

How will historians remember the past 30 years?



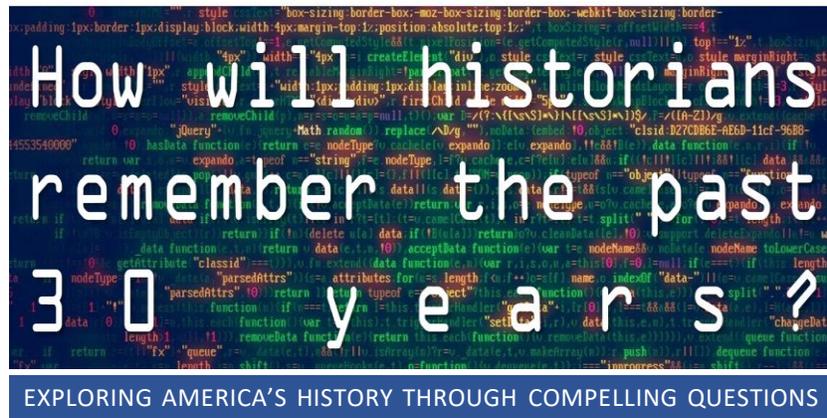
19





www.inquiryhistory.com

QUESTION NINETEEN



SUPPORTING QUESTIONS

- 1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?
- 2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?
- 3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?
- 4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?
- 5 IS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?
- 6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

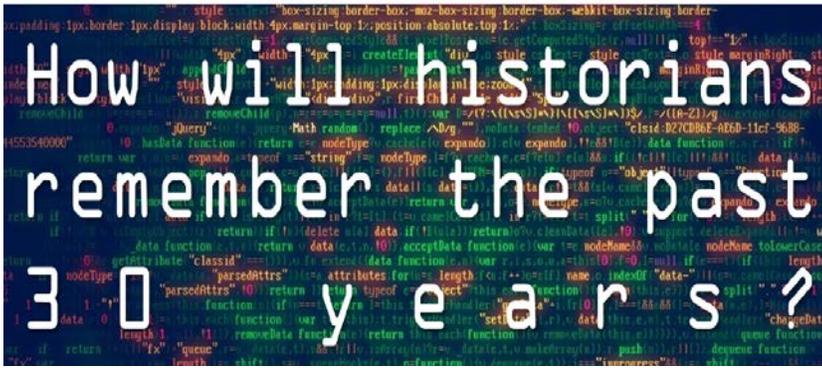
DEVELOPED AND COMPILED BY
JONATHAN LOOMIS

SOURCES FOR ORIGINAL TEXT INCLUDE
c n x . o r g
courses.lumenlearning.com
us history . o r g
sageamericanhistory.net
learnc . o r g
wikipedia . o r g



CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-NC-ND 4.0 INTERNATIONAL LICENSE

QUESTION NINETEEN



Looking back, we can separate truly impactful events from things that seemed important in the moment but had no lasting influence because we can analyze their impact on the course of history. That's why most historians are reluctant to include the most recent few decades in their textbooks. How can we write a history of the years we're living through right now without the benefit of hindsight? The answer is that we probably can't. But that's not going to stop us from trying! After all, it's the time we've lived through, which means it's most relevant, to us.

Of course, we know our analysis of the present won't be perfect. No doubt in the coming years we will rewrite this chapter again and again as we see what actually results in important change and what does not.

However, now that we have studied the past and understand the story of how we got here, we can look at the present with a historian's eye and consider what people in the future will say about us.

What do you think, how will historians remember the past 30 years?

1

F I R S T Q U E S T I O N CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the contours of the Cold War had largely determined American action abroad. Strategists saw each Third World coup, revolution, and civil war as part of the larger struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. But after 1989 with the Soviet Union vanquished, the United States was suddenly free of this paradigm, and Presidents Bush, Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, and Biden have seen international crises differently from their predecessors.

President George H. W. Bush envisioned a post-Cold War role in which the United States used its overwhelming military superiority and influence as global policing tools to preserve peace. President Bill Clinton also used the armed forces in this policing role. President George W. Bush oversaw the opening of a new conflict – the fight against terrorism – but both he and Barack Obama also sent America's fighting men and women into combat in the role of the world's police force.

Can this be America's role in the world? Can we act as the police officer, patrolling the smaller conflicts, weighing in and picking sides to ensure that justice is served and peace preserved? 2000 years ago the Mediterranean World lived under the so-called Pax Romana as the forces of the Roman Empire ensured a long period of peace between former enemies who fell under the reach of their empire. Can, or should the world now live in an era of Pax Americana?

What do you think? Can the United States be the world's police officer?

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



THE FIRST GULF WAR

The Middle East had always been a source of interest for the United States. Jews who had survived the Holocaust in Europe during World War II, fled to Palestine in the Middle East and founded the modern nation of Israel which Americans have always supported. The nations of the Persian Gulf supply the United States and the rest of the world with oil, an essential ingredient of the modern economy. During the Cold War, conflicts in the Middle East, such as the war between neighbors Iraq and Iran served as proxies for our conflict with the Soviet Union. For these, and a variety of lesser reasons, the Middle East has always been a point of American interest.

At the end of the Cold War, the Middle East became a source of increased concern. In 1988, Iraq faced a problem. It had run up an enormous debt during its war with neighboring Iran. At the same time, other Arab states had increased their oil production, forcing oil prices down and further hurting Iraq's economy. Iraq's leader, **Saddam Hussein**, approached these oil-producing states for assistance, particularly Saudi Arabia and the tiny, but wealthy neighboring Kuwait. When talks broke down in August 1990, and Iraq found itself politically and economically isolated, Hussein ordered an invasion of oil-rich Kuwait.

The invasion of Kuwait served as a new test for the United States in the post-Cold War era. President George H. W. Bush had a choice. On the one hand, he could intervene to protect Kuwait, essentially recasting the role of the United States from Soviet adversary into global cop. On the other, the United States could stand back and allow minor conflicts around the world to go on without notice. For many, the second option seemed best. After all, without the threat of communism, what possible reason did the United States have to get involved?

President Bush, however, chose the first option. He and his foreign policy team forged an unprecedented coalition of 34 countries, including many members of NATO and the Middle Eastern countries of Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, to oppose Iraqi aggression. The Saudis had never allowed American troops on their soil before, and during the Cold War Syria and Egypt had been friendly with the Soviet Union. Bush hoped that this coalition would herald the beginning of a "new world order" in which the nations of the world would work together to deter belligerence. For the first time, Woodrow Wilson's dream of moral diplomacy looked like it might be coming true.

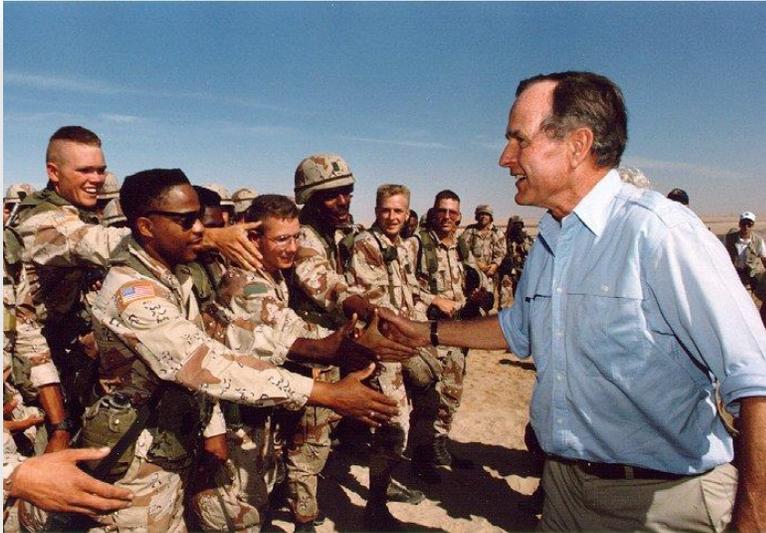
A deadline was set for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face serious consequences. Bush first deployed troops to defend Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Shield. Bush succeeded in getting resolutions from Congress authorizing the use of military force against Iraq and the United States launched an effective bombing campaign. The air war was the first time the United States deployed some of its new, high-tech weaponry,

 **Saddam Hussein:** Dictator of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. He was a strong Arab nationalist and led his nation during the Iran-Iraq War as well as the First Gulf War and the American invasion of Iraq after 9/11.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

including stealth bombers and laser-guided bombs. After successfully weakening the Iraqi defenses, the United States launched Operation Desert Storm, a 100-hour land war involving over 500,000 American troops and another 200,000 from 27 other countries. Iraq's army was expelled from Kuwait and almost entirely destroyed. Together, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm are now known as the **First Gulf War**.



The First Gulf War: Conflict in 1990 between Iraq and an American-led international coalition after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It was the first major test of American foreign policy after the Cold War.

Primary Source: Photograph

President George H. W. Bush flew to the Middle East to meet the troops during the First Gulf War.

Some controversy arose among Bush's advisors regarding whether to end the war without removing Saddam Hussein from power, but General **Colin Powell**, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that to continue to attack a defeated army would be "un-American." Bush agreed and troops began moving out of the area in March 1991. Although Hussein was not removed from power, the war nevertheless suggested that the United States no longer suffered from Vietnam Syndrome and would deploy massive military resources if and when it thought necessary. In April 1991, United Nations Resolution 687 set the terms of the peace, with long-term implications. Its concluding paragraph authorizing the UN to take such steps as necessary to maintain the peace was later taken as the legal justification for the further use of force, as in 1996 and 1998, when Iraq was again bombed. It was also referenced in the lead-up to the second invasion of Iraq in 2003, when it appeared that Saddam Hussein was refusing to comply with other UN resolutions.

Apart from the end of Vietnam Syndrome, the Gulf War was important for a number of other reasons. Unlike the Vietnam War, Bush's use of the military to stop one nation from invading a smaller neighbor proved to be enormously popular. Americans tied yellow ribbons around trees in their yards and on the radio antenna of their cars to show support for the troops.



Colin Powell: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the First Gulf War and later Secretary of State under George W. Bush at the start of the War on Terror.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

At the Super Bowl in 1991, Whitney Houston sang the National Anthem, then released the recording which went platinum. Americans were caught up in patriotic fervor. So many who had feared “another Vietnam,” but video images of laser guided bombs blowing up Iraqi radar stations and missile sites gave Americans reason to be proud of their nation’s status as the world’s greatest military power. It was the first war to be shown on cable news, and it went so well that the tiny minority of people who protested were drowned out by the enormous show of support for the president and the armed forces. For the military itself, the war had enormous consequences. The leaders of the war, like Colin Powell, had been young officers in Vietnam, taking orders from an older generation. This time, they were in charge, and they showed that the modernized army, navy, and air force with its high tech weapons had come a long way since the days of the disaster in Vietnam.



Primary Source: Photograph

Whitney Houston’s rendition of The Star Spangled Banner at the Super Bowl during the First Gulf War is the only recording of that song ever to break the Top 10 charts for popular music in the United States.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

As discussed earlier, the United States has been a strong ally of the nation of Israel since its inception after World War II. Israel’s history is one of violent conflict with its neighbors. The mostly Muslim, Arab nations that exist today in the Middle East around Israel were British protectorates at the end of that war and did not want to lose land to what they saw as invaders. The Jewish immigrants who built the nation of Israel fought a war for their existence against these Arab neighbors in 1948 and won. That victory ensured the existence of their country, but also set up a long-standing conflict, that the United States has always been interested in ending.

Most problematic was the fate of the Palestinians, the original residents of the land that became Israel itself. Many had been expelled from their homes, or had fled during the fighting and were living in the nations

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

surrounding Israel. Some had taken up arms under the leadership of Yasser Arafat and his Palestinian Liberation Organization, which carried out terrorist attacks on Israelis around the world.

In the 1970s, American diplomats had their first measure of success when President Jimmy Carter helped negotiate the **Camp David Accords**, which formalized peace between Israel and Egypt. 14 years later, another Democratic president found a way to inch the peace process along. In September 1993, at the White House, Yitzhak Rabin, prime minister of Israel, and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), signed the **Oslo Accords**, granting some self-rule to Palestinians living in the Israeli-occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A year later, the Clinton administration helped facilitate peace treaty between Israel and its neighbor Jordan. In 2020, President Trump hosted leaders from Israel, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates as they jointly signed the **Abraham Accords**, normalizing relations between these nations.

 **Camp David Accords, Oslo Accords & Abraham Accords:** Peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors that were negotiated with help from American presidents.



Primary Source: Photograph

Yitzhak Rabin (left) and Yasser Arafat (right), shown with Bill Clinton, signed the Oslo Accords at the White House on September 13, 1993. Rabin was killed two years later by an Israeli who opposed the treaty.

THE BALKAN WARS

As a small measure of stability was brought to the Middle East, violence erupted in the **Balkans**, the region in the southeastern corner of Europe. For the previous half-century, the region had been united as Yugoslavia, a communist nation behind the Iron Curtain. Yugoslavia consisted of six provinces: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Each was occupied by a number of ethnic groups, some of which shared a history of hostile relations. Ethnic and national disputes in the Balkans were nothing new. The murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the trigger that led to World War I, had taken place in the heart of the Balkans. In May 1980, the leader of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito, died. Without him to hold the country together, ethnic tensions increased, and

 **The Balkans:** Region in southeastern Europe made up of many small nations. It marks the boundary between Christian Europe and the Muslim Middle East and has traditionally been a source of conflict throughout history. World War II started there and it was the site of intense civil wars following the collapse of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

this, along with the fall of communism elsewhere in Europe at the end of the 1980s, led to the breakup of Yugoslavia. In 1991, Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia declared their independence. In 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina did as well. Only **Serbia** and Montenegro remained united as the Serbian-dominated Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

With the fall of communism and the lack of any dominating authority like Tito, ethnic tensions within **Bosnia and Herzegovina** escalated into war. Yugoslavian Serbs aided Bosnian Serbs who did not wish to live in an independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. These Bosnian Serbs proclaimed the existence of autonomous Serbian regions within the country and attacked Bosnian Muslims and Croats. During the conflict, the Serbs engaged in **genocide**. The brutal conflict also gave rise to the systematic rape of Muslim women by Serbian military or paramilitary forces. The International Criminal Tribunal of Yugoslavia estimated that 12,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the war.

NATO intervened in 1995, and President Bill Clinton agreed to American participation in airstrikes against Bosnian Serbs. That year, the **Dayton Accords** peace settlement was signed in Dayton, Ohio, ending three and a half years of war in Bosnia. Four years later, the United States, acting with other NATO members, launched an air campaign against Serbian-dominated Yugoslavia to stop it from attacking ethnic Albanians in **Kosovo**. Although these attacks were not sanctioned by the UN and were criticized by Russia and China, Yugoslavia withdrew its forces from Kosovo in June 1999.



The fighting in the Balkans helped define a new role for NATO. First founded as a mutual defense alliance to counter the Soviet Union, some had been wondering what purpose the alliance had in the years after the end of the



Serbia: Christian Slavic nation in the Balkans. It is the center and largest nation to be formed after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War and was the aggressor in the wars during the 1990s against its neighbors Bosnia and Kosovo.



Bosnia and Herzegovina: Independent nation that was formed in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War. It was the site of intense civil war and genocide as Christian Serbs murdered Muslims. The war concluded with the Dayton Accords in 1995.



Genocide: Mass murder in an attempt to eliminate an entire population of people. The Holocaust of Jews in Europe during World War II is one example.



Dayton Accords: Peace agreement signed in 1995 that ended the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. President Bill Clinton was influential in the negotiations and American airstrikes against the Serbian military helped convince Serbians to negotiate.



Kosovo: Independent nation that was formed in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War. Its population is primarily ethnic Albanian and the United States led NATO in a bombing campaign to prevent Serbia from carrying out mass murder.

Primary Source: Photograph

Marines walk with a group of children in Kosovo during the American intervention there. American soldiers have served as peace keepers in various places. The case of Kosovo is one of the successful uses of military might to end mass murder.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



Cold War. Now, the years of planning, joint exercises, and coordination paid off as the forces from the various NATO powers could collaborate, share bases, hardware and carry out joint missions to achieve what they saw as a goal of ending genocide. The American Secretary of State at the time, **Madeleine Albright**, had been a child in Czechoslovakia during World War II, and understood the dangers of hate and dictatorship on Europe. Her leadership was crucial in guiding the alliance in its new mission as a force for justice.

The United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) after the war. A total of 161 individuals were indicted, setting an important precedent for the role of the United Nations in the years after the Cold War. Not since the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials at the end of World War II had there been an international court to force perpetrators of genocide to face justice.

SOMALIA AND RWANDA

The use of force in the decades after the Cold War did not always bring positive results. For example, in December 1992, George H. W. Bush sent a contingent of American soldiers to **Somalia**, initially to protect and distribute relief supplies to civilians as part of a United Nations mission. Without an effective Somali government, however, the warlords who controlled different regions stole food, and their forces endangered the lives of UN workers. In 1993, the Clinton administration sent soldiers to capture one of these leaders, Mohammed Farah Aidid, in the city of Mogadishu. The resulting battle proved disastrous. A Black Hawk helicopter was shot down, and Army Rangers and members of Delta Force spent hours battling their way through the streets. 84 soldiers were wounded and 19 died. The United States withdrew, leaving Somalia to struggle with its own anarchy.

The sting of the Somalia failure probably contributed to Clinton's reluctance to send American forces to end the 1994 genocide in **Rwanda**. In the days of brutal colonial rule, Belgian administrators had given control to Tutsi tribal chiefs, although Hutus constituted a majority of the population. Resentment over ethnic privileges, and the discrimination that began then and continued after independence in 1962, erupted into civil war in 1980. The Hutu majority began to slaughter the Tutsi minority and their Hutu supporters. President Clinton was aware of the extent of the killing, but chose not to send American troops to intervene, fearing another failure like the one in Somalia. In 1998, while visiting Rwanda, Clinton apologized for having done nothing to save the lives of the 800,000 massacred in three months of genocidal slaughter. In the end, the United Nations also set up a court to try criminals from Rwanda, but justice after the fact is nothing compared to the lives that might have been saved if the powerful militaries of the world had been sent to stop the killing.

 **Madeleine Albright:** Secretary of State under Bill Clinton in the 1990s. She was the first woman to hold the position and a strong advocate of military intervention in the Balkans to prevent genocide.

 **Somalia:** Nation in the east of Africa. The government failed there and the United States has tried at various times to provide humanitarian aid. In 1992, American soldiers carried out a failed mission in which 19 American soldiers died trying to protect UN workers.

 **Rwanda:** Small nation in east-central Africa that was the site of genocide in 1994. President Bill Clinton and the United States was criticized for not intervening to stop the massacre.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

THE ARAB SPRING

Americans have a mixed record of protecting life and supporting democracy in the past decade. The various uprisings of the Arab Spring have shown the limits of both American military might and political willpower.

The **Arab Spring** was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in late 2010. It began in response to oppressive regimes and a low standard of living, beginning with protests in Tunisia.



Arab Spring: A series of protests and uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East beginning in 2010 focused on the overthrow of corrupt, dictatorial regimes. Most of the uprisings have turned into violent civil wars with only Tunisia have converted to a democracy.

Secondary Source: Map

This map of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa shows almost all of the places the United States has been involved in since the end of the Cold War.



The effects of the Tunisian Revolution spread strongly to five other countries: Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain, where either the regime was toppled or major uprisings and social violence occurred, including riots, civil wars or insurgencies. Sustained street demonstrations took place in Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Sudan. The early hopes that these popular movements would end corruption, increase political participation, and bring about greater economic equity collapsed by mid-2012, as many Arab Spring demonstrations were met with violent responses from authorities. Large-scale conflicts resulted in Syria, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Only the uprising in Tunisia resulted in a transition to constitutional democratic governance.

LIBYA

Protests against Libya’s dictator, Muammar Gaddafi, began in **Libya** in 2011 and within a few days, the opposition controlled most of Benghazi, the country’s second-largest city. Gaddafi amassed his army and prepared to invade Benghazi, promising to kill everyone in the city. To protect civilians from what appeared to be imminent slaughter, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution to create a no-fly zone over Libya, and authorized “all necessary measures” to protect civilians.



Libya: Arab nation in North Africa. For many years it was ruled by dictator Muammar Gaddafi until he was overthrown during a revolution that grew out of the Arab Spring. Airstrikes by American, French and other nations protected civilians during the revolution and weakened Gaddafi’s forces.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Two days later, France, the United States and the United Kingdom intervened in Libya with a **bombing campaign against pro-Gaddafi forces**. A coalition of 27 countries from Europe and the Middle East soon joined the intervention. President Obama addressed the nation and articulated America's role as global cop. "For generations, the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an advocate for human freedom. Mindful of the risks and costs of military action, we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the world's many challenges. But when our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act." For Obama and his advisors, the possibility of mass murder in Libya qualified as a threat to American values.



2011 Airstrikes in Libya: Attacks by American and 26 other nations on Libyan government forced under the command of Gaddafi in order to stop the slaughter of civilians during the Libyan Civil War.

Primary Source: Photograph

Airmen from the 509th Bomb Wing at Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri prepare B-2 Spirit stealth bombers for an attack on Libya. The modern air force has the ability to send bombers around the world on long missions. Some have criticized the United States for using its military to strike from a distance, separating Americans from the actual fighting.

The air attacks did not end the war. It took five more months before anti-rebel fighters captured Tripoli, scattered Gaddafi's government and ended his 42 years of rule. After the government fell the civil war continued between various factions within Libya. Fighting continued until a cease fire was signed in 2020. The nation remains divided with areas being separately controlled. Over 10,000 Libyans died in the fighting and tens of thousands more fled the nation.

In 2012 American **ambassador J. Christopher Stephens and two other Americans were killed in an attack in the city of Benghazi**. The attack became a major political scandal for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and President Barack Obama. A total of six investigations were carried out by Republicans in Congress, none of which found significant wrongdoing on the part of Clinton or Obama, but which reminded the American public of the administration's failure to prevent a civil war in Libya after the initial intervention.



Benghazi Attack: Murder of Ambassador J. Christopher Stephens and two other Americans in 2012 in Libya. The event was a major embarrassment for President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and hurt her 2016 presidential campaign.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Obama and his foreign policy team had not anticipated the chaos that would follow Gaddafi's demise and he said in 2016 that failing to plan for Libya after Gaddafi was the "worst mistake" of his presidency.

SYRIA

Protests in **Syria** started in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring in response to aggressive tactics by the government security forces, most notably when they arrested children for writing antigovernment slogans. When protests erupted, approximately 3,000 people were arrested. The government responding with harsh security clampdowns and military operations when the protests spread. In July, Syrian army tanks stormed several cities killing protesters. By the end of the year, the opposition had formed into a military force and began taking control of territory in an attempt to oust Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Battles between the government's security forces and the rebel Free Syrian Army intensified. Massacres ensued in which hundreds of civilians were killed in a single day. By mid-2012, the peaceful protests of 2011 had evolved into full scale civil war. The **Syrian Civil War** remains ongoing. The United States has opposed the government of Bashar al-Assad, due to both his opposition to democracy and his use of force against his own people.



However, Iran, Iraq, and Russia support the government. American presidents Obama and Trump have both shown great reluctance to commit the military to the fight in Syria. The United States has supported the anti-government forces with material and financing, but even in 2013 when it seemed clear that Assad had deployed chemical weapons against his own people Congress refused to give President Obama permission to use American forces in against Syria. Obama focused instead on trying to negotiate with Assad to convince him to voluntarily give up his remaining chemical weapons. This effort was at least partially successful, with Assad agreeing to turn over his chemical weapons to an international group that



Syria: Arab nation at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It borders both Iraq and Israel and is the site of the worst civil war that resulted from the Arab Spring protests. The United States has been reluctant to become fully involved in the conflict.



Syrian Civil War: Ongoing war within Syria between government forces, anti-government opposition forces, terrorist groups, Americans, Russians, Iranians, and a variety of other players. The war has resulted in an enormous humanitarian crisis and millions of refugees.

Primary Source: Photograph

A destroyed neighborhood in the Syrian city of Raqqa. The war has been especially deadly for civilians.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



would destroy them. He turned over some, but not all of his chemical weapons stockpile.

The United States had not entirely stayed out of the fighting. In 2014, American aircraft conducted airstrikes against terrorist forces from Iraq that had moved into Syria as well as some against government and pro-government targets. They also deployed special forces and artillery units to engage terrorists on the ground.

Russia, on the other hand, has deployed its jets in Syria with the explicit goal of supporting Assad and the government forces. Some Americans find this deeply unsettling as Russia seems to have the upper hand in a new sort of proxy war. President Trump promised not to get involved in the Syrian Civil War as part of his **America First** policy but ordered a bombing raid against Assad's forces when it was clear that they had once again used chemical weapons in an attack against civilians.

International organizations have accused virtually all sides involved, including the government, opposition rebel groups, Russia, terrorist organizations, and the United States of severe human rights violations and of massacres. Over the course of the war, a number of peace initiatives have been launched, but fighting continues.

The conflict has caused a major refugee crisis with approximately half of the entire population having been displaced. Millions have fled to neighboring Lebanon, creating unrest there. Millions have also sought refuge in Europe. While some European leaders have welcomed Syrian refugees, others have not. Anti-immigrant sentiment has been a growing political issue in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, in large part due to the flood of refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria and other conflicts associated with the Arab Spring. Whereas President Obama was welcoming to the first waves of Syrian refugees, President Trump sought to bar all Syrians seeking a new home in America.

PUTIN'S RUSSIA

While the United States has launched airstrikes and sometimes used ground troops against weaker nations, no president has been willing to go head to head with powerful foes Russia or China. When Russia invaded its small neighbor Georgia in 2008, President George W. Bush said, "Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st Century," and that Russia would "jeopardize" its standing with the West if it did not withdraw its forces. Although the Bush administration contemplated a military response to defend Georgia, it decided against it so as to not provoke a conflict with Russia.

The problem the United States faces today in dealing with Russia is not just that it is the successor state to the Soviet Union and possesses nuclear weapons, but also that its new leader, **Vladimir Putin**, is a fierce nationalist who has publicly decried Russia's loss of prestige. He said, "the collapse of



America First: President Trump's foreign policy. He generally has advocated isolationism, but has used the military to intervene in some cases, such as in Syria.



Vladimir Putin: President of Russia. He believes that Russia should rebuild its power in the world and has led his nation in attacks on neighbors Georgia and Ukraine, as well as ordered the

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster” and as a former Soviet spy, seems intent on manipulating global politics to his nation’s advantage. After convincing his nation to rewrite its constitution so that he could return to power, he embarked on a campaign to rebuild the glories of decades past.

Especially distressing to Americans who favor international action and an active role for the United States in promoting global peace and security are the aggressive actions of Russia in **Ukraine**. The Ukraine was once an important part of the Soviet Union, but since 1991 has swayed between pro-Russia and pro-European politics. The nation itself is divided between Ukrainians who speak the Ukrainian language, and those who speak Russian. In 2014, Ukrainians who wanted closer ties with the West rose up in protest in the capital city of Kiev when the president announced the he would not be signing a trade agreement with the European Union. That president, Viktor Yanukovich, eventually fled to Russia and power was turned over to a pro-European president.



Following the ousting of Yanakovich, Putin ordered Russian troops to occupy **Crimea**, a peninsula that had been a part of Ukraine since 1954 but had been Russian territory before that. Putin declared that the territory rightfully belonged to Russia, and given that most of the residents were pro-Russian, Russian speaking Ukrainians, his forces faced little opposition as they swept in and installed a new government subordinate to Russia.

Western leaders, including President Obama were horrified at Putin’s aggression. Many saw parallels to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. However, despite tough talk, the United States did nothing to stop the Russian invasion. Obama noted, “Bigger nations can bully smaller ones to

interference in American and other European nations’ elections.



Ukraine: Nation in the far east of Europe bordering Russia. It was an important part of the Soviet Union but is not torn between pro-European and pro-Russian factions. Crimea was a part of this nation until Russia invaded and it is the site of ongoing Russian intervention.

Primary Source: Photograph

Vladimir Putin meeting with President Obama in 2012. A series of American presidents have been unable to control Putin’s aggressive actions.



Crimea: Peninsula in the south of Ukraine jutting out into the Black Sea. It was part of Russia until 1954 and was retaken by force by Russian forces in 2014 under the direction of Vladimir Putin. The United States protested and implemented sanctions against Russia, but took no military action to stop Russia’s move to annex the territory.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



get their way.” Like Truman who was criticized for allowing communists to take over China in 1949, Obama was criticized by his political opponents for not preventing a conflict he had little control over. Launching a military attack against Russia today is as unthinkable as invading China seemed in the late 1940s.

Putin went further by ordering his troops, sometimes in uniform and sometimes not, into Eastern Ukraine. In 2014, a Russian missile was used to shoot down a Malaysian Airlines flight as it passed over the border between Russia and Ukraine. While Russia’s government claims innocence, American leaders and an international investigation lay blame on Russia’s military units inside of Ukraine. As was the case when Putin order his forces into Crimea, Americans complained, but did not take military action.

In response to Russia’s actions in the Ukraine and Crimea, the United States and its European allies implemented **sanctions** against Russian businesses and top government officials. These sanctions were responsible for the collapse of the Russian economy in 2015. One reason Putin was so eager to help Donald Trump win the presidency in 2016 was that Trump proposed reducing the sanctions in an effort to reduce tensions between the United States and Russia. Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump made efforts to ease tensions with Russia and met with Putin multiple times but was unsuccessful in getting Putin to agree to any of his demands. Trump’s policy toward Russia, as well as meetings he had with North Korean dictator Kim Jung-un, were used by his political opponents to claim that he was cozying up to dictators. In Biden’s first year as president, he abandoned Trump’s openness to negotiation and his administration again implemented harsh sanctions against Russia.

CONCLUSION

For the purposes of studying history, we have broken down Americans military activities after the Cold War into two broad categories: police actions, and the war on terrorism. Everything you just learned about American intervention in the Middle East, the Balkans, Africa and Ukraine, is only part of the story. It was be entirely understandable if you started to long for the simplicity of the Cold War. You would not be alone. Truly, America’s foreign affairs are complicated. Whereas the Cold War had a simple goal: stop communism, the years since have been much less one-dimensional.

In 1990 when President George H. W. Bush launched the First Gulf War and expelled the Iraqis from Kuwait, it seemed that the role for the United States might been global police officer. When Bill Clinton led NATO’s efforts to end genocide in the Balkans that role appeared to be solidified. But then the United States did not stop genocide in Rwanda or a civil war in Syria, and refused to even consider military force against Russia, which leaves us today with some interesting questions.

 **Russian Sanctions:** Restrictions on Russian business dealings implemented by Congress after the Russian invasion of Crimea and Ukraine in 2014. They negatively impacted the Russian economy and are one reason Russia interfered in the American election in 2016. Sanctions were established again in 2021 as punishment for cyber-hacking.

1 CAN THE UNITED STATES BE THE WORLD'S POLICE OFFICER?



Should we try to be the world's police officers? Or should we embrace President Trump's motto of America First. Given that Russia and China both possess nuclear weapons, could we be the world's police officers even if we wanted to? What responsibility do we have to others as a democracy and the world's most powerful military and economy?

What do you think? Should the 21st Century be an age of Pax Americana? Can, or should the United States be the world's police officer?

SUMMARY

BIG IDEA: After the Cold War ended, the United States has taken on the role of the World's police officer, preventing genocide and maintaining international law. While Americans have been successful in some conflicts, we have also faced limitations to the extent of our power, most notably in the Middle East and with Russia.

After the end of the Cold War, many people were not sure what the United States' new role in the world should be. President George H. W. Bush helped define that role in 1991 by using the military to stop Saddam Hussein from annexing Kuwait into Iraq. He organized a coalition of nations and won United Nations approval for the First Gulf War. It was a successful operation, was hugely popular at home, and ended Vietnam Syndrome.

Presidents Carter, Clinton and Trump helped negotiate peace treaties between Israel and its Arab and Palestinian neighbors. President Clinton also guided NATO's use of the force to end genocide in the Balkans in two separate wars against Serbia.

The United States was unsuccessful in bringing peace to Somalia and refused to intervene in Rwanda to stop a genocide.

In 2010 a series of revolutions and protests in the Middle East and North Africa known as the Arab Spring produced multiple conflicts. The United States used air power in Libya to prevent Muammar Gaddafi from carrying out mass murder, but did not prepare for chaos in that nation after his fall. Americans have provided funding and weapons to rebels in Syria, but have not been fully committed to the civil war there, although Russia has. Congress voted not to participate in the war during the Obama Administration and Trump's America First policy was popular specifically because many Americans are fearful of involvement in another Middle Eastern conflict.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has caused Americans many problems. He invaded the small nation of Georgia, and invaded the much larger neighbor of Ukraine. The United States has protested and imposed sanctions, but has not used military force against this nuclear-armed enemy.



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Saddam Hussein: Dictator of Iraq from 1979 until 2003. He was a strong Arab nationalist and led his nation during the Iran-Iraq War as well as the First Gulf War and the American invasion of Iraq after 9/11.

Colin Powell: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the First Gulf War and later Secretary of State under George W. Bush at the start of the War on Terror.

Madeleine Albright: Secretary of State under Bill Clinton in the 1990s. She was the first woman to hold the position and a strong advocate of military intervention in the Balkans to prevent genocide.

Vladimir Putin: President of Russia. He believes that Russia should rebuild its power in the world and has led his nation in attacks on neighbors Georgia and Ukraine, as well as ordered the interference in American and other European nations' elections.



KEY CONCEPTS

Genocide: Mass murder in an attempt to eliminate an entire population of people. The Holocaust of Jews in Europe during World War II is one example.

Russian Sanctions: Restrictions on Russian business dealings implemented by Congress after the Russian invasion of Crimea and Ukraine in 2014. They negatively impacted the Russian economy and are one reason Russia interfered in the American election in 2016. Sanctions were established again in 2021 as punishment for cyber-hacking.

America First: President Trump's foreign policy. He generally has advocated isolationism, but has used the military to intervene in some cases, such as in Syria.



TREATIES

Camp David Accords, Oslo Accords & Abraham Accords: Peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors that were negotiated with help from American presidents.

Dayton Accords: Peace agreement signed in 1995 that ended the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. President Bill Clinton was influential in the negotiations and American airstrikes against the Serbian military helped convince Serbians to negotiate.



LOCATIONS

The Balkans: Region in southeastern Europe made up of many small nations. It marks the boundary between Christian Europe and the Muslim Middle East and has traditionally been a source of conflict throughout history. World War II started there and it was the site of intense civil wars following the collapse of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War.

Serbia: Christian Slavic nation in the Balkans. It is the center and largest nation to be formed after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War and was the aggressor in the wars during the 1990s against its neighbors Bosnia and Kosovo.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Independent nation that was formed in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War. It was the site of intense civil war and genocide as Christian Serbs murdered Muslims. The war concluded with the Dayton Accords in 1995.

Kosovo: Independent nation that was formed in the Balkans after the fall of Yugoslavia at the end of the Cold War. Its population is primarily ethnic Albanian and the United States led NATO in a bombing campaign to prevent Serbia from carrying out mass murder.

Somalia: Nation in the east of Africa. The government failed there and the United States has tried at various times to provide humanitarian aid. In 1992, American soldiers carried out a failed mission in which 19 American soldiers died trying to protect UN workers.

Rwanda: Small nation in east-central Africa that was the site of genocide in 1994. President Bill Clinton and the United States was criticized for not intervening to stop the massacre.

Libya: Arab nation in North Africa. For many years it was ruled by dictator Muammar Gaddafi until he was overthrown during a revolution that grew out of the Arab Spring. Airstrikes by American, French and other nations protected civilians during the revolution and weakened Gaddafi's forces.

Syria: Arab nation at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It borders both Iraq and Israel and is the site of the worst civil war that resulted from the Arab Spring protests. The United States has been reluctant to become fully involved in the conflict.

Ukraine: Nation in the far east of Europe bordering Russia. It was an important part of the Soviet Union but is not torn between pro-European and pro-Russian factions. Crimea was a part of this nation until Russia invaded and it is the site of ongoing Russian intervention.

Crimea: Peninsula in the south of Ukraine jutting out into the Black Sea. It was part of Russia until 1954 and was retaken by force by Russian forces in 2014 under the direction of Vladimir Putin. The United States protested and implemented sanctions against Russia, but took no military action to stop Russia's move to annex the territory.



EVENTS

The First Gulf War: Conflict in 1990 between Iraq and an American-led international coalition after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. It was the first major test of American foreign policy after the Cold War.

Arab Spring: A series of protests and uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East beginning in 2010 focused on the overthrow of corrupt, dictatorial regimes. Most of the uprisings have turned into violent civil wars with only Tunisia have converted to a democracy.

2011 Airstrikes in Libya: Attacks by American and 26 other nations on Libyan government forces under the command of Gaddafi in order to stop the slaughter of civilians during the Libyan Civil War.

Benghazi Attack: Murder of Ambassador J. Christopher Stephens and two other Americans in 2012 in Libya. The event was a major embarrassment for President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and hurt her 2016 presidential campaign.

Syrian Civil War: Ongoing war within Syria between government forces, anti-government opposition forces, terrorist groups, Americans, Russians, Iranians, and a variety of other players. The war has resulted in an enormous humanitarian crisis and millions of refugees.

2

S E C O N D Q U E S T I O N IS THE WAR ON TERROR W O R T H T H E C O S T ?



How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

INTRODUCTION

The dominant foreign policy issue of the 2000s and 2010s has been the War on Terror. Begun when al-Qaeda attacked the United States on September 11, 2001, the War on Terror has extended to distant battlefields and in classrooms, courtrooms and halls of power.

In addition to foreign terrorism, Americans also are dealing with terrorists who come from within, especially a dangerous epidemic of mass shootings, as well as an increase in overall gun violence.

To counter these threats we have gone to war in the Middle East, but also implemented new policies at home. We created the Department of Homeland Security and most visibly the TSA to protect the nation's airlines. We passed laws that gave the government the power to monitor our cell phone usage, and then after realizing how intrusive the government had become, we took that power away again. Even now, we debate the balance between the right to own guns for sport and the right to be safe from violence perpetrated by others.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and cost Americans trillions of dollars. The thousands of gun deaths at home have produced no significant change in the law, and little change in public opinion about gun regulation.

For all that we've spent, and all we've endured, are we safer? What do you think? Has the War on Terror been worth the cost?

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Some in America have grown to fear the government, especially after trust in the nation's leaders was rocked during the 1970s by the Watergate and other scandals. Those fears appeared to be confirmed in the spring of 1993, when federal and state law enforcement authorities laid siege to the compound of a religious sect called the **Branch Davidians** near Waco, Texas. The group, which believed the end of world was approaching, was suspected of violating gun laws and various members of the sect had resisted arrest. A standoff developed that lasted nearly two months and was captured on television each day. Federal official decided to make a final assault on the compound to end the siege. As police moved in, 76 men, women, and children died in a fire set by members of the sect. Many others committed suicide or were killed by fellow sect members.

During the siege, numerous people who held antigovernment views and those who feared that the government would use force to take away their freedom came to satisfy their curiosity or show support for sect members inside the compound. One was Timothy McVeigh, a former army infantry soldier. McVeigh had served in Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, earning a bronze star, but he became disillusioned with the military and the government when he was deemed psychologically unfit for the Army Special Forces. He was convinced that the Branch Davidians were victims of government terrorism, and he and his friend Terry Nichols decided to avenge them.



Branch Davidian Raid: 1993 raid by the FBI and other law enforcement authorities on the compound of a cult group in Waco, Texas after a long standoff. The raid went badly and the cult members set their compound on fire and committed suicide. The raid inspired the Oklahoma City bombing.



Primary Source: Photograph

Charles Porter IV's photograph of a fireman cradling one of the children killed in the Murrah Federal Building attack captured the shock and horror many Americans felt and won the Pulitzer Prize.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Two years later, on the anniversary of the day the Waco compound burned to the ground, McVeigh parked a rented truck full of explosives in front of the **Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building** in Oklahoma City and blew it up. More than 600 people were injured in the attack and 168 died, including 19 children at a daycare center inside. Charles Porter IV, one of the workers in the building was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the photo he snapped of a fireman cradling one of the children who died in the bombing. The image captured the shock, horror and sorrow many Americans felt.

McVeigh hoped that his actions would spark a revolution against government control, but it did not. He and Nichols were both arrested and tried. McVeigh was executed for the worst act of terrorism yet committed on American soil. Just a few months later, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 broke that dark record.

SEPTEMBER 11

Unlike the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma, the September 11 attacks were carried out by foreigners. The group responsible, **al-Qaeda** was not new. In fact, they had already launched attacks against Americans, including an attempted bombing of the World Trade Center a few years before that had failed.

Al-Qaeda was led by **Osama bin Laden**, a wealthy man from Saudi Arabia who had gone to Afghanