

Chapter 40: America Confronts the Post-Cold War Era (1992-2000)

Synopsis

- After the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the US was the main superpower in the world
- The US needed to discover how to use its new political and economic power in the world
- The world was in a new era of rapid globalization
- The 1990s were a time of good economic health

Bill Clinton: The First Baby-Boomer President

- The social and economic problems caused by Reaganomics and the policies of the other conservative presidents that had ruled for most of the later 20th century made the Democrats more popular
 - The Republicans had caused “a slumbering economy, a widening gender gap, and a rising anti-incumbent spirit”
- Governor Bill Clinton of AR became the Democratic presidential nominee for the election of 1992 with Albert Gore of TN as his vice president
 - He was a “New Democrat,” which meant that he was more pro-business than other traditional democrats
 - He formed the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) as a business-friendly liberal platform
- The Republicans tried to use their stance of pro-traditional family values to elevate themselves, but their popularity over the Democrats was lost due to their bad economic plan and the high financial deficit
 - Many people were frustrated with the Republicans but still against the Democrats’ traditional anti-business stance, so they voted for H. Ross Perot, a businessman against the current economic budget
- Clinton won the election against Bush and Perot, 370 to 168 to 0 electoral votes
 - Perot won a surprising 20 million votes, the second-best popularity for a third-party candidate (after Theodore Roosevelt and his Bull Moose Progressive Party)
 - The Democrats also won majorities in both houses of Congress
 - Democrats in Congress included many minority groups, “including thirty-nine African Americans, nineteen hispanic Americans, seven Asian Americans, one Native American, and forty-eight women”
- Shortly after his presidency, Clinton elected a liberal justice to the Supreme Court, Ruth Bader Ginsburg (the second woman after Sandra Day O’Connor)

A False Start for Reform

- Clinton tried to enact some controversial social reform at the beginning of his presidency, to the fury of many more conservative Americans
 - He tried to end the ban on homosexuals in the military, but had to settle on a more moderate “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy that meant the military could accept gay

- officers without revealing it (essentially denied their participation in the armed services)
- He tried to reform the healthcare system with a committee led by his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, but this turned out to be a long and convoluted solution that was immediately rejected by Congress
 - Clinton passed a bill for deficit-improvements successfully
 - However, this was passed solely with the Democratic majority in Congress, with no Republican support
 - This was a bitter issue that divided the two parties
 - This policy actually created a federal surplus by 1998
 - Clinton successfully created an anti-crime movement
 - In 1994 he wrote an anti-crime bill, funding more police officers, building more prisons, and banning assault weapons
 - America's arrest rate was the highest in the world, but by 1995 violent crime began to decrease substantially
 - Anti-government sentiment was strong during the beginning of Clinton's presidency
 - In response to a conflict between federal agents and "a Fundamentalist sect known as the Branch Davidians," there was the Oklahoma City Bombing (1995)
 - This was the destruction of a federal building by a bomb, killing 168 people
 - This sentiment was largely caused by the distrust in government by the disillusionment by the government about the Vietnam War (e.g., Pentagon Papers) and the Watergate Scandal
 - Some states created term-limit laws (even though they were prohibited under federal law) because of this anti-government sentiment

Politics and Power: Bill Clinton created the DLC and adopted a new political perspective of "New Democracy" in order to appeal to the conservative masses of the latter 20th century. In an era only briefly interrupted by one unpopular Democratic term under Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton successfully politicked his way into the presidency by leveraging their problems against them ("It's the economy, stupid!" some of his campaigners would say against the Republicans' failed efforts to get the economy under control.) Newly elected into office, and with Democratic majorities in both houses, Clinton eagerly went ahead with reform such as homosexual rights and anti-crime laws. However, these faced a strong conservative backlash that limited his power and popularity. The strong decline in his initial, moderate personality because of his eager liberal reforms show the limits of the president to enact laws contrary to the public sentiment (which, at this time, was mostly conservative).

The Politics of Distrust

- The strong anti-government stance of many Americans and the failure of some of Clinton's early reform attempts gave the Republicans some popularity again
 - The Republicans led the Contract with America initiative under Newt Gingrich (who became the Speaker of the House) in the 1994 Congressional elections
 - These promised "an all-out assault on budget deficits and radical reduction in welfare programs"

- These increased Republican leadership by “eleven new governorships, eight seats in the Senate, and fifty-three seats in the House,” giving them control of both houses of Congress
- The new Republican-majority Congress passed the Welfare Reform Bill (1996) that “made deep cuts in welfare grants and required able-bodied welfare recipients to find employment”
 - This went against purely Democratic motives, but Clinton accepted it to remain somewhat popular with the large number of conservatives in the US
- Clinton strongly supported rights to welfare for immigrants (legal or not)
 - Despite Clinton’s wishes, the Welfare Reform Bill, Illegal Immigration Reform of 1996, and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 all passed and represented the anti-immigrant sentiment in the US in the 1990s
 - Immigration reached an all-time high at this time, especially from Mexico and Central America
- The “Republican Revolution” of the conservative welfare-reform bills went too far
 - Americans began to question the overly-conservative Republican Congress (e.g., when they proposed to send the children of families depending on welfare to orphanages)
 - The government was forced to shut down for 27 days in 1995-6 because of heavy disagreement between the Democrats and Republicans in Congress
 - It lasted long enough to create a strong backlash against the Republican initiatives
 - Clinton agreed to a budget package to end the shutdown

Clinton Comes Back

- Robert Dole, Senate Majority Leader and Republican, ran against President Clinton in the presidential election of 1996
- Both Dole and Clinton fought for the votes of the moderate “swing voters”
 - Because neither major party had a clear majority of the US population’s support, these “swing voters” who were indecisive between the two parties were important for the election won
- Clinton was re-elected, 379 to 159 against Dole
 - He was the first Democratic president since FDR to be re-elected, showing the weak Democratic support in the latter part of the 20th century
 - Congress was still dominated by the Republicans, however
- Clinton’s new goals in his second term were considerably more moderate than the far-looking reforms that he had proposed in his first term because of the Republican Congress
 - Even with moderate economic reform, he was able to balance the federal budget with its spending by 1998 for the first time in 30 years

Racial Progress and Perils

- Clinton took a moderate stance on many social issues
 - He now welcomed the Welfare Reform Bill of 1996

- He supported a reform of affirmative action, knowing that many Americans wanted to get rid of it
 - However, he was against Proposition 209 in California and the court decision *Hopwood v. Texas* that took away affirmative action; he did not approve these decisions on affirmative action being so conservative
- Los Angeles racial riots broke out in 1992
 - Los Angeles was the home of many racial minorities at the time
 - White police were acquitted despite obviously having savagely beaten black suspect, causing mass riots and violence, leading to many deaths
 - OJ Simpson, an African American, was acquitted despite evidence suggesting that he killed his wife because of racial marks by the police
 - This divided many white Americans (who believed Simpson was guilty) and black Americans (who believed Simpson was innocent)
- In many American cities minority groups made up the majority of the population
 - 52% of African Americans lived in cities, while only 21% of whites lived in cities
 - Whites mostly moved to the wealthier suburbs and more expensive real estate in the cities, while many blacks moved to inner cities and early suburbs (that were now over 50 years old)
- African American representation in government and educational level increased dramatically
 - Over 9000 black officials were elected by 2000
 - Over 30 members of Congress were African American
 - Many more blacks completed higher education than had ever before (16.6% had a bachelor's or higher in 2000)
- African Americans largely voted for Clinton
 - 83% of the African American vote in both 1992 and 1996 went toward Clinton
 - This was part of a trend in which the majority of minorities voted Democrat

American and National Identity: While the “Contract with America” under hardcore conservative Republicans was initially very popular and regained the Republicans majorities in both houses of Congress, it could not last. Its call for radical reform on the right of the spectrum (even proposing that welfare-family children be sent to orphanages) made even conservative Americans doubt their motives. After such intense disagreement between the leftist Democrats and rightist Republicans, the President emerged more moderate, such as by promoting reform to make affirmative action more appealing to conservatives and supporting a conservative-backed free-market economy. This strongly demonstrates how the two-party system works in America, with popularity easily swayed from one party to another (in this case, twice within the same presidential term), to prevent against radical measures to either the Left or to the Right. This ability of the nation to center itself on the political spectrum but lean either left or right with the opposing political party to temper the changes makes the two-party election system of American very strong. This liberal/conservative checking of each other is a fundamental part of American identity, similar to the system of checks and balances between the branches of government.

- Clinton's administration created the "longest period of [economic] growth in American history"
 - "The Federal Reserve Board's low-interest, easy-money policies and the explosive growth of new Internet ... businesses helped fuel the boom"
 - Unemployment lowered to 4% and inflation decrease
- Clinton worked with the Republicans to pursue new deregulatory measures
 - He loosened regulation on trade
 - He repealed the Glass-Steagall Act that had "barred commercial banks from dealing in securities"
 - Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1993)
 - This opened up free trade between the US, Canada, and Mexico
 - This weakened support from the protectionists within in the Democratic party
 - Clinton helped create the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1994)
 - This succeeded GATT as the main organization to supervise global trade
 - It was a long-awaited goal of free-market advocates since WWII, but many people also opposed it because it would lower wages and make the market more competitive against American companies
 - Clinton wanted to improve trade relations with China as it grew economically into an industrial superpower
 - He passed a bill to make China a full trading partner in 2000
- A new information age sped up the process of globalization
 - Microsoft made great leaps in the computing industry
 - The Internet greatly grew and gave the world's citizens much more connectivity
 - This especially helped speed up long-distance trade
 - It threatened to wipe out many other jobs, such as "postal carriers, travel agents, store clerks, bank tellers, stock-brokers, and all kinds of other workers whose business it was to mediate between product and client"
 - "Outsourcing" became possible for intellectual jobs and gave American jobs away to cheaper jobs to other countries such as Ireland and India

The Feminist Revolution

- Women were greatly influenced by the economic changes of the latter 1900s
 - At the beginning of the 1900s, women made up only 20% of the workforce, but by the 1990s they made up about half of the workforce
 - In the 1990s over half of working-age women worked outside the home
 - A majority of women with young children had jobs outside the home (compared to 90% of women with children under 6 years-old that didn't work in 1950)
 - However, women still earned much less than men for the same jobs — these were part of the "pink-collar ghetto"
 - Women were more likely than men to have domestic and familial obligations and take time off from work for it

- Only 33% of lawyers and judges (white-collar jobs) were women, and only 32% of doctors were women even as recently as 2010
- Clinton passed the Medical Leave Act of 1993, which gave working people job protection if they had familial obligations
 - This recognized the lower pay and lesser job opportunities for women, but it also applied to men
 - The higher recognition of people with obligations toward children and to gender equality led to some employers giving paternal leaves, but usually unpaid
- Traditional family values declined significantly in the 1990s
 - As women's role in the workforce increased, many households were single-parent households or both-parent-working households
 - Divorce rate increased to 50%
 - However, this (and teen pregnancy) began to decline in the mi-1990s
 - ¼ of white babies, ⅓ of African American babies, and ½ of hispanic babies were born to single parents

Work, Exchange, and Technology: The efficiency of free trade and work were greatly improved in the 1990s as a result of the creation of multiple international free-trade organizations, the increase of women into the workforce, and the improvement of means of telecommunications. Clinton helped to create NAFTA (which improved free trade in North America) and the WTO (which helped regulate international trade fairly), and he improved trade relations with China by establishing it as a full trading partner of the US. While this didn't appeal to many pro-protectionist Democrats, it was well-liked by free-trade advocates, especially Republicans. The creation of these greatly sped up the role of globalization in the US, which helped US companies keep up with the pace of foreign industrial development (which had outpaced American industrial development in the immediate post-war era, in which destroyed nations such as Britain, Japan, and Russia were under greater pressure to rebuild and modernize) and form a more competitive international market. The introduction of new communications media, especially the Internet, sped up the rate and ease of trade throughout the world. And the rise of women's role in the workforce increased American productivity and prosperity even more, with many women (including recent mothers) creating a second income for their families. Together, the increased rate of work and exchange, partially bolstered by the introduction of new technology, helped the nation pull out of its economic gloom begun with the "revenue gap" under Reagan and gave the nation a federal surplus during Clinton's presidency.

Searching for a Post-Cold War Policy

- Clinton was initially unsure what to do in terms of American diplomacy now that the Cold War was ended and the main US foreign policy was not anticommunism
- Clinton sent peacekeeping troops to Somalia in 1994, but they quickly returned without having accomplished much when 12 were killed
 - This led him to withhold American support from the Rwandan genocide (1994), in which over 500,000 people were killed
 - Similarly, the US hesitated to send troops to Bosnia, where an ethnic conflict took place

- The US led a bombing campaign against Serbia, whose president Slobodan Milosevic, who was undergoing an “ethnic cleansing” in the region
 - The campaign was successful and Milosevic was brought before international court
- Clinton tried to mediate an agreement between Israel and Palestine
 - He presided over a meeting in 1993 between Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin and the PLO leader Yasir Arafat
 - While agreements were made, Rabin was killed in 1993 and Arafat died in 2004 before any real progress could be made
- The Middle East spawned some extremists, which violently waged war against the US
 - Al Qaeda was a new anti-American Islamist group led by Osama bin Laden
 - They were against increased American influence on the Arabian peninsula and the US support for Israel
- Clinton intervened in Northern Ireland to help end conflict between the “predominantly Catholic nationalist and predominantly Protestant Loyalists” in 1998
- Clinton helped reduce nuclear tension in Korea, India, and Pakistan

America in the World: The Cold War was essentially the world order for the 45 years following WWII. Now that it had ended and the USSR was weakened by its dissolution, US political foreign policy became somewhat aimless without the central goal of anticommunism. When sporadic troubles arose in smaller countries, especially in the Middle East and Africa, the US felt the need to intervene. In Somalia, and to a lesser extent in Bosnia, the US fulfilled its role as the “international police,” similar to the highly interventionist policies of the McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt administrations. More specifically, it somewhat adhered to the American aspect of helping other nations in need that were established in the Truman Doctrine (to prevent nations from external suppression), which in turn has its roots in the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary (which essentially protect some nations against political suppression and economic depression). This interventionist role of the international police has largely persisted as the dominant foreign policy for the US to date, causing both relief (such as in Somalia, where the racist dictator was removed from power) but also anti-American hate (as seen in the rise of anti-American extremist groups such as Al Qaeda).

Scandal and Impeachment

- Clinton was plagued by cries of scandal and corruption
 - Some people claimed that he corruptly dealt in a real-estate deal called the Whitewater scandal when he was governor
 - His most prominent scandal was the Lewinsky affair, in which he was accused of lying about having sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky
 - This led to the first impeachment trial since that of Andrew Johnson 130 years ago
 - Democratic minorities claimed that these sexual acts were not “high crimes and misdemeanors,” and many Americans agreed, especially with the good economic standing of the nation under Clinton
 - Clinton was voted 45:55 guilty: not guilty, not the 2/3 necessary for impeachment

Clinton’s Legacy and the 2000 Election

- Clinton was widely praised for his economic achievement (balancing the federal budget)
- Clinton was a New Democrat, which had mixed implications for the Democratic party
 - Although he was popular because he was moderate, he helped to consolidate many moderate and even some conservative, anti-New Deal policies established during the Reagan and Bush presidencies that went against traditional Democratic views
- Clinton's Lewinsky scandal undermined public confidence in the presidency again
- The Democrats chose Albert Gore, vice president of Clinton, to be their presidential nominee in 2000
 - He called for moderate tax cuts and the strengthening of Social Security
- The Republicans chose George W. Bush as their presidential nominee and vice president Richard Cheney
 - Bush was the governor of TX and had his father's popular presidency to help his reputation
 - He argued for tax cuts and private sector programs to give government surpluses (estimated to be as high as \$2 trillion in the early 2000s) back to the people
- The election was very close but had Bush as the winner
 - Bush won the electoral vote 271 to 266, all determined by the last state of Florida
 - Florida was won by Bush by only 537 votes
 - Many Democrats cried for a recount of votes in Florida, and some blacks there argued that they had been turned back from the polls and would've voted for Al Gore, but the Supreme Court declared a recount unconstitutional
 - Al Gore won the popular vote, 50,996,116 to 50,456,169
 - This was the first time since President Benjamin Harrison that a president had won the electoral vote without winning the popular vote

American and National Identity: Another presidential flaw, following LBJ's unliked war, Nixon's Watergate scandal, Reagan's Reaganomics fail, Carter's failed economic budget, and Bush's broken promise of "no new taxes," occurred in Clinton's presidency. This time, like with Reagan, the crime was considered serious enough to be impeachable, but the general sentiment in America decided that the offense, which was personal and had no tangible implications on the American public, should not be enough to take Clinton out of the presidency, especially with his stellar economic record. This ability of Americans to differentiate between having a good leader versus a good person is a part of the American identity to fight against corruption. This was demonstrated in Nixon's presidency, when the Watergate scandal was considered an offense to the national system of the election, while Clinton didn't try to malign anyone, simply lying about a personal flaw. The choice to keep Clinton in the presidency allowed the economy to continue to improve and the country to move on, even if it did further undermine the people's trust in the government (which was already damaged by the aforementioned post-war scandals of the other presidents).

E Pluribus Plures

- "Multiculturalism," an acceptance of the diversity and cultural pluralism in the nation, was becoming more prominent in the 1990s

- For example, in education cultural pluralists advocated for more focus on the history of minority groups rather than being “Eurocentric,” focusing on Caucasian American politics
- The Census Bureau allowed people to respond with more than one ethnicity checked off, representing the cultural mixing prominent in the nation
- People from minority races were beginning to hold more important positions
 - E.g., Tiger Woods, Rosario Dawson, and Barack Obama rose to prominence in the early 2000s

The Postmodern Mind

- The rise in acceptance of multiculturalism “energized much of the cultural and intellectual output of the era”
- People described the 2000s as an age of “postmodernism”
 - The term, while controversial, “generally referred to a condition of fragmented perspectives, multiple truths, and constructed identities. The postmodern mind rejected rational, totalizing descriptions of the self or the world, and replaced modernism’s faith in certainty, objectivity, and unity with an eclectic celebration of diverse and overlapping outlooks”
 - Postmodernism was prominent in art: in architecture (which mixed old and new styles), music (blending many genres), visual art, performance art (such as break-dancing), and literature (usually satirical, and written from the views of female and minority authors (e.g., *Beloved*, *The Shipping News*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Waiting*, *War Trash*, *Interpreter of Maladies*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Angels in America*, *Rent*, *The Vagina Monologues*))

Niche Nation

- A new age of telecommunications opened up the media world to a greater degree of diversity
 - “Mix and mash” music such as “Jay-Z ‘sampled’ beats” rose to popularity
 - The Internet became a playground of different sites of concentrated, similar interests (individual websites for all sorts of purposes)
 - Cable television “smashed the dominance of the Big Three broadcast networks,” allowing many smaller, more specialized programs to come about
 - These collectively allowed American culture to be more fragmented, more pluralistic

Culture and Society: The rise of cultural pluralism, or “multiculturalism,” into the broader scheme of “postmodernism,” highlighted the effective liberal reform movements in the mid- to late-20th century. The push for racial and gender equality spawned a new crop of authors and artists of minority groups, producing new mixtures of art that were both highly unique and mixing older styles and multicultural elements. This is similar to the Jazz movement, in which African American folk songs mixed with European music to form a popular music movement. The great acceptance of multiculturalism showed the success of the Civil Rights and gender equality movements of the 1960s and 1970s, showing that the members of these groups had grown enough recognition and gained enough rights to be fully accepted into society and able to focus their efforts on producing new art rather than the fight for equality.