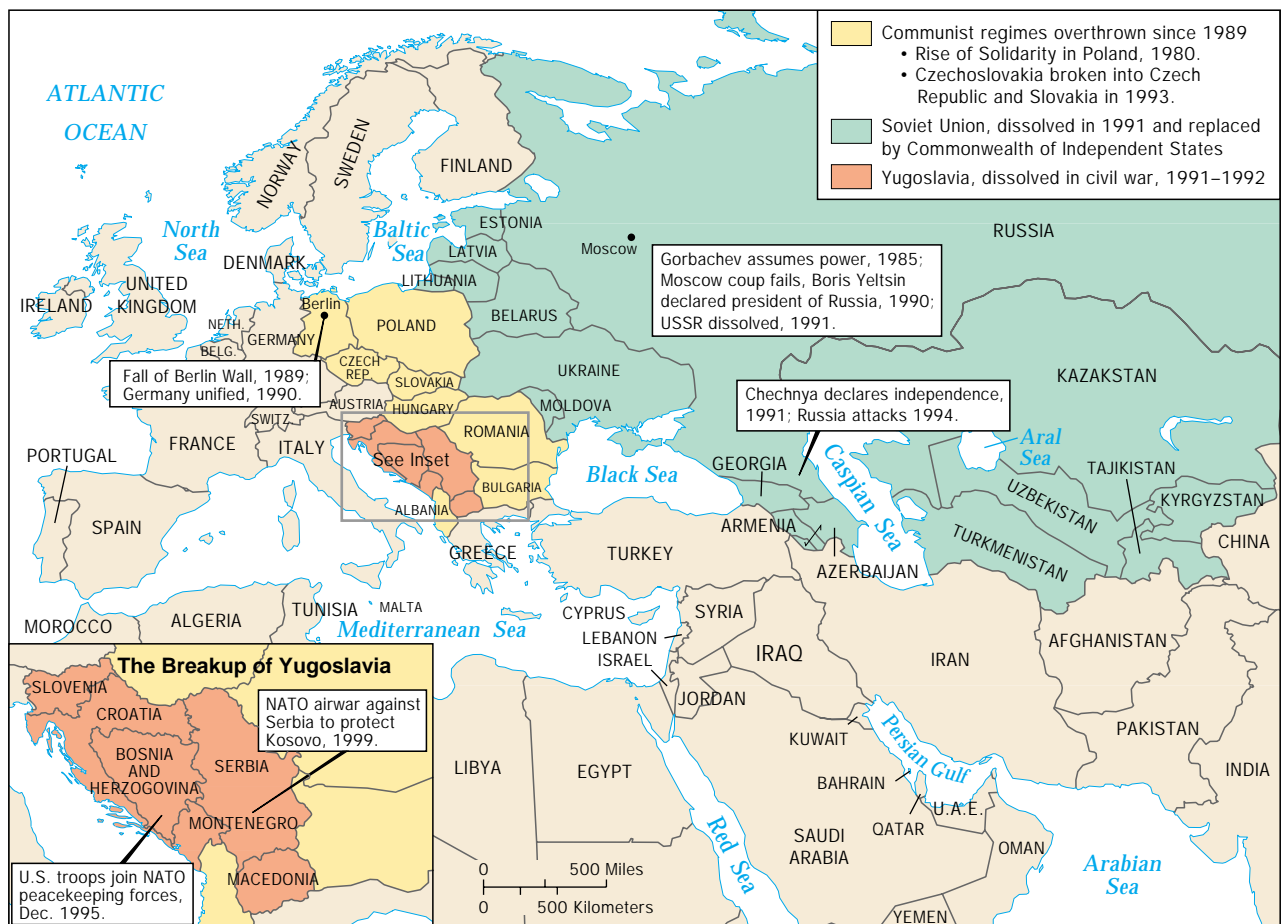
questions remained. For example, who would honor arms-control agreements with the United States? Which of the successor states of the former Soviet Union would take command of the formidable Soviet nuclear arsenal? (A partial answer was provided in early 1993, when President Bush, in one of his last official acts, signed the START II accord with Russian president Boris Yeltsin, committing both powers to reduce their long-range nuclear arsenals by two-thirds within ten years.)

Throughout the former Soviet empire, waves of nationalistic fervor and long-suppressed ethnic and racial hatreds rolled across the vast land as communism's roots were wrenched out. A particularly nasty conflict erupted in the Russian Caucasus in 1991, when the Chechnyan minority tried to declare their independence from Russia, prompting President Yeltsin to send in Russian troops. Ethnic warfare

flared in other disintegrating communist countries as well, notably in misery-drenched Yugoslavia, racked by vicious "ethnic cleansing" campaigns against various minorities.

The cruel and paradoxical truth stood revealed that the calcified communist regimes of Eastern Europe, whatever their sins, had at least bottled up the ancient ethnic antagonisms that were the region's peculiar curse and that now erupted in all their historical fury. Refugees from the strife-torn regions flooded into Western Europe. The sturdy German economy, the foundation of European prosperity, wobbled under the awesome burden of absorbing a technologically backward, physically decrepit communist East Germany. The stability of the entire European continent seemed at risk. The Western democracies, which for more than four decades had feared the military *strength* of the

The End of the Cold War Changes the Map of Europe



Eastern bloc, now ironically saw their well-being threatened by the social and economic *weakness* of the former communist lands.

The end of the Cold War also proved a mixed blessing for the United States. For nearly half a century, the containment of Soviet communism had been the paramount goal of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed the Cold War era had been the only lengthy period in American history when the United States had consistently pursued an internationalist foreign policy. With the Soviet threat now canceled, would the United States revert to its traditional isolationism? What principles would guide American diplomacy now that “anticommunism” had lost its relevance?

The Soviet-American rivalry, with its demands for high levels of military preparedness, had also deeply shaped and even invigorated the U.S. economy. Huge economic sectors such as aerospace were heavily sustained by military contracts. The economic cost of beating swords into plowshares became painfully apparent in 1991 when the Pentagon announced the closing of thirty-four military bases and canceled a \$52 billion order for a navy attack plane. More closings and cancellations followed. Communities that had been drenched with Pentagon dollars now nearly dried up, especially in hard-hit southern California, where scores of defense plants shut their doors and unemployment soared. The problems of weaning the U.S. economy

from its decades of dependence on defense spending tempered the euphoria of Americans as they welcomed the Cold War’s long-awaited finale.

Elsewhere in the world, democracy marched triumphantly forward. The white regime in South Africa took a giant step toward liberating that troubled land from its racist past when in 1990 it freed African leader Nelson Mandela, who had served twenty-seven years in prison for conspiring to overthrow the government. Four years later Mandela was elected South Africa’s president. Free elections in Nicaragua in February 1990 removed the leftist Sandinistas from power. Two years later, peace came at last to war-ravaged El Salvador.

### **The Persian Gulf Crisis**

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Sadly, the end of the Cold War did not mean the end of all wars. President Bush flexed the United States’ still-intimidating military muscle in tiny Panama in December 1989, when he sent airborne troops to capture dictator and drug lord Manuel Noriega.

Still more ominous events in the summer of 1990 severely tested Bush’s dream of a democratic and peaceful new world order. On August 2 Saddam Hussein, the brutal and ambitious ruler of Iraq, sent his armies to overrun Kuwait, a tiny, oil-rich desert sheikdom on Iraq’s southern frontier.

Oil fueled Saddam's aggression. Financially exhausted by its eight-year war with Iran, which had ended in a stalemate in 1988, Iraq needed Kuwait's oil to pay its huge war bills. Saddam's larger design was ironfisted control over the entire Persian Gulf region. With his hand thus firmly clutching the world's economic jugular vein, he dreamed of dictating the terms of oil supplies to the industrial nations, and perhaps of totally extinguishing the Arabs' enemy, Israel.

Ironically the United States and its allies had helped supply Saddam with the tools of aggression. He was widely known to be a thug and assassin who intimidated his underlings by showing them the bodies of his executed adversaries hanging on meat hooks. But in the 1980s, American enmity for Islamic-fundamentalist Iran was intense, and Saddam was at war with Iran. Assuming that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," American policymakers helped build Saddam's military machine into a formidable force.

On August 2, 1990, Saddam's army roared into Kuwait. The speed and audacity of the invasion was stunning, but the world responded just as swiftly. The United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned the invasion on August 3 and demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq's troops. When an economic embargo failed to squeeze the Iraqis into compliance by November, the Security Council delivered an ultimatum to Saddam to leave Kuwait by January 15, 1991, or U.N. forces would "use all necessary means" to expel his troops. For perhaps the first time in the post-World War II era, the U.N. seemed to be fulfilling its founders' dreams that it could preserve international order by putting guns where its mouth was. It also put them where the world's critical oil supply was.

In a logistical operation of astonishing complexity, the United States spearheaded a massive international military deployment on the sandy Arabian peninsula. As the January 15 deadline approached, some 539,000 U.S. soldiers, sailors, and pilots—many of them women and all of them members of the new, post-Vietnam, all-volunteer American military—swarmed into the Persian Gulf region. They were joined by nearly 270,000 troops, pilots, and sailors from twenty-eight other countries in the coalition opposed to Iraq. When all diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis failed, the U.S. Congress voted regretfully on January 12 to approve the use of

force. The time bomb of war now ticked off its final few beats.

## **Fighting "Operation Desert Storm"**

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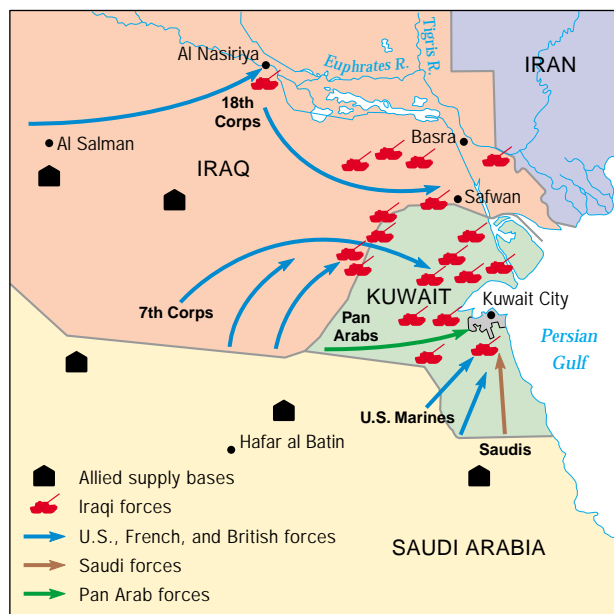
On January 16, 1991, the United States and its U.N. allies unleashed a hellish air war against Iraq. For thirty-seven days, warplanes pummeled targets in occupied Kuwait and in Iraq itself. The air campaign constituted an awesome display of high-technology, precision-targeting modern warfare. Yet the Iraqis claimed, probably rightly, that civilians were killed.

Iraq responded to this pounding by launching several dozen "Scud" short-range ballistic missiles against military and civilian targets in Saudi Arabia and Israel. These missile attacks claimed several lives but did no significant military damage.

Yet if Iraq made but a feeble military response to the air campaign, the allied commander, the beefy and blunt American general Norman ("Stormin' Norman") Schwarzkopf, took nothing for granted. Saddam, who had threatened to wage "the mother of all battles," had the capacity to inflict awful damage. Iraq had stockpiled tons of chemical and biological weapons, including poison gas and the means to spread epidemics of anthrax. Saddam's tactics also included ecological warfare as he released a gigantic oil slick into the Persian Gulf to forestall amphibious assault and ignited hundreds of oil-well fires, whose smoky plumes shrouded the ground from aerial view. Faced with these horrifying tactics, Schwarzkopf's strategy was starkly simple: soften the Iraqis with relentless bombing, then suffocate them on the ground with a tidal-wave rush of troops and armor.

On February 23 the dreaded and long-awaited land war began. Dubbed "Operation Desert Storm," it lasted only four days—the "hundred-hour war." With lightning speed the U.N. forces penetrated deep into Iraq, outflanking the occupying forces in Kuwait and blocking the enemy's ability either to retreat or to reinforce. Allied casualties were amazingly light, whereas much of Iraq's remaining fighting force was quickly destroyed or captured. On February 27 Saddam accepted a cease-fire, and Kuwait was liberated.

Most Americans cheered the war's rapid and enormously successful conclusion. Some, remembering the antiwar movement of the 1960s, had protested against going to war. But the end had



Operation Desert Storm: The Ground War,  
February 23–27, 1991

come so suddenly and decisively that antiwar sentiment on a large scale never crystallized. And unlike the forlorn veterans of Vietnam, who had struggled back to their embittered and disillusioned homeland, the troops from Operation Desert Storm returned home to enthusiastic heroes' welcomes.

The war had nevertheless failed to dislodge Saddam from power. When the smoke cleared, he had survived to menace the world another day. The perpetually troubled Middle East knew scarcely less trouble after Desert Storm had ceased to thunder, and the United States, for better or worse, found itself even more deeply ensnared in the region's web of mortal hatreds and intractable conflicts.

### **Bush on the Home Front**

In his inaugural address, George Bush pledged that he would work for a “kinder, gentler America.” He redeemed that promise in part when he signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, a landmark law prohibiting discrimination against the 43 million U.S. citizens with physical or mental disabilities. The president also signed a major water projects bill in 1992 that fundamentally reformed the distribution of subsidized federal water in the West. The bill put the interests of the environment ahead of agriculture, especially in California's heavily irrigated Central Valley, and made much more water available to the West's thirsty cities.

The new president continued to aggravate the explosive “social issues” that had so divided Americans throughout the 1980s, especially the nettlesome questions of affirmative action and abortion.

In 1990 Bush's Department of Education challenged the legality of college scholarships targeted for racial minorities. Bush repeatedly threatened to veto civil rights legislation that would make it easier for employees to prove discrimination in hiring and promotion practices. (He grudgingly accepted a watered-down civil rights bill in 1991.)

Most provocatively, in 1991 Bush nominated for the Supreme Court the conservative African-American jurist Clarence Thomas. A stern critic of affirmative-action policies, Thomas was slated to fill a seat vacated by the retirement of Thurgood Marshall, the Court's lone black justice and an outspoken champion of civil rights.

Thomas's nomination was loudly opposed by liberal groups, including organized labor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the National Organization for Women (NOW), which objected to Thomas's presumed opposition to abortion rights—though the nominee studiously refrained from publicly

commenting on the landmark abortion case of *Roe v. Wade*, claiming, incredibly, that he had never thought about it or discussed it.

Reflecting irreconcilable divisions over affirmative action and abortion, the Senate Judiciary Committee concluded its hearings on the nomination with a divided 7–7 vote and forwarded the matter to the full Senate without a recommendation. Then, just days before the Senate was scheduled to vote in early October 1991, a press leak revealed that Anita Hill, a law professor at the University of Oklahoma, had accused Thomas of sexual harassment. The public outcry at this allegation forced the Senate Judiciary Committee to reopen its hearings. For days a prurient American public sat glued to their television sets as Hill graphically detailed her charges of sexual improprieties and Thomas angrily responded. Although Hill passed a lie detector test, thirteen other female colleagues of Thomas testified that they had never witnessed any improper behavior. In the end, by a 52–48 vote, the Senate narrowly

confirmed Thomas as the second African-American ever to sit on the supreme bench. Hill's charges had failed to block Thomas's nomination, but many Americans hailed her as a heroine for her role in focusing the nation's attention on issues of sexual harassment. (Oregon's Republican senator Robert Packwood was among the most prominent officials to fall victim to the new sexual etiquette when he was forced to resign from the Senate in 1995 after charges that he had sexually harassed several women.) Thomas maintained that Hill's widely publicized, unproved allegations amounted to "a high-tech lynching for uppity blacks who in any way deign to think for themselves, to do for themselves."

The furor over Clarence Thomas's confirmation suggested that the social issues that had helped produce three Republican presidential victories in the 1980s were losing some of their electoral appeal. Many women, enraged by the all-male judiciary committee's behavior in the Clarence Thomas hearings, grew increasingly critical of the president's uncompromising stand on abortion. A "gender gap" opened between the two political parties, as pro-choice women grew increasingly cool toward the strong anti-abortion stand of the Republicans.

Still more damaging to President Bush's political health was the economy, which sputtered and stalled almost from the outset of his administration. By 1992 the unemployment rate exceeded 7 percent.

It approached 10 percent in the key state of California, ravaged by defense cutbacks. The federal budget deficit continued to mushroom cancerously, topping \$250 billion in each of Bush's years as president. In a desperate attempt to stop the hemorrhage of red ink, Bush agreed in 1990 to a budget agreement with Congress that included \$133 billion in new taxes.

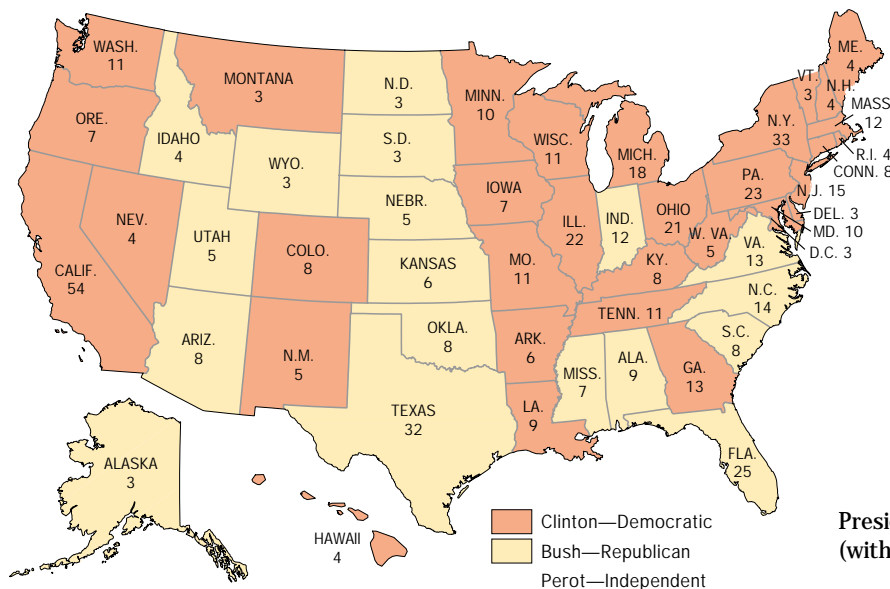
Bush's 1990 tax and budget package added up to a political catastrophe. In his 1988 presidential campaign, Bush had belligerently declared, "Read my lips—no new taxes." Now he had flagrantly broken that campaign promise.

The intractable budgetary crisis and the stagnant economy congealed in a lump of disgust with all political incumbents. Disillusion thickened in 1991 when it was revealed that many members of the House of Representatives had written thousands of bad checks from their accounts in a private House "bank." Although no taxpayers' money was involved, the image of privileged politicians incompetently managing their private business affairs, with no penalty, even while they were grossly mismanaging the Republic's finances, further soured the voters. A movement to impose limits on the number of terms that elected officials could serve gained strength in many states. Sniffing this prevailing wind, unprecedented numbers of officeholders announced that they would not stand for reelection.

## Bill Clinton: The First Baby-Boomer President

The slumbering economy, the widening gender gap, and the rising anti-incumbent spirit spelled opportunity for Democrats, frozen out of the White House for all but four years since 1968. In a bruising round of primary elections, Governor William Jefferson Clinton of Arkansas weathered blistering accusations of womanizing and draft evasion to emerge as his party's standard-bearer. Breaking with the tradition of a "balanced ticket," he selected a fellow fortysomething southern white male Protestant moderate, Senator Albert Gore of Tennessee, as his vice-presidential running mate.

Clinton claimed to be a "new" Democrat, chastened by the party's long exile in the political wilderness. Spurred especially by Walter Mondale's galling defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan in 1984, Clinton and other centrist Democrats had formed the Democratic Leadership Council to point the party away from its traditional antibusiness, dovish, champion-of-the-underdog orientation and toward progrowth, strong defense, and anticrime policies. Clinton campaigned especially vigorously on promises to stimulate the economy, reform the welfare system, and overhaul the nation's health-care apparatus, which had grown into a scandalously



Presidential Election of 1992 (with electoral vote by state)



expensive contraption that failed to provide medical coverage to some 37 million Americans.

Trying to wring one more win out of the social issues that had underwritten two Reagan and one Bush presidential victories, the Republican convention in Houston in August 1992 dwelt stridently on “family values” and, as expected, nominated George Bush and Vice President J. Danforth Quayle for a second term. A tired and apparently dispirited Bush then took to the campaign trail. His listless performances and spaghetti sentences set him sharply apart from his youthful rival, the superenergetic, articulate Clinton. Bush halfheartedly attacked Clinton’s character, contrasting the Arkansan’s evasion of military service in the Vietnam War with his own heroic record as a navy flier in World War II. The president seemed to campaign more for vindication in the history books than for victory in the election. He tried to take credit for the end of the Cold War and trumpeted his leadership role in the Persian Gulf War.

But fear for the economic problems of the future swayed more voters than pride in the foreign policies of the past. The purchasing power of the average worker’s paycheck had actually declined during Bush’s presidency. At Clinton’s campaign headquarters, a simple sign reminded staffers of his principal campaign theme: “It’s the economy, stupid.” Reflecting pervasive economic unease and the virulence of the throw-the-bums-out national mood, nearly 20 percent of voters cast their ballots for independent presidential candidate H. Ross Perot, a bantamweight, jug-eared Texas billionaire who harped incessantly on the problem of the federal deficit and made a boast of the fact that he had never held any public office.

Perot’s colorful presence probably accounted for the record turnout on election day, when some 100 million voters—55 percent of those eligible—went to the polls. The final tallies gave Clinton 43,728,275 popular votes and 370 votes in the Electoral College. He was the first baby boomer to ascend to the White House, a distinction reflecting the electoral profile of the population, 70 percent of whom had been born after World War II. Bush polled some 38,167,416 popular and 168 electoral votes. Perot won no Electoral College votes but did gather 19,237,247 in the popular count—the strongest showing for an independent or third-party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt ran on the Bull Moose ticket in 1912. Democrats also racked up clear majorities in both houses of Congress, which

seated near-record numbers of new members, including thirty-nine African-Americans, nineteen Hispanic-Americans, seven Asian-Americans, one Native American, and forty-eight women. In Illinois Carol Moseley-Braun became the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Senate, where she joined five other women in the largest female contingent ever in the upper chamber.

Women also figured prominently in President Clinton’s cabinet, including the first female attorney general, Janet Reno, and former Wisconsin University president Donna Shalala, who became the secretary of health and human services. Vowing to shape a government that “looked like America,” Clinton appointed several ethnic and racial minority members to his cabinet contingent, including former San Antonio mayor Henry Cisneros at Housing and Urban Development and an African-American, Ron Brown, as secretary of commerce. Clinton also seized the opportunity in 1993 to nominate Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the Supreme Court, where she joined Sandra Day O’Connor to make a pair of women justices.

### **A False Start for Reform**

Badly overestimating his electoral mandate for liberal reform, the young president made a series of costly blunders upon entering the White House. In one of his first initiatives on taking office, he stirred a hornet’s nest of controversy by advocating an end to the ban on gays and lesbians in the armed services. Faced with ferocious opposition, the president finally had to settle for a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that quietly accepted gay and lesbian soldiers and sailors without officially acknowledging their presence in the military.

Even more damaging to Clinton’s political standing, and to his hopes for lasting liberal achievement, was the fiasco of his attempt to reform the nation’s health-care system. In a dramatic but personally and politically risky innovation, the president appointed his wife, nationally prominent lawyer and child-advocate Hillary Rodham Clinton, as the director of a task force charged with redesigning the medical-service industry. After months of highly publicized hearings and scrappy planning sessions, the task force unveiled its stupefyingly complicated plan in October 1993. Critics

immediately blasted the cumbersome, convoluted proposal, which was virtually dead on arrival in Congress, where it was finally buried one year later. As the reform plan's principal architect, the First Lady was doused with a torrent of abuse. She had entered the White House as a full political partner with her husband, sharing the national spotlight as no previous First Lady had done. But midway through his first term, she had become a political liability and sidestepped quietly to the shadows.

Clinton had better luck with a deficit-reduction bill in 1993, which combined with a moderately buoyant economy by 1996 to shrink the federal deficit to its lowest level in more than a decade. He also induced the Congress in 1993 to pass a gun-control law, the "Brady Bill," named for presidential aide James Brady, who had been wounded and disabled by gunfire in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan in 1981. In July of 1994,

Clinton made further progress against the national plague of firearms when he persuaded Congress to pass a \$30 billion anticrime bill, which contained a ban on several types of assault weapons.

With these measures the government struggled to hold the line against an epidemic of violence that rocked American society in the 1990s. A radical Muslim group bombed New York's World Trade Center in 1993, killing six people. A still larger blast destroyed a federal office building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1995, taking 168 lives, presumably in retribution for a 1993 standoff in Waco, Texas, between federal agents and a fundamentalist sect known as the Branch Davidians. That showdown ended in the destruction of the sect's compound and the deaths of many Branch Davidians, including women and children. The last two episodes brought to light a lurid and secretive underground of paramilitary private "militias,"

composed of alienated citizens armed to the teeth and ultrasuspicious of all governments.

Even many law-abiding citizens shared to some degree in the antigovernment attitudes that drove the militia members to murderous extremes. Thanks largely to the disillusioning agony of the Vietnam War and the naked cynicism of Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal, the confidence in government that had come naturally to the generation that licked the Great Depression and won the Second World War was in short supply by the century's end. Reflecting that pervasive disenchantment with politics and politicians, some twenty-three states had imposed restrictions on elected officials with term-limit laws by the mid-1990s, though the Supreme Court ruled in 1995 that such laws did not apply to federal officeholders.

### **The Politics of Distrust**

Clinton's failed initiatives and widespread antigovernment sentiment offered conservative Republicans a golden opportunity in 1994, and they seized it aggressively. Led by outspoken Georgia representative Newt Gingrich, conservatives offered voters a "Contract with America" that promised an all-out assault on budget deficits and radical reductions in welfare programs. Liberal Democrats countered that the conservative pledge should be called a "Contract *on* America," but their protests were drowned in the right-wing tornado that roared across the land in the 1994 congressional elections. Every incumbent Republican gubernatorial, senatorial, and congressional candidate was reelected. Republicans also picked up eleven new governorships, eight seats in the Senate, and fifty-three seats in the House (where Gingrich became speaker), giving them control of both chambers of the federal Congress for the first time in forty years.

But if President Clinton had overplayed his mandate for liberal reform in 1993, the congressional Republicans now proceeded to overplay their mandate for conservative retrenchment. The new Republican majority did legislate one long-standing conservative goal when they restricted "unfunded mandates"—federal laws that imposed new obligations on state and local governments without providing new revenues. And in 1996 the new Congress

achieved a major conservative victory when it compelled a reluctant Clinton to sign the Welfare Reform Bill, which made deep cuts in welfare grants and required able-bodied welfare recipients to find employment. The new welfare law also tightly restricted welfare benefits for legal and illegal immigrants alike, reflecting a rising tide of anti-immigrant sentiment as the numbers of newcomers climbed toward an all-time high. Old-line liberal Democrats howled with pain at the president's alleged betrayal of his party's heritage, and some prominent administration members resigned in protest against his decision to sign the welfare bill. But Clinton's acceptance of the welfare reform package was part of his shrewd political strategy of accommodating the electorate's conservative mood by moving to his right.

President Clinton was at first stunned by the magnitude of the Republican congressional victory in 1994. For a time he was reduced to lamely reminding Congress that the president was still relevant to the political and policy-making process. But many Americans gradually came to feel that the Gingrich Republicans were bending their conservative bow too far, especially when the new speaker advocated provocative ideas like sending the children of welfare families to orphanages. In a tense confrontation between the Democratic president and the Republican Congress, the federal government actually had to shut down for several days at the end of 1995, until a budget package was agreed upon. These outlandishly partisan antics bred a backlash that helped President Clinton rebound from his condition as a political dead duck.

As the Republicans slugged it out in a noisy round of presidential primaries in 1996, Clinton's reelection campaign raised spectacular sums of money—some of it, investigations later revealed, from questionable sources. The eventual Republican standard-bearer was Kansas senator Robert Dole, a decorated World War II veteran who ran a listless campaign. Clinton, buoyed by a healthy economy and by his artful trimming to the conservative wind, breezed to an easy victory, with 45,628,667 popular votes to Dole's 37,869,435. The Reform party's egomaniacal leader, Ross Perot, ran a sorry third, picking up less than half the votes he had garnered in 1992. Clinton won 379 electoral votes, Dole only 159. But Republicans remained in control of Congress.



supporting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), creating in 1993 a free-trade zone encompassing Mexico, Canada, and the United States. In doing so, he reversed his own stand in the 1992 election campaign and bucked the opposition of protectionists in his own party, especially labor leaders fearful of losing jobs to low-wage Mexican workers. Clinton took another step in 1994 toward a global free-trade system when he vigorously promoted the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and a cherished goal of free-trade advocates since the end of the Second World War.

Simmering discontent over trade policy boiled over in 1999 when Clinton hosted the meeting of the WTO in Seattle. The city's streets filled with protesters railing against what they viewed as the human and environmental costs of economic "globalization." Clinton, eager to keep Democratic party activists and the trade unions in line in the upcoming election year, expressed measured sympathy with the protest, to the dismay of trade negotiators from the poor countries of the Southern Hemisphere, who resented Yankee meddling with their plans for economic development. Trade talks fizzled in Seattle, with Clinton taking a hefty share of the blame.

Money spurred controversy of another sort in the late 1990s. Campaign finance reform, long smoldering as a potential issue, suddenly flared up after the 1996 presidential campaign. Congressional investigators revealed that the Clinton campaign had received funds from many improper sources, including contributors who paid to stay overnight in the White House and foreigners who were legally prohibited from giving to American campaigns. But Republicans and Democrats alike had reason to avoid reform. Both parties had grown dependent on vast sums to finance television ads for their candidates. Clinton did little more than pay lip service to the cause of campaign finance reform. But within the ranks of both parties, a few mavericks proposed to eliminate the corrupting influence of big donors. Senator John McCain from Arizona made campaign finance reform a centerpiece of his surprisingly strong, though ultimately unsuccessful, bid for the Republican presidential nomination in the 2000 campaign.

Two domestic issues inspired Clinton to act boldly in his second term: the fights *against* big tobacco and *for* gun control. In 1998 the large tobacco companies and the attorneys general of several states worked their way toward a huge legal settlement. In return for restricting advertising targeted at young people and for giving the states \$358 billion to offset the public-health costs of smoking, the tobacco firms would win immunity from further litigation, including at the federal level. When the deal came before Congress, Clinton weighed in heavily behind it, while big tobacco spent \$40 million to snuff it out. The deal collapsed, but the tobacco wars continued. Months later eight states worked out a more limited settlement, and in 1999 the Clinton administration shifted its strategy to the

courts, where it hoped lawsuits would eventually force the tobacco industry to reimburse the federal government the \$20 million a year Clinton officials argued Uncle Sam had spent since the 1950s on smokers' health.

Clinton's focus on gun control had a tragic impetus. On an April morning in 1999, two students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, killed twelve fellow students and a teacher in the deadliest of a series of school shootings that shook the nation in the mid to late 1990s (see p. 1006). Debate flared over the origins of this epidemic of school violence. Some observers targeted the violence of movies, TV shows, and video games, others the failings of parents. But the culprit that attracted the most sustained political attention was guns—their abundance and accessibility, especially in suburban and rural communities, where most of the school shootings had occurred. Clinton engaged in a pugnacious debate with the progun National Rifle Association over the need to toughen gun laws. The "Million Mom March" in Washington in May 2000 demonstrated the growing public support for new antigun measures.

## **Problems Abroad**

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The end of the Cold War robbed the United States of the basic principles on which it had conducted foreign policy for nearly half a century, and Clinton groped for a diplomatic formula to replace anticommunism in the conduct of America's foreign affairs. The Cold War's finale also shook a number of skeletons loose from several government closets. Sensational revelations that Central Intelligence Agency double agents had sold secrets to the Soviets during the Cold War years, causing the execution of American agents abroad, demonstrated that the ghost of the Cold War still cast its frosty shadow over official Washington.

Absorbed by domestic issues, President Clinton at first seemed uncertain and even amateurish in his conduct of foreign policy. He followed his predecessor's lead in dispatching American troops as part of a peacekeeping mission to Somalia and reinforced the U.S. contingent after Somali rebels killed more than a dozen Americans in late 1993. But in March 1994, the president quietly withdrew the

American units, without having accomplished any clearly defined goal. Burned in Somalia, Washington stood on the sidelines in 1995 when catastrophic ethnic violence in the central African country of Rwanda resulted in the deaths of half a million people. A similar lack of clarity afflicted policy toward Haiti, where democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide had been deposed by a military coup in 1991. Clinton at last committed twenty thousand American troops to return Aristide to the Haitian presidency in 1994, after thousands of desperate Haitian refugees had sought asylum in the United States.

It took time, too, for Clinton to settle on an approach to China. Candidate Clinton had denounced George Bush in 1992 for not imposing economic sanctions on China as punishment for Beijing's wretched record of human rights abuses. But President Clinton learned what Bush had long known: China's economic importance to the United States did not permit Washington the luxury of taking the high road on human rights. Clinton soon soft-pedaled his criticism of the Beijing regime and instead began seeking improved trade relations with that rapidly industrializing country and poten-

tial market bonanza. By 2000 Clinton had become the country's leading crusader for a controversial China trade bill, passed by Congress in May 2000, which made the Asian giant a full-fledged trading partner of the United States.

Clinton's approach to the tormented Balkans in southeastern Europe showed a similar initial hesitation, followed eventually by his assumption of a leadership role. In the former Yugoslavia, as vicious ethnic conflict raged through Bosnia, the Washington government dithered until finally deciding to commit American troops to a NATO peacekeeping contingent in late 1995. Deadlines for removing the troops were postponed and then finally abandoned altogether as it became clear that they were the only force capable of preventing new hostilities. NATO's expansion to include the new member states of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1997, and its continuing presence in Bosnia, failed to pacify the Balkans completely. When Serbian president Slobodan Milosević in 1999 unleashed a new round of "ethnic cleansing" in the region, this time against ethnic Albanians in the province of Kosovo, U.S.-led NATO forces launched an air war against Serbia. The bombing campaign initially failed to

stop ethnic terror, as refugees flooded into neighboring countries, but it eventually forced Milosević to accept a NATO peacekeeping force in Kosovo. With ethnic reconciliation still a distant dream in the Balkans, Washington accepted the reality that American forces had an enduring role as peacekeepers in the region.

The Middle East remained a major focus of American diplomacy right up to the end of Clinton's tenure. In 1993 Clinton presided over a historic meeting at the White House between Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasir Arafat. They agreed in principle on self-rule for the Palestinians within Israel. But hopes flickered two years later when Rabin fell to an assassin's bullet. Clinton and his second-term secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, spent the rest of the 1990s struggling to broker the permanent settlement that continued to elude Israelis and Palestinians. In Iraq Saddam Hussein persisted in his game of hide-and-seek with U.N. inspectors monitoring the Iraqi weapons program. When the chief U.N. inspector reported in 1998 that Iraq was out of compliance with U.N. rules, America and Britain launched air strikes against Iraqi weapons factories and warehouses. That same year the United States also conducted missile attacks against alleged terrorist sites in Afghanistan and Sudan in retaliation for terrorist bombings that had killed more than two hundred people at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

In his final year as president, Clinton stepped up his efforts to leave a legacy as an international peacemaker. Along with his work in the Middle East, he sought to bring peace to Northern Ireland and the Korean peninsula, and he traveled to India and Pakistan in hopes of reducing the rivalry between the two nuclear powers of southern Asia. Although the guiding principles of foreign policy in the post-Cold War era remained elusive, Clinton had become a stalwart opponent of the minority factions in both parties that yearned for a new isolationism.

## **Scandal and Impeachment**

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President Clinton had ample cause for concern about his lasting reputation, since scandal had dogged him from the beginning of his presidency. Allegations of flagrant wrongdoing, reaching back to his prepresidential days in Arkansas, included a failed real estate investment known as the Whitewater Land Corporation. The Clintons' role in that deal prompted the appointment of a federal special prosecutor to investigate. Suspicions were especially aroused by the apparent suicide in 1993 of White House counsel and close Clinton associate Vincent W. Foster, Jr., who had handled the Clintons' legal and financial affairs. The president's loose ethics and womanizing even found fictional expressions in a runaway 1996 best-seller, *Primary Colors*,



though the actual Whitewater investigation never proved any Clinton wrongdoing.

But all the previous scandals were overshadowed when allegations broke in January 1998 that Clinton had engaged in a sexual affair with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and then lied about it when he testified under oath in a civil lawsuit. The lawsuit had been brought by an Arkansas woman, Paula Jones, who charged that then-governor Clinton had sexually harassed her when she was a state employee. The Supreme Court had unanimously agreed to permit the case to go forward in May 1997, ruling that being sued in a civil case would not “significantly distract” the president from his duties.

The accusation that Clinton had lied under oath in the Jones case presented a stunning windfall to the special prosecutor, Kenneth Starr, originally appointed to investigate the Whitewater deal. Like Captain Ahab pursuing the whale Moby Dick, Starr had relentlessly traced Clinton’s steps for years, spending \$40 million but never succeeding in finding evidence against the president himself. Clinton, now suddenly caught in a legal and political trap, delivered vehement public denials that he had engaged in “sexual relations” with “that woman.” After maintaining his innocence for eight months, Clinton was finally forced to acknowledge an “inappropriate relationship.” In September 1998 Starr presented to the House of Representatives a stinging report, including graphic sexual details, charging Clinton with eleven possible grounds for impeachment, all related to the Lewinsky matter.

Led by its fiercely anti-Clinton Republican majority, the House quickly cranked up the rusty machinery of impeachment. After a nasty partisan debate, the House Republicans in December 1998 eventually passed two articles of impeachment against the president: perjury before a grand jury and obstruction of justice. Crying foul, the Democratic minority charged that, however deplorable Clinton’s personal misconduct, sexual transgressions did not rise to the level of “high crimes and misdemeanors” prescribed in the Constitution (see Art. II, Sec. IV in the Appendix). The House Republican managers (prosecutors) of impeachment for the Senate trial, led by Illinois congressman and House Judiciary Committee chairman Henry Hyde, claimed that perjury and obstruction were grave public issues and that nothing less than the “rule of law” was at stake.

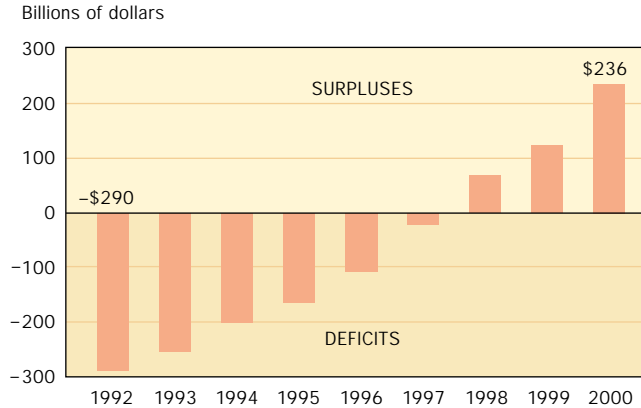
As cries of “honor the Constitution” and “sexual McCarthyism” filled the air, the nation debated whether the president’s peccadilloes amounted to high crimes or low follies. Most Americans apparently leaned toward the latter. In the 1998 midterm elections, voters reduced the House Republicans’ majority, causing fiery House speaker Newt Gingrich to resign his post. Incredibly, Clinton’s job approval rating remained high and even rose throughout the long impeachment ordeal. Although Americans held a low opinion of Clinton’s slipshod personal morals, most liked the president’s political and economic policies and wanted him to stay in office. Kenneth Starr’s stock in public opinion fell accordingly.

In January and February 1999, for the first time in 130 years, the nation witnessed an impeachment proceeding in the U.S. Senate. Dusting off ancient precedents from Andrew Johnson’s trial, the one hundred solemn senators heard arguments and evidence in the case, with Chief Justice William Rehnquist presiding. With the facts widely known and the two parties’ political positions firmly locked in, the trial’s outcome was a foregone conclusion. On the key obstruction of justice charge, five northeastern Republicans joined all forty-five Democratic senators in voting not guilty. The fifty Republican votes for conviction fell far short of the constitutionally required two-thirds majority. The vote on the perjury charge was forty-five guilty, fifty-five not guilty.

## **Clinton’s Legacy**

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With the impeachment trial over, a weary nation yearned for Washington to move on to other business. Vowing to serve “until the last hour of the last day of my term,” Clinton spent what remained of his presidency seeking to secure a legacy for himself as an effective leader and moderate reformer. He designated major swaths of undeveloped land as protected wilderness and won public support for health-care improvements in the form of a “patients’ bill of rights.” He took advantage of big federal budget surpluses to win congressional approval for hiring 100,000 more teachers and 50,000 more police officers. Budget surpluses brought out the enduring differences between Republicans and Democrats. The former urged big tax cuts, the latter a mixture of smaller cuts and new



### Deficits into Surpluses

In 1998 the U.S. Budget deficit became a surplus for the first time in decades. (Sources: Office Management and Budget and Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

ways to shore up Medicare and Social Security—a conflict in aims that set the stage for the 2000 presidential campaign.

Beyond the obvious stain of impeachment, Clinton's legacy was bound to be a mixed one for his country and his party. He came to office in 1992 determined to make economic growth his first priority, and in this domain he surely succeeded. Benefiting from a global expansion he had done little to foster, he nonetheless made sound appointments to top economic posts and kept a steady eye on the federal budget. The country achieved nearly full employment by decade's end, poverty rates inched down, and median income reached new highs. From 1998 to 2000, the federal budgets resulted in surpluses rather than deficits. Yet by governing successfully as a "New Democrat" and avowed centrist, Clinton did more to consolidate than reverse the Reagan-Bush revolution against the New Deal liberalism that had for half a century provided the compass for the Democratic party and the nation. As a brilliant communicator, Clinton kept alive a vision of social justice and racial harmony. But as an executive, he discouraged people from expecting government to remedy all the nation's ills. By setting such a low standard for his personal conduct, he replenished the sad reservoir of public cynicism about politics that Vietnam and Watergate had created a generation before. In the last days of his presidency, Clinton negotiated a deal with the Special Prosecutor to win immunity from possible legal action over the Lewinsky scandal by agreeing to a fine and a five-year suspension of his law license.

Controversy trailed Clinton out the White House door when the departing president issued several executive pardons that gave at least the appearance of rewarding political backers and donors.

## The Bush-Gore Presidential Battle

Like Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1950s, Clinton regarded the election of his vice president as a further means of ensuring his own legacy. Clinton's loyal vice president, Al Gore, easily won the Democratic party's presidential nomination in 2000. A quarter-century in national government, as congressman, senator, and vice president, had made Gore a seasoned and savvy policy expert, but many Americans found his somewhat formal personal bearing to be off-putting, especially when contrasted with the winsome charm of his boss. Gore also faced the tricky challenge of somehow associating himself with Clinton-era prosperity while detaching himself from Clinton-era scandal. Trying to distance himself from Clinton's peccadilloes, he chose as his running mate Connecticut senator Joseph Lieberman, an outspoken critic of Clinton during the Lewinsky affair and the first Jew nominated to a national ticket by a major party. Meanwhile, consumer advocate Ralph Nader's Green party threatened to siphon off the ballots of environmentalists who might otherwise have voted for Gore, a long-time champion of vigorous pro-environmental policies.

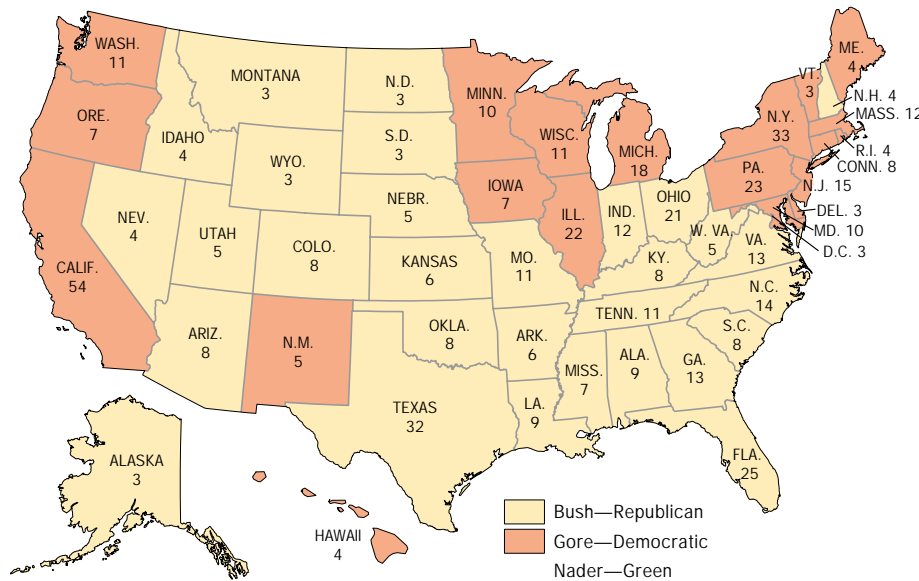
The Republican nominee, George W. Bush, had catapulted to party prominence on the strength of his being the eldest son of former president George Bush and his popularity as a two-term governor of Texas. Though untested on the national stage, he inspired the loyalty of able lieutenants and organized a formidable campaign with a promise “to restore dignity to the White House”—a thinly veiled attack on Clinton’s personal failings. Bush chose Dick Cheney, former secretary of defense in the elder Bush’s administration and a key planner in the Persian Gulf War of 1991, as his vice-presidential running mate, lending the ticket a much-needed aura of experience. Styling himself a “compassionate conservative,” “George W.” (also “W,” or sometimes “dubya”) promised to bridge the bitter division between moderates and die-hard conservatives within the Republican party.

Rosy estimates that the federal budget would produce a surplus of some \$2 trillion over the coming decade set the stage for the presidential contest. Bush called for returning two-thirds of the surplus “to the people” in the form of a \$1.3 trillion across-the-board tax cut. True to the Republican creed of smaller government, Bush championed private-sector initiatives, such as school vouchers, a reliance on “faith-based” institutions to serve the poor, and reforms to the Social Security system that would permit individual workers to invest part of their payroll taxes in private retirement accounts. Gore countered that Bush’s tax plan would benefit

the rich much more than the poor. Gore advocated a more modest tax cut targeted at the middle and lower classes and proposed using most of the surplus to reduce or even eliminate the national debt, shore up Social Security, and expand Medicare. In this post-Cold War era, foreign policy did not figure prominently in either candidate’s campaign.

Pollsters and candidates alike predicted a close election, but they could not foresee that the result would be an epochal cliffhanger. Not since the Hayes-Tilden election of 1876 had the usual electoral mechanisms ground their gears so badly before yielding a definite conclusion. In the pivotal state of Florida (where the Republican candidate’s brother Jeb Bush served as governor), the vote was so close that state law compelled a recount. When that second tally confirmed Bush’s paper-thin margin of victory, Democrats called for further hand recounts in several counties where confusing ballots and faulty machines seemed to have denied Gore a legitimate majority. Crying foul, Republicans turned to the courts to block any more recounting. A bizarre judicial tussle ensued as battalions of Democratic lawyers challenged the legality of Florida’s voting procedures and legions of Republican lawyers fought to stymie them.

When the Florida Supreme Court ordered a hand count of nearly sixty thousand ballots that the machines had failed to read, Republicans struck back on two fronts. The Republican-dominated



**Presidential Election of 2000 (with electoral vote by state)**  
 Although Democratic vice president Albert Gore won the popular election for president by half a million votes, George W. Bush's contested five-hundred-vote advantage in Florida gave him a slight lead in the Electoral College. The 2.7 million popular votes won by Green party candidate and consumer activist Ralph Nader almost surely deprived Gore of victory, casting Nader in the role of spoiler. Bush's failure to win the popular vote inspired critics to protest at his inauguration with placards reading "Hail to the Thief."

Florida legislature moved to name a set of pro-Bush electors, regardless of the vote tabulating and retabulating then under way. The Bush campaign also took its case to the U.S. Supreme Court. There, with the eyes of an increasingly restive nation riveted on the proceedings, the nine justices broke into a bare-knuckle judicial brawl. Five bitterly divisive weeks after election day, the presidential campaign of 2000 finally ended when the high court's five most conservative members ruled in Bush's favor. They reasoned that since neither Florida's legislature nor its courts had established a uniform standard for evaluating disputed ballots, the hand counts amounted to an unconstitutional breach of the Fourteenth Amendment's "equal protection" clause. In a rare departure from high court decorum, the liberal minority excoriated the majority. Justice John Stevens wrote scathingly that the Court's decision jeopardized "the nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law."

The Supreme Court ruling gave Bush the victory but also cast a cloud of illegitimacy over his presidency. Bush's final official margin of victory in Florida was only 537 votes of 6 million cast, and his national tally in the popular vote, 50,456,169 votes, fell short of Gore's 50,996,116. Bush also faced a Congress more evenly divided than any in history. For the first time, the Senate was split fifty-fifty between Democrats and Republicans, and the GOP's grip on the House dwindled to just a ten-vote majority.

The election featured other novelties besides its minuscule margins of victory. "W" became only the second son of a president, after John Quincy Adams, to win the White House. Hillary Rodham Clinton became the first First Lady to run for office, winning a U.S. Senate seat from New York.

The fiasco of the 2000 election severely tested American democracy, but in the end it earned a passing grade. The nation's two-century-old electoral machinery might have shown its age, but it managed to wheeze and clank its way to a peaceful resolution of one of the most ferociously contested presidential races ever. It could even be said that America's much-maligned political system managed to display a certain awkward dignity. Despite the fuss about unreadable ballots and all the partisan maneuvering, no credible charges of serious chicanery or outright corruption wafted up out of the election's cauldron of controversy. No really threatening riotous rabble filled the nation's streets. Both camps sought victory by calling out the lawyers, not the generals. No insoluble constitutional crisis emerged. And however unsettling the U.S. Supreme Court's intervention might have been, surely it was better to have the buck stop with the judges, not with a junta. The foresight of the Founders in crafting a system of elections and courts stood reaffirmed for the new century, although the imbroglio unquestionably demonstrated the need for modernized and nationally uniform balloting procedures. Some critics even called for the abolition of the Electoral College.

## Chronology

- 1980** Reagan defeats Carter for presidency
- 1981** Iran releases American hostages  
“Reaganomics” spending and tax cuts passed  
Solidarity movement in Poland  
O’Connor appointed to Supreme Court (first woman justice)
- 1981–1991** United States aids antileftist forces in Central America
- 1982** Recession hits U.S. economy
- 1983** Reagan announces SDI plan (Star Wars)  
U.S. marines killed in Lebanon  
U.S. invasion of Grenada
- 1984** Reagan defeats Mondale for presidency
- 1985** Gorbachev comes to power in Soviet Union  
First Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting, in Geneva
- 1986** Reagan administration backs Aquino in Philippines  
Iran-contra scandal revealed  
Second Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting, in Reykjavik, Iceland
- 1987** Senate rejects Supreme Court nomination of Robert Bork  
U.S. naval escorts begin in Persian Gulf  
508-point stock-market plunge  
Third Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting, in Washington, D.C.; INF treaty signed
- 1988** Fourth Reagan-Gorbachev summit meeting, in Moscow  
Bush defeats Dukakis for the presidency
- 1989** Chinese government suppresses prodemocracy demonstrators  
*Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*  
Eastern Europe throws off communist regimes  
Berlin Wall torn down
- 1990** Iraq invades Kuwait  
East and West Germany reunite  
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- 1991** Persian Gulf War  
Thomas appointed to Supreme Court  
Gorbachev resigns as Soviet president  
Soviet Union dissolves; republics form Commonwealth of Independent States
- 1992** Twenty-seventh Amendment (prohibiting congressional pay raises from taking effect until an election seats a new session of Congress) ratified  
*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*  
Clinton defeats Bush and Perot for presidency
- 1993** NAFTA signed
- 1994** Republicans win majorities in both houses of Congress
- 1996** Welfare Reform Bill becomes law  
Clinton defeats Dole for presidency
- 1998** Clinton-Lewinsky scandal  
U.S. and Britain launch military strikes against Iraq  
House of Representatives impeaches Clinton
- 1999** Senate acquits Clinton on impeachment charges  
Kosovo crisis; NATO warfare with Serbia  
Protest in Seattle against World Trade Organization
- 2000** “Million Man March” against guns in Washington, D.C.  
U.S. normalizes trade relations with China  
George W. Bush wins presidency in Electoral College, although Albert Gore takes popular vote

## Where Did Modern Conservatism Come From?

Ronald Reagan's election surprised many historians. Reflecting a liberal political outlook that is common among academic scholars, they were long accustomed to understanding American history as an inexorable, almost evolutionary, unfolding of liberal principles, including the quests for economic equality, social justice, and active government. That point of view animated the enormously popular writings of the so-called progressive historians, such as Charles and Mary Beard, earlier in the century (See Chapter 23, *Varying Viewpoints: The Populists: Radicals or Reactionaries?*). For the Beards, “conservatives” were the rich, privileged elites bent on preserving their wealth and power and determined to keep government impotent, but doomed in the end to give way to the forces of liberal democracy.

Even the “New Left” revisionists of the 1960s, while critical of the celebratory tone of their progressive forebears, were convinced that the deepest currents of American history flowed leftward. But whether they were liberal or revisionist, most scholars writing in the first three post-World War II decades dismissed conservatism as an obsolete political creed. The revisionists were much more interested in decrying liberalism's deficiencies than in analyzing conservatism's strengths. Liberals and revisionists alike abandoned the Beards' image of powerful conservative elites and offered instead a contemptuous portrait of conservatives as fringe wackos—paranoid McCarthyites or racist demagogues who, in the words of the liberal critic Lionel Trilling, trafficked only in “irritable mental gestures which seem to resemble ideas.” Such an outlook is conspicuous in books like Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* (1963), and Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (1965).

But what flowed out of the turbulent decade of the 1960s was not a strengthened liberalism, but a revived conservatism. Ronald Reagan's huge political success compelled a thorough reexamination of the tradition of American conservatism and the sources of its modern resurgence.

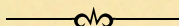
Historians including Leo Ribuffo and Alan Brinkley have argued that characters once dismissed as irrational crackpots or colorful irrelevancies—including religious fundamentalists and depression-era figures like Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin—articulated values deeply rooted

and widely shared in American culture. Those conservative spokespersons, whatever their peculiarities, offered a vision of free individuals, minimal government, and autonomous local communities that harked back to many of the themes of “civic republicanism” in the era of young nationhood.

But modern conservatism, however deep its roots, is also a product of the recent historical past. As scholars like Thomas Sugrue and Thomas Edsall have shown, the economic stagnation that set in after 1970 made many Americans insecure about their futures and receptive to new political doctrines. At the same time, as the commentator Kevin Phillips has stressed, “social issues,” with little or no apparent economic content, became increasingly prominent, as movements for sexual liberation, abortion on demand, and women's rights sharply challenged traditional beliefs. Perhaps most important, the success of the civil rights movement thrust the perpetually agonizing question of race relations to the very center of American political life. Finally, the failure of government policies in Vietnam, runaway inflation in the 1970s, and the disillusioning Watergate episode cast doubt on the legitimacy, efficacy, and even the morality of “big government.”

Many modern conservatives, including the pundit George Will, stress the deep historical roots of American conservatism. In their view, as Will once put it, it took sixteen years to count the ballots from the 1964 (Goldwater versus Johnson) election, and Goldwater won after all. But that argument is surely overstated. Goldwater ran against the legacy of the New Deal and was overwhelmingly defeated. Reagan ran against the consequences of the Great Society and won decisively. Many conservatives, in short, apparently acknowledge the legitimacy of the New Deal and the stake that many middle-class Americans feel they have in its programs of Social Security, home mortgage subsidies, farm price supports, and similar policies. But they reject the philosophy of the Great Society, with its more focused attack on urban poverty and its vigorous support of affirmative action. Modern conservatism springs less from a repudiation of government per se and more from a disapproval of the particular priorities and strategies of the Great Society. The different historical fates of the New Deal and the Great Society suggest the key to the rise of modern conservatism.

# The American People Face a New Century



*As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 1862

**M**ore than two hundred years old as the twenty-first century began, the United States was both an old and a new nation. It boasted one of the longest uninterrupted traditions of democratic government of any country on earth. Indeed, it had pioneered the techniques of mass democracy and was, in that sense, the oldest modern polity. As one of the earliest countries to industrialize, America had also dwelt in the modern economic era longer than most nations.

But the Republic was in many ways still youthful as well. Innovation, entrepreneurship, and risk-taking—all characteristics of youth—were honored national values. The twenty-first century began much like the twentieth, with American society continuing to be rejuvenated by fresh waves of immigrants, full of energy and ambition. The U.S. economy, despite problems, was generating new jobs at a rate of some 2 million per year. American inventions—especially computer and communications technologies—were

transforming the face of global society. The whole world seemed to worship the icons of American culture—downing soft drinks and donning blue jeans, watching Hollywood films, listening to rock or country and western music, even adopting indigenous American sports like baseball and basketball. In the realm of consumerism, American products appeared to have Coca-Colonized the globe.

The history of American society also seemed to have increased global significance as the third millennium of the Christian era opened. Americans were a pluralistic people who had struggled for centuries to provide opportunity and to achieve tolerance and justice for many different religious, ethnic, and racial groups. Their historical experience could offer valuable lessons to the rapidly internationalizing planetary society that was emerging at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

In politics, economics, and culture, the great social experiment of American democracy was far

from completed as the United States faced its future. Much history remained to be made as the country entered its third century of nationhood. But men and women make history only within the framework bequeathed to them by earlier generations. For better or worse, they march forward along time's path bearing the burdens of the past. Knowing when they have come to a truly new turn in the road, when they can lay part of their burden down and when they cannot, or should not—all this constitutes the sort of wisdom that only historical study can engender.

### **Economic Revolutions**

When the twentieth century opened, United States Steel Corporation was the flagship business of America's booming industrial revolution. U.S. Steel was a typical "heavy industry," cranking out the ingots and girders and sheet metal that built the nation's basic physical infrastructure. A generation later, General Motors, annually producing millions of automobiles, became the characteristic American corporation, signaling the historic shift to a mass consumer economy that began in the 1920s and flowered fully in the 1950s. Following World War II, the rise of International Business Machines (IBM) symbolized yet another momentous transformation, to the fast-paced "information age," when the storing, organizing, and processing of data became an industry in its own right.

The pace of the information age soon accelerated. By century's end, the rapid emergence of Microsoft Corporation and the phenomenal growth of the Internet heralded an explosive communications revolution. Americans now rocketed down the "information superhighway" toward the uncharted terrain of an electronic global village, where traditional geographic, social, and political boundaries could be vaulted with the tap of a keypad.

The communications revolution was full of both promise and peril. In the blink of an eye, ordinary citizens could gain access to information once available only to privileged elites with vast libraries or expert staffs at their disposal. Businesspeople instantaneously girdled the planet with transactions of prodigious scope and serpentine complexity. Japanese bankers might sell wheat contracts in Chicago and simultaneously direct the profits to buying oil

shipments from the Persian Gulf offered by a broker in Amsterdam. By the late 1990s, a "dot-com" explosion of new commercial ventures quickly expanded the market (and the stock-market stakes) for entrepreneurs leading the way in making the Internet a twenty-first-century electronic mall, library, and entertainment center rolled into one.

But the very speed and efficiency of the new communications tools threatened to wipe out entire occupational categories. Postal delivery people, travel agents, store clerks, bank tellers, stock brokers, and all kinds of other workers whose business it was to mediate between product and client, might find themselves rendered obsolete in the era of the Internet. And as the computer makes possible "classrooms without walls," where students can pursue learning largely on their own, even teachers, whose job is essentially to mediate between students and various bodies of knowledge, might well end up as roadkill on the information superhighway.

Increasingly, scientific research was the engine that drove the economy, and new scientific knowl-



edge posed new social and moral dilemmas. When scientists first unlocked the secrets of molecular genetic structure in the 1950s, the road lay open to breeding new strains of high-yield, pest- and weather-resistant crops; to curing hereditary diseases; and also, unfortunately, to unleashing genetic mutations that might threaten the fragile ecological balance of the wondrous biosphere in which humankind was delicately suspended. As technical mastery of biological and medical techniques advanced, unprecedented ethical questions clamored for resolution. Should the human gene pool itself be “engineered”? What principles should govern the allocation of human organs for lifesaving transplants, or of scarce dialysis machines, or of artificial hearts? Was it wise in the first place to spend money on such costly devices rather than devote society’s resources to improved sanitation, maternal and infant care, and nutritional and health education? Who was the rightful parent of a child born to a “surrogate mother” or conceived by artificial insemination? How, if at all, should society regulate the increasingly lengthy and often painful process of dying? What rules should guide efforts to clone human beings—or should such efforts even be attempted?

## Affluence and Inequality

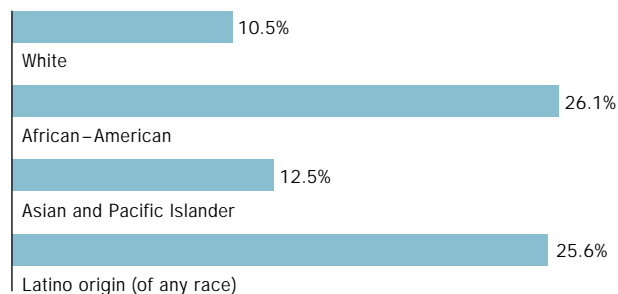
Americans were still an affluent people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Median household income declined somewhat in the early 1990s but rebounded by 1998 to about \$39,000. Yet even those Americans with incomes below the government’s official poverty level (defined in 1998 as \$16,600 for a family of four) enjoyed a standard of living higher than that of two-thirds of the rest of humankind.

Americans were no longer the world’s wealthiest people in the 1990s, as they had been in the quarter-century after World War II. Citizens of several other countries enjoyed higher average per-capita incomes, and many nations boasted more equitable distributions of wealth. In an unsettling reversal of long-term trends in American society, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, the rich got much richer, while the poor got an ever-shrinking share of the pie. The richest 20 percent of Americans in the 1990s raked in nearly

half the nation’s income, whereas the poorest 20 percent received less than 4 percent. The gap between rich and poor began to widen in the 1980s and widened further in the following decade. That trend was evident in many industrial societies, but it was most pronounced in the United States. Between 1968 and 1998, the share of the nation’s income that flowed to the top 20 percent of its households swelled from 40 percent to more than 49 percent. Even more striking, in the same period the top 5 percent of income earners saw their share of the national income grow from about 15 percent to more than 20 percent. The Welfare Reform Bill of 1996, restricting access to social services and requiring able-bodied welfare recipients to find work, weakened the financial footing of many impoverished families still further.

Widening inequality could be measured in other ways as well: chief executives in the 1970s typically earned forty-one times the income of the average worker in their corporations; by the 1990s they earned 225 times as much. At the same time, some 34 million people, 12.7 percent of all Americans (8.2 percent of whites, 26.1 percent of African-Americans, and 25.6 percent of Latinos), remained mired in poverty—a depressing indictment of the inequities afflicting an affluent and allegedly egalitarian republic.

What caused the widening income gap? Some critics pointed to the tax and fiscal policies of the Reagan and Bush years, which favored the wealthy and penalized the poor. But deeper-running historical currents probably played a more powerful



Poverty Rates of Americans by Race and Latino Origin, 1998 (Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, March Current Population Survey.)

**Who Pays Federal Income Taxes?  
(share of U.S. income tax, by income percentile)**

<b>Income Group (base income shown as of 1998)</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1998</b>
Top 1% (above \$269,496)	28.7%	34.8%
Top 5% (above \$114,729)	47.4%	53.8%
Top 10% (above \$83,220)	59.1%	65.0%
Top 25% (above \$50,607)	79.5%	82.7%
Top 50% (above \$25,491)	95.2%	95.8%
Bottom 50% (below \$25,491)	4.8%	4.2%

Because the United States has long had a “progressive” income tax system, in which tax obligations are distributed according to ability to pay, widening income inequality was reflected in a redistribution of tax burdens. In the booming 1990s, the rich did indeed get richer—but they also paid an increasing fraction of the total federal tax take.

(Source: Internal Revenue Service data, Tax Foundation.)

role, as suggested by the similar experiences of other industrialized societies. Among the most conspicuous causes were intensifying global economic competition; the shrinkage in high-paying manufacturing jobs for semi-skilled and unskilled workers; the greater economic rewards commanded by educated workers in high-tech industries; the decline of unions; the growth of part-time and temporary work; the rising tide of relatively low-skill immigrants; and the increasing tendency of educated men and women to marry one another and both work, creating households with very high incomes.

**Widening Income Inequality**

Share of Aggregate Income	1980	1990	1999
Lowest fifth	4.3	3.9	3.6
Second fifth	10.3	9.6	8.9
Middle fifth	16.9	15.9	14.9
Fourth fifth	24.9	24.0	23.2
Highest fifth	43.7	46.6	49.4
Top 5%	15.8	18.6	21.5

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the top fifth of the country's households made significant gains in income, while everyone else lost ground. (Source: U.S. Census.)

**The Feminist Revolution**

All Americans were caught up in the great economic changes of the late twentieth century, but no group was more profoundly affected than women. When the century opened, women made up about 20 percent of all workers. Over the next five decades, they increased their presence in the labor force at a fairly steady rate, except for a temporary spurt during World War II. Then, beginning in the 1950s, women's entry into the workplace accelerated dramatically. By the 1990s nearly half of all workers were women,

### Percentage of Working Married Women with Children (husband present), 1950–1998

Year	Total Percentage	No Children Under 18	Children 6–17 Only	Children Under 6
1950	23.8	30.3	28.3	11.9
1960	30.5	34.7	39.0	18.6
1970	40.8	42.2	49.2	30.3
1980	50.1	46.0	61.7	45.1
1994	60.6	53.2	76.0	61.7
1998	61.8	70.6	76.8	63.7

(Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

and the majority of working-age women held jobs outside the home. Most astonishing was the upsurge in employment among mothers. In 1950, 90 percent of mothers with children under the age of six did not work for pay. But by the 1990s, a majority of women with children as young as one year old were wage earners. Women now brought home the bacon and then cooked it, too.

Beginning in the 1960s, many all-male strongholds, including Yale, Princeton, West Point, Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, and even, grudgingly and belatedly, southern military academies like the Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, opened their doors to women. Women are now piloting commercial airliners and orbiting in outer space. They govern states and cities, write Supreme Court decisions, and debate the law of the land in both houses of Congress. In 1996 women cracked another gender barrier when they launched a professional basketball league of their own.

Yet despite these gains, many feminists remained frustrated. Women continued to receive lower wages—an average 76.5 cents on the dollar in 1999 compared with men doing the same full-time work—and they tended to concentrate in a few low-prestige, low-paying occupations (the “pink-collar ghetto”). Although they made up more than half the population, women in the 1990s accounted for only 25 percent of lawyers and judges (up from 5 percent in 1970) and 22 percent of physicians (up from 10 percent in 1970). Overt sexual discrimination explained some of this occupational segregation, but most of it seemed attributable to the greater burdens of parenthood on women than on men. Women were far more likely than men to interrupt their careers to bear and raise children, and even to

choose less demanding career paths to allow for fulfilling those traditional roles. Discrimination and a focus on children also helped account for the persistence of a “gender gap” in national elections. Women continued to vote in greater numbers than men for Democratic candidates, who were often perceived as being more willing to favor government support for health and child care, education, and job equality.

As the revolution in women's status rolled on in the 1990s, men's lives changed as well. A men's movement sprang up that sought to redefine male roles in a new age of increasing gender equality. Some employers provided paternity leave as well as maternity leave, in recognition of the shared obligations of the two-worker household. As traditional female responsibilities such as cooking, laundry, and child care spilled over to men, many corporations sponsored highly popular fatherhood seminars and husbands' support groups. Recognizing

the new realities of the modern American household, Congress passed a Family Leave Bill in 1993, mandating job protection for working fathers as well as mothers who needed to take time off work for family-related reasons.

### **The Fading Family**

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The nuclear family, once prized as the foundation of society and the nursery of the Republic, suffered heavy blows in modern America. By the 1990s one out of every two marriages ended in divorce. Seven times more children were affected by divorce than at the beginning of the century. Kids who commuted between separated parents were commonplace. The 1950s ideal of a family with two parents, only one of whom worked, was now a virtually useless way to picture the typical American household.

Traditional families were not only falling apart at an alarming rate but were also increasingly slow to form in the first place. The proportion of adults living alone tripled in the four decades after 1950, and by the 1990s nearly one-third of women aged

twenty-five to twenty-nine had never married. In the 1960s, 5 percent of all births were to unmarried women, but three decades later one out of four white babies, one out of three Hispanic babies, and two out of three African-American babies were born to single mothers. Every fourth child in America was growing up in a household that lacked two parents. The collapse of the traditional family contributed heavily to the pauperization of many women and children, as single parents (usually mothers) strug-

*In his inaugural address in January 1989, President George Bush (b. 1924) declared,*

“My friends, we are not the sum of our possessions; they are not the measure of our lives. In our hearts we know what matters: . . . to be a loyal friend, a loving parent, a citizen who leaves his home, his neighborhood, and his town better than he found it.”

gled to keep their households economically afloat and their families emotionally intact.

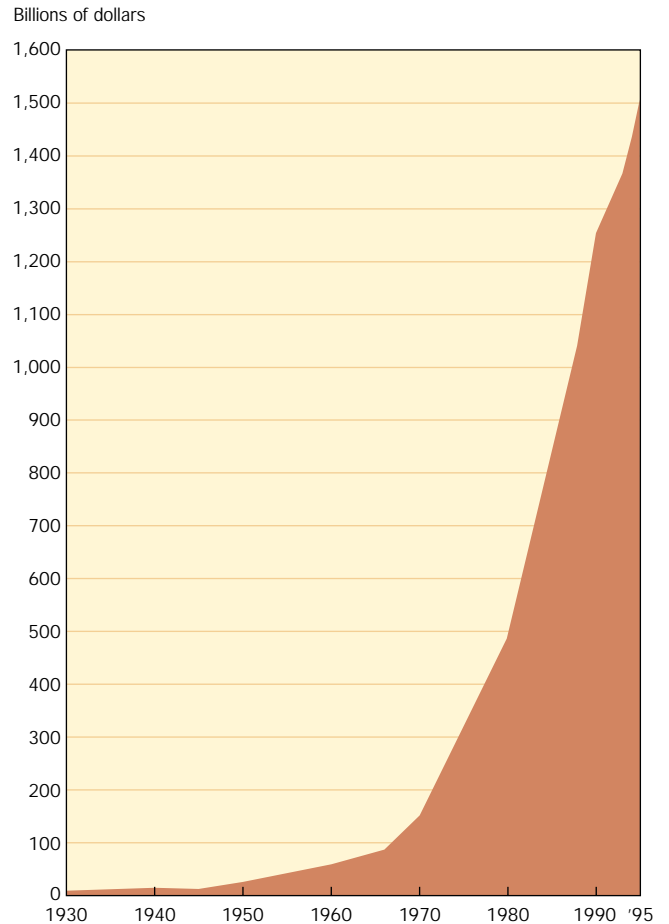
Child-rearing, the family's foremost function, was being increasingly assigned to "parent-substitutes" at day-care centers or schools—or to television, the modern age's "electronic baby-sitter." Estimates were that the average child by age sixteen had watched up to fifteen thousand hours of TV—more time than was spent in the classroom. Parental anxieties multiplied with the advent of the Internet—an electronic cornucopia where youngsters could "surf" through poetry and problem sets as well as pornography.

Born and raised without the family support enjoyed by their forebears, Americans were also increasingly likely to be lonely in their later years. Most elderly people in the 1990s depended on pension plans and government Social Security payments, not on their loved ones, for their daily bread. The great majority of them drew their last breath not in their own homes, but in hospitals and nursing facilities. From youth to old age, the role of the family was dwindling.

### The Aging of America

Old age was more and more likely to be a lengthy experience for Americans, who were living longer than ever before. A person born at the dawn of the century could expect to survive less than fifty years, but a white male born in the 1990s could anticipate a life span of more than seventy-six years. His white female counterpart would probably outlive him by seven years. (The figures were slightly lower for nonwhites, reflecting differences in living standards, especially diet and health care.) The census of 1950 recorded that women for the first time made up a majority of Americans, thanks largely to greater female longevity. Miraculous medical advances lengthened and strengthened lives. Noteworthy were the development of antibiotics after 1940 and Dr. Jonas Salk's discovery in 1953 of a vaccine against a dreadedcrippler, polio.

Longer lives spelled more older people. One American in eight was over sixty-five years of age in the 1990s, and projections were that one of every five people would be in the "sunset years" by 2050, as the median age rose toward forty. This aging of the population raised a host of political, social, and



**Government Expenditures for Social Welfare, 1930–1995**  
 "Social welfare" includes unemployment and old-age insurance, medical insurance, and veterans' benefits. The skyrocketing costs from the mid-1960s onward reflect the increasing size (and political clout) of the elderly population, who were the main beneficiaries of Great Society programs like Medicare. The steep rise after 1970 is also explained by the galloping inflation of the 1970s.

economic questions. Elderly people formed a potent electoral bloc that aggressively lobbied for government favors and achieved real gains for senior citizens. The share of GNP spent on health care for people over sixty-five more than doubled in the three decades after the enactment of Medicare in 1965. This growth in medical payments for the old far outstripped the growth of educational expenditures for the young, with corresponding consequences for the social and economic situations of both populations. As late as the 1960s, nearly a quarter of Americans over the age of sixty-five lived

in poverty; three decades later, only about one in ten did. The figures for young people moved in the reverse direction: 15 percent of children were living in poverty in the 1970s, but over 20 percent were in the 1990s.

These triumphs for senior citizens also brought fiscal strains, especially on the Social Security system, established in 1935 to provide income for retired workers. When Social Security began, most workers continued to toil after age sixty-five. By century's end only a small minority did (about 15 percent of men and 8 percent of women), and a majority of the elderly population relied primarily on Social Security checks for their living expenses. Contrary to popular mythology, Social Security payments to retirees did not simply represent reimbursement for contributions that the elderly had made during their working lives. In fact, the payments of current workers into the Social Security system funded the benefits to the current generation of retirees. By the 1990s, those benefits had risen so high, and the ratio of active workers to retirees had dropped so low, that drastic adjust-

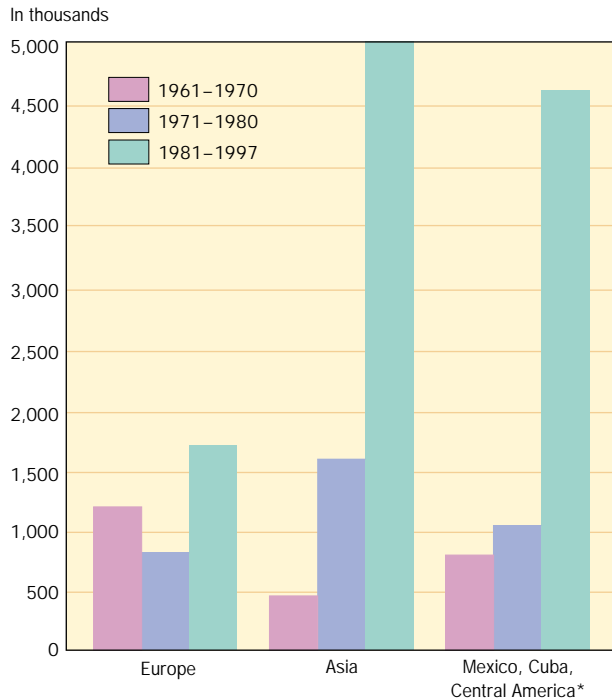
ments were necessary. The problem had intensified in the 1960s, when Medicare was added to the list of benefits for the elderly, and again in the 1970s, when a compassionate Congress dramatically increased retirement payments at a time when productivity growth was stalling. At the beginning of the new century, as the huge wave of post-World War II baby boomers approached retirement age, it seemed that the “unfunded liability”—the difference between what the government had promised to pay to the elderly and the taxes it expected to take in—might rise above \$7 trillion, a sum that threatened to bankrupt the Republic unless drastic reforms were adopted. Yet because of the electoral power of older Americans, Social Security and Medicare reform remained the “third rail” of American politics, which politicians touched only at their peril.

Without substantial change, larger payments to retirees could only mean smaller paychecks for workers. Three-quarters of all employees in the 1990s already paid higher Social Security taxes than income taxes. (An individual paid a maximum of \$5,829 in Social Security taxes in 2000, matched by an identical employer contribution.) A war between the generations loomed in the twenty-first century, as payments to the nonworking elderly threatened to soak up fully half the working population's income by about 2040.

## The New Immigration

Newcomers continued to flow into modern America. They washed ashore in waves that numbered nearly 1 million persons per year in the 1980s and 1990s—the heaviest inflow of immigrants in America's experience. In striking contrast to the historic pattern of immigration, Europe contributed far fewer people than did the teeming countries of Asia and Latin America, especially Mexico.

What prompted this new migration to America? The truth is that the newest immigrants came for many of the same reasons as the old. They typically left countries where populations were growing rapidly and where agricultural and industrial revolutions were shaking people loose from old habits of life—conditions almost identical to those in nineteenth-century Europe. And they came to America, as previous immigrants had done, in search of jobs and economic opportunity.



\*Mexico represents approximately 75 percent of total.

Recent Legal Immigration by Area of Origin, 1961-1997

The Southwest, from Texas to California, felt the immigrant impact especially sharply, as Mexican migrants—by far the largest contingent of modern immigrants—concentrated heavily in that region. By the turn of the century, Latinos made up nearly one-third of the population in Texas, Arizona, and

California, and almost half in New Mexico—a population shift that amounted to a demographic *reconquista* of the lands lost by Mexico in the war of 1846.

The size and geographic concentration of the Hispanic population in the Southwest had few precedents in the history of American immigration. Most previous groups had been so thinly scattered across the land that they had little choice but to learn English and make their way in the larger American society, however much they might have longed to preserve their native language and customs. But Mexican-Americans might succeed in creating a truly bicultural zone in the booming southwestern states, especially since their mother culture lies just next door and is easily accessible—another factor that differentiates this modern immigrant community from its nineteenth-century European and Asian antecedents.

Some old-stock Americans worried about the capacity of the modern United States to absorb these new immigrants. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 attempted to choke off illegal entry by penalizing employers of undocumented aliens and by granting amnesty to many of those already here. Anti-immigrant sentiment flared especially sharply in California in the wake of an economic recession in the early 1990s. California voters approved a ballot initiative that attempted to deny benefits, including education, to illegal immigrants, though courts blocked the effort. Congress in 1996 restricted access to some welfare benefits for *legal* immigrants who arrived after that year.



Yet the fact was that foreign-born people accounted for almost 10 percent of the American population by the end of the 1990s, a far smaller proportion than the historical high point of nearly 15 percent recorded in the census of 1910, but evidence nonetheless that American society continued to welcome—and need—newcomers. Somewhat inconsistently, critics charged both that immigrants robbed citizens of jobs and that they dumped themselves on the welfare rolls at the taxpayers' expense. But studies showed that immigrants took jobs scorned by Americans and that they paid more dollars in taxes (withholding and Social Security taxes, as well as sales taxes) than they claimed for welfare payments. A more urgent worry was that unscrupulous employers might take cruel advantage of alien workers, who often had scant knowledge of their legal rights.

### **Ethnic Pride**

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Thanks both to continued immigration and to their own high birthrate, Hispanic-Americans were becoming an increasingly important minority (see “Makers of America: The Latinos,” pp. 1026–1027). The United States by the late 1990s was home to more than 31 million Hispanics. They included some 21 million Chicanos, or Mexican-Americans,

mostly in the Southwest, as well as 3 million Puerto Ricans, chiefly in the Northeast, and more than 1 million Cubans in Florida (where it was jokingly said that Miami had become the most “Anglo” city in Latin America).

Flexing their political muscles, Latinos elected mayors of Miami, Denver, and San Antonio. After years of struggle, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), headed by the soft-spoken and charismatic César Chávez, succeeded in improving work conditions for the mostly Chicano “stoop laborers” who followed the cycle of planting and harvesting across the American West. Hispanic influence seemed likely to grow, as suggested by the increasing presence of Spanish-language ballots and television broadcasts. Hispanic-Americans, newly confident and organized, were destined to become the nation's largest ethnic minority, outnumbering even African-Americans, in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, by the first decade of the new century, the Chicano population of America's largest state, California, equaled the Anglo population, making the state a patchwork of minorities with no single ethnic majority.

Asian-Americans also made great strides. By the 1980s they were America's fastest-growing minority. Their numbers nearly doubled in that decade alone, thanks to heavy immigration, and continued to swell in the 1990s. Once feared and hated as the

“yellow peril” and relegated to the most menial and degrading jobs, citizens of Asian ancestry were now counted among the most prosperous and successful of Americans—a “model minority.” The typical Asian-American household enjoyed an income nearly 20 percent greater than that of the typical white household. In 1996 the voters of Washington elected the first Asian-American to serve as governor of a mainland American state.

Indians, the original Americans, shared in the general awakening of ethnic and cultural pride. The 2000 census counted some 2.4 million Native Americans, half of whom had left their reservations to live in cities. Meanwhile, unemployment and alcoholism had blighted reservation life. Many tribes tried to take advantage of their special legal status as independent nations by opening bingo halls and gambling casinos for white patrons on reservation lands, but the cycle of discrimination and poverty proved hard to break.

### **Cities and Suburbs**

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America’s “alabaster cities” of song and story grew more sooty and less safe in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Crime was the great scourge of urban life. The rate of violent crimes committed in cities reached an all-time high in the drug-infested 1980s and then leveled off in the early 1990s. The number of violent crimes even began to decline substantially in many areas after 1995. Nevertheless, murders, robberies, and rapes remained shockingly common not only in cities but also in suburbs and rural areas. America imprisoned a larger fraction of its citizens than almost any other country in the world, and some desperate citizens resorted to armed vigilante tactics to protect themselves.

Millions of Americans fled the cities altogether for the supposedly safer suburbs. So swift and massive was the exodus from the old urban neighborhoods that by the mid-1990s it ended the nation’s rather brief “urban age,” whose dawn had been heralded by the census of 1920, the first to show a majority of city dwellers.

A majority of Americans now lived in the suburbs, a historic phenomenon that many observers blamed for the spreading fragmentation and isolation of American life. Entire suburban neighborhoods, usually containing economically and racially

homogeneous populations, walled themselves off behind elaborate security systems in “gated communities.” In these safe but segregated enclaves, the sense of a larger and inclusive national community might prove hard to sustain.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, some major cities exhibited signs of renewal. Commercial redevelopment gained ground in cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco. Well-to-do residents reclaimed once-fashionable neighborhoods and sent real estate values soaring. But these late-century urban homesteaders did little to make cities new centers of residential integration. Cities remained as divided by wealth and race as the suburban social landscape surrounding them.

### **Minority America**

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Racial and ethnic tensions also exacerbated the problems of American cities. These stresses were especially evident in Los Angeles, which, like New York a century earlier, was a magnet for minorities, especially immigrants from Asia and Latin America. When in 1992 a mostly white jury exonerated white Los Angeles police officers who had been videotaped ferociously beating a black suspect, the minority neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles erupted in rage. Arson and looting laid waste entire city blocks, and scores of people were killed. In a sobering demonstration of the complexity of modern American racial rivalries, many black rioters vented their anger at the white police and the judicial system by attacking Asian shopkeepers, who in turn formed armed patrols to protect their property.

The Los Angeles riots vividly testified to black skepticism about the American system of justice. Just three years later, again in Los Angeles, the gaudy televised spectacle of former football star O. J. Simpson’s murder trial fed white disillusionment with the state of race relations. After months of testimony that seemed to point to Simpson’s guilt, the jury acquitted him, presumably because certain Los Angeles police officers involved in the case had been shown to harbor racist sentiments. In a later civil trial, another jury unanimously found Simpson liable for the “wrongful deaths” of his former wife and another victim. The reaction to the Simpson

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Latinos

Today Mexican food is handed through fast-food drive-up windows in all fifty states, Spanish-language broadcasts fill the airwaves, and the Latino community has its own telephone book, the *Spanish Yellow Pages*. Latinos send representatives to Congress and mayors to city hall, record hit songs, paint murals, and teach history. Latinos, among the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population, include Puerto Ricans, frequent voyagers between their native island and northeastern cities; Cubans, many of them refugees from the communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro, concentrated in Miami and southern Florida; and Central Americans, fleeing the ravages of civil war in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

But the most populous group of Latinos derives from Mexico. The first significant numbers of Mexicans began heading for *El Norte* (“the North”) around 1910, when the upheavals of the Mexican

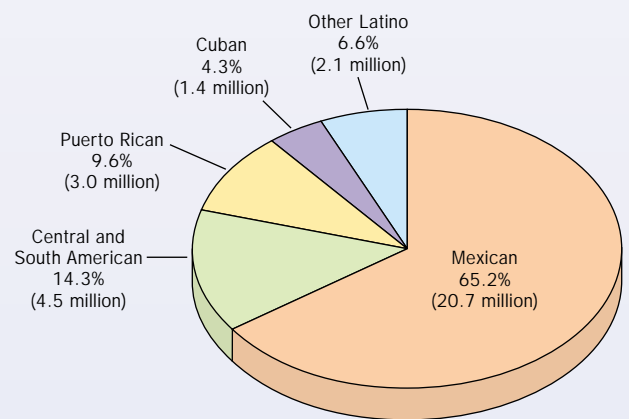
Revolution stirred and shuffled the Mexican population into more or less constant flux. Their northward passage was briefly interrupted during the Great Depression, when thousands of Mexican nationals were deported. But immigration resumed during World War II, and since then a steady flow of legal immigrants has passed through border checkpoints, joined by countless millions of their undocumented countrymen and countrywomen stealing across the frontier on moonless nights.

For the most part, these Mexicans came to work in the fields, following the ripening crops northward to Canada through the summer and autumn months. In winter many headed back to Mexico, but some gathered instead in the cities of the Southwest—El Paso, Los Angeles, Houston, and San Bernardino. There they found regular work, even if lack of skills and racial discrimination often confined them to

manual labor. City jobs might pay less than farm labor, but the work was steady and offered the prospect of a stable home. Houses may have been shabby in the barrios, but these Mexican neighborhoods provided a sense of togetherness, a place to raise a family, and the chance to join a mutual-aid society. Such societies, or *Mutualistas*, sponsored baseball leagues, helped the sick and disabled, and defended their members against discrimination.

Mexican immigrants lived so close to the border that their native country acted like a powerful magnet, drawing them back time and time again. Mexicans frequently returned to see relatives or visit the homes of their youth, and relatively few became U.S. citizens. Indeed, in many Mexican-American communities, it was a badge of dishonor to apply for U.S. citizenship.

The Mexican government, likewise influenced by the proximity of the two countries, intervened in the daily lives of its nationals in America, further discouraging them from becoming citizens of their adopted country. As Anglo reformers attempted to Americanize the immigrants in the 1910s and 1920s, the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles launched a Mexicanization program. The consulate sponsored parades on *Cinco de Mayo* ("Fifth of May"), celebrating Mexico's defeat of a French army at the Battle of Puebla in 1892, and opened special Spanish-language schools for children. Since World War II, the Ameri-



Sources of Latino Population in the United States, 1999

can-born generation has carried on the fight for political representation, economic opportunity, and cultural preservation.

Fresh arrivals from Mexico and from the other Latin American nations daily swell the Latino communities across America. The census of 2000 revealed that Latinos are now the largest minority group in the United States, surpassing African-Americans. As the United States heads into the twenty-first century, it is taking on a pronounced Spanish accent, although Latinos' reticence to vote in elections has retarded their influence on American politics.

*In 1990 the African-American intellectual Shelby Steele (b. 1946) declared in his provocative book, *The Content of Our Character*,*


“What is needed now is a new spirit of pragmatism in racial matters where blacks are seen simply as American citizens who deserve complete fairness and in some cases developmental assistance, but in no case special entitlements based on color. We need deracinated social policies that attack poverty rather than *black* poverty and that instill those values that make for self-reliance.”

wake of the civil rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s, though they still had a long hill to climb before reaching full equality. By the 1990s about 40 percent of blacks were counted in the middle class (defined as enjoying family income greater than \$25,000 per year). The number of black elected officials had risen above the seven thousand mark, including more than a thousand in the Old South, some two dozen members of Congress, and the mayors of several large cities. Voting tallies demonstrated that successful black politicians were moving beyond

verdicts revealed the yawning chasm that separated white and black America, as most whites continued to believe Simpson guilty, while a majority of African-Americans told pollsters that the original not-guilty verdict was justified. African-American charges that they had been unlawfully kept from the polls during the 2000 presidential election in Florida convinced many blacks that they were still facing a Jim Crow South of black disenfranchisement.

American cities have always held an astonishing variety of ethnic and racial groups, but in the late twentieth century, minorities made up a majority of the population of many American cities, as whites fled to the suburbs. More than three-quarters of African-Americans lived in cities by the 1990s, whereas only about one-quarter of whites did. The most desperate black ghettos, housing a hapless “underclass” in the inner core of the old industrial cities, were especially problematic. Successful blacks who had benefited from the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s followed whites to the suburbs, leaving a residue of the poorest poor in the old ghettos. Without a middle class to sustain community institutions like schools and small businesses, the inner cities, plagued by unemployment and drug addiction, seemed bereft of leadership, cohesion, resources, and hope.

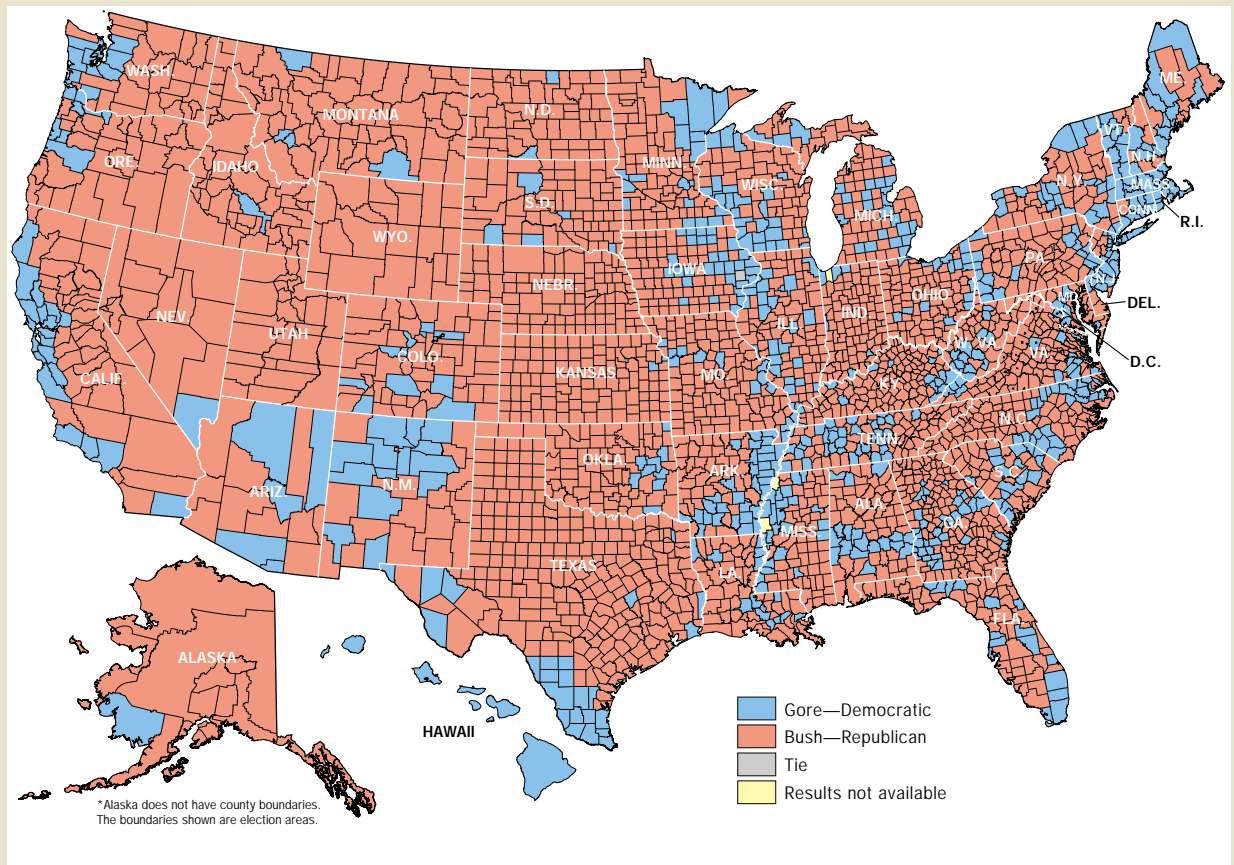
The friendless underclass, heavily composed of blacks and other minorities, represented a sorry—and dangerous—social failure that eluded any known remedy. But other segments of the African-American community had clearly prospered in the



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**A Country Politically Divided Between City and Country** Computer mapping of election data has helped analysts identify patterns in Americans' political behavior. This county-level map of election-night returns from the November 2000 presidential election reveals a deadlock between urban Democrats and rural Republicans. Even though Democratic nominee Albert Gore won the popular vote, he prevailed in only 676 counties, fewer than half of what Bill Clinton had won four years earlier. Yet Gore took virtually all major cities and most of their surrounding suburbs, giving him the lead in the heavily populated coasts and most metropolitan areas in the interior. Bush, on the other hand, carried an impressive 2,477 counties, and virtually every small town on a straight line from Redding, California, to Springfield, Illinois. In the vast western plain of Republican red, cities like St. Louis,

Kansas City, Tulsa, and Las Vegas were rare outposts of Democratic blue. Gore's huge win in Portland was big enough to give him the state in the Electoral College, even though the rest of Oregon voted heavily for Bush. The division of this map into red and blue territory vividly portrays a deep cultural chasm between urban and rural America. While minorities, union members, and prospering white collar workers remained loyal to the party of Clinton, small-town white America experienced the Clinton years as an assault on their most cherished values concerning issues like abortion, gender roles, and gun ownership. What additional voting patterns does this election map reveal? How did other economic, social, and cultural issues separate Americans into these two camps? How else might computers be used for historical analysis?



(Source: Adapted from VNS Graphic by Stanford Kay-Newsweek)

isolated racial constituencies and into the political mainstream by appealing to a wide variety of voters. In 1989 Virginians, only 15 percent of whom were black, chose L. Douglas Wilder as the first African-American elected to serve as a state governor. In 1994 voters in Illinois made Carol Moseley-Braun the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Senate.

Single women headed over half of black families, almost three times the rate for whites. Many of those African-American women, husbandless and jobless, necessarily depended on welfare to feed their children. As social scientists increasingly emphasized the importance of the home environment for success in school, it became clear that many fatherless, impoverished African-American children seemed consigned to suffer from educational handicaps that were difficult to overcome. Black youths in the 1990s still had about one year less schooling than whites of the same age and were less than half as likely to earn college degrees. As the American economy became ever more driven by new applications of computers and biotechnology, these disadvantages were bound to widen the racial gap of employment opportunity. The political assault against affirmative action in California and elsewhere only compounded the obstacles to advanced training for many young African-Americans.

## The Life of the Mind

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Despite the mind-sapping chatter of the “boob tube,” Americans in the late twentieth century read more, listened to more music, and were better educated than ever before. By the 1990s colleges were awarding nearly a million degrees a year, and one person in four in the twenty-five-to-thirty-four-year-old age group was a college graduate. This expanding mass of educated people lifted the economy to more advanced levels while creating consumers of “high culture.” Americans annually made some 300 million visits to museums in the 1990s and patronized about a thousand opera companies and fifteen hundred symphony orchestras—as well as countless popular music groups, including the inventive performers known as Phish and the long-lived sixties survivors the Grateful Dead.

What Americans read said much about the state of American society at the dawn of the new century. Among the most striking development in American letters was the rise of authors from the once-marginal regions and ethnic groups now coming into their own. Reflecting the general population shift westward, the West became the subject of a particularly rich literary outpouring. Larry McMurtry wrote about the small-town West and

lovingly recollected the end of the cattle-drive era in *Lonesome Dove* (1985). Raymond Carver penned understated and powerful stories about working-class life in the Pacific Northwest. Annie Dillard, Ivan Doig, and Jim Harrison re-created the gritty frontier history of that same verdant region. David Guterson penned a moving tale of interracial anxiety and affection in the World War II-era Pacific Northwest in *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1994). Wallace Stegner, the acknowledged dean of western writers, produced several works that far transcended their regional themes, including *Angle of Repose* (1971) and *Crossing to Safety* (1987). Norman MacLean, a former English professor who turned to fiction writing in his retirement, left two unforgettable accounts of his boyhood in Montana: *A River Runs Through It* (1976) and *Young Men and Fire* (1992).

African-American authors and artists also increasingly made their mark. Playwright August Wilson retold the history of black Americans in the twentieth century, with special emphasis on the psychic costs of the northward migration (*Fences*, 1985; *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, 1988; *Jitney*, 1998). In the usually lighthearted medium of the Broadway musical, George Wolfe sensitively explored sobering questions of black identity in *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992), the life story of the great New Orleans jazzman "Jelly Roll" Morton. Alice Walker gave fictional voice to the experiences of black women in her hugely popular *The Color Purple* (1982). Toni Morrison wove a bewitching portrait of maternal affection in *Beloved* (1987) and in 1993 became the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Native-Americans, too, achieved literary recognition. Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday won a Pulitzer Prize for his portrayal of Indian life in *House Made of Dawn* (1968). James Welch wrote movingly about his Blackfoot ancestors in *Fools Crow* (1986).

Asian-American authors also flourished, among them playwright David Hwang and essayist Maxine Hong Kingston, whose *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and *China Men* (1980) imaginatively reconstructed the obscure lives of the earliest Chinese immigrants. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) explored the sometimes painful relationship between immigrant Indian parents and their American-born children. The older European migration continued to hold literary appeal as well, notably with Frank McCourt's memories of an Irish and American childhood, captured in *Angela's Ashes* (1996).

Women writers and women's themes forged to the fictional forefront as the feminist movement advanced. Jane Smiley modeled her touching narrative of a midwestern farm family, *A Thousand Acres* (1991), on Shakespeare's *King Lear* and followed up with a hilarious spoof of university life in *Moo* (1995). Ann Tyler penned memorable portraits of quirky characters, male as well as female, in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (1982) and *The Accidental Tourist* (1985). E. Annie Proulx won widespread acclaim with her comical yet tender portrayal of a struggling family in *The Shipping News* (1993). The rising interest in feminist and African-American themes revived the popularity of a 1930s writer, Zora Neale Hurston, especially her naturalistic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, first published in 1937.

New York became the art capital of the world after World War II, as well-heeled Americans supported a large number of painters and sculptors. The Ford Foundation also became a major patron of the arts, as did the federal government after the creation of the tax-supported National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. The open and tradition-free American environment seemed especially congenial to the experimental mood of much modern art. Jackson Pollock pioneered abstract expressionism in

*In her touching novel The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan explored the complex dilemmas of growing up as a Chinese-American:*

"A girl is like a young tree,' [my mother] said. 'You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. . . .' Over the years I learned to choose from the best opinions. Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was much better.

"It was only later that I discovered there was a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices, so it was easy to get confused and pick the wrong thing."



the 1940s and 1950s, flinging paint on huge flats stretched on his studio floor. Realistic representation went out the window, as artists like Pollock and Willem de Kooning strove to create “action paintings” that expressed the painter’s individuality and made the viewer a creative participant in defining the painting’s meaning. Pop artists in the 1960s, notably Andy Warhol, canonized on canvas everyday items of consumer culture, such as soup cans. Robert Rauschenberg made elaborate collages out of objects like cardboard boxes and newspaper clippings. Claes Oldenburg tried to stun viewers into a new visual awareness with unfamiliar versions of familiar objects, such as giant plastic sculptures of pillow-soft telephones. The venerable Georgia O’Keeffe, whose first exhibit was in 1916, continued well into the post-World War II period to produce stunningly immaculate, vividly colored paintings of her beloved Southwest, and moved increasingly into abstract works as her career progressed.

On the stage, playwright David Mamet analyzed the barbarity of American capitalism in plays like *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *American Buffalo*, in which he crafted a kind of poetry from the sludge of American slang. Mamet also made savage sport of feminism and “political correctness” in *Oleanna*, a biting satire about a woman student and her professor. The AIDS epidemic inspired Tony Kushner’s sensationally inventive *Angels in America*, a broad-ranging commentary, alternately hilarious and touching, about the condition of American life at century’s end. Film, the most characteristic American art form, continued to flourish, especially as a wave of younger filmmakers like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Spike Lee, and the Coen brothers, as well as the innovative documentary artist Ken Burns, made their influence felt.

Architecture also benefited from the building boom of the postwar era. Old master Frank Lloyd Wright produced strikingly original designs, as in

the round-walled Guggenheim Museum in New York. Louis Kahn employed stark geometric forms and basic building materials like brick and concrete to make beautiful, simple buildings. Eero Saarinen, the son of a Finnish immigrant, contributed a number of imaginative structures, including two Yale University residential colleges that evoked the atmosphere of an Italian hill town. Chinese-born I. M. Pei designed numerous graceful buildings on several college campuses, as well as the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. Philip Johnson artfully rendered huge edifices intimate in structures like New York City's Seagram Building and the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center in Manhattan. "Postmodernists" such as Robert Venturi and Michael Graves, inspired by the decorative details of earlier historical styles, rejected the spare functionalism that had dominated modern architecture for much of the century.

### **The American Prospect in the Age of Terrorism**

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On September 11, 2001, America's good luck apparently ran out. Out of a crystal-clear sky, suicidal terrorists slammed two hijacked airliners, loaded with passengers and jet fuel, into the twin towers of New York City's World Trade Center. They flew a third plane into the military nerve-center of the Pentagon, near Washington, D.C., killing 189 people. Heroic passengers forced another hijacked aircraft to crash in rural Pennsylvania, killing all 44 aboard but depriving the terrorists of a fourth weapon of mass destruction. As the two giant New York skyscrapers thunderously collapsed, some three thousand innocent victims perished, including peoples of many races and faiths from more than sixty countries, as well as hundreds of New York's police- and fire-department rescue workers. A stunned nation blossomed with flags, as grieving and outraged Americans struggled to express their sorrow and solidarity in the face of catastrophic terrorism.

The murderous events of that late-summer morning reanimated American patriotism. They also dramatically ended an historical era. For nearly two centuries, the United States had been spared from foreign attack against its homeland. All but unique among modern peoples, that degree of national security had undergirded the values of openness and

individual freedom that defined the distinctive character of American society. Now American security and American liberty alike were imperiled.

President Bush responded with a sober but stirring address to Congress nine days later. His solemn demeanor and the gravity of the situation helped to dissipate the cloud of illegitimacy that had shadowed his presidency since the disputed election of 2000. Warning that the struggle against terrorism would be long and messy, he pledged "we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail" until "we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies." While emphasizing his respect for the Islamic religion and Muslim peoples, he identified the principal enemy as Osama bin Laden, head of a shadowy terrorist network known as Al Qaeda ("the base" in Arabic). A wealthy extremist exiled from his native Saudi Arabia, bin Laden was associated with earlier attacks on American embassies in East Africa and on a U.S. Naval vessel in Yemen. He had taken refuge in land-locked Afghanistan, ruled by Islamic fundamentalists called the Taliban. (Ironically, the United States had indirectly helped bring the Taliban to power, when it supported religious rebels resisting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s). Bin Laden was known to harbor bitter resentments toward the United States for its economic embargo against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, its military presence on the sacred soil of the Arabian peninsula, and its support for Israel's hostility to Palestinian nationalism. Bin Laden also fed on world-wide resentment of America's enormous economic, military, and cultural power. Ironically, America's most conspicuous strengths had made it a conspicuous target.

When the Taliban refused to hand over bin Laden, Bush ordered a massive military campaign against Afghanistan. Within three months, American and Afghani rebel forces had overthrown the Taliban and were poised to flush bin Laden out of the fortified underground sanctuary where he was believed to have holed up.

The campaign in Afghanistan impressively demonstrated the wallop and sophistication of American air power and "smart," precision-guided munitions. But it remained an open question whether in the longer run America's high-tech arsenal would prove effective against foes so elusive, zealous, and determined—foes who sought not simply to destroy the United States but to demoralize it, perhaps to corrupt its very soul. Behind bin Laden lurked countless terrorist "cells" in several dozen countries, some of

them possibly in possession of biochemical or even nuclear weapons. Some alarmed critics even warned that the events of September 11 heralded the onset of a protracted clash of civilizations, pitting millions of Muslims desperate to defend their traditional faith and culture against the relentlessly modernizing forces of the western world, spearheaded by the United States. Confronted with this unconventional, diffuse menace, anti-terrorism experts called for new tactics of “a-symmetrical warfare,” employing not just traditional military muscle, but innovative intelligence-gathering, economic reprisals, infiltration of suspected organizations, and even assassinations. The new war against terror also compelled the Bush administration to back away from the unilateralist foreign policies it had pursued in its early months and seek anti-terrorist partners around the globe, as evidenced by the surprisingly warm relationship that

emerged after September 11 between the United States and its former adversary, Russia.

The terrorists’ blows diabolically coincided with the onset of a recession. The already gathering economic downdraft worsened as edgy Americans shunned air travel and the tourist industry withered. Then, while the rubble in New York was still smoldering, a handful of Americans died after receiving letters contaminated with the deadly respiratory disease, anthrax. The gnawing fear spread that biological warfare would be the next threat facing the American people.

In this anxious atmosphere, Congress rammed through the USA-Patriot Act, permitting extensive telephone and e-mail surveillance, and authorizing the detention and deportation of immigrants suspected of terrorism. The Justice Department meanwhile rounded up hundreds of immigrants and held them without habeas corpus (formal charges in an open court). The Bush administration further called for trying suspected terrorists before military tribunals, where the usual rules of evidence and procedure did not apply. Public opinion polls showed Americans sharply divided on whether the terrorist threat fully warranted such drastic encroachments on America’s ancient traditions of civil liberties.

Catastrophic terrorism posed an unprecedented challenge to the United States, but the world’s oldest republic remained resilient and resourceful. Born as a revolutionary force in a world of conservatism, the United States had emerged in the twentieth century as a conservative force in a world of revolution. It held aloft the banner of liberal democracy in a world wracked by revolutions of the right and left, including fascism, Nazism, and communism. Yet through it all, much that was truly revolutionary also remained a part of America’s liberal democratic heritage, as its people pioneered in revolutions against colonialism, racism, sexism, ignorance, and poverty.

The terrorist threat reminded Americans of the urgency of resolving the ethnic and cultural conflicts that continued to plague the planet after the Cold War’s end—and of the urgency of making America’s own character better understood around the world. Americans still aspired to live up to Lincoln’s prediction that they and their heritage represented “the last best hope of earth”—but in the twenty-first century they would have to work harder than ever to prove it, to themselves as well as to others.

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For further reading, see page A29 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.

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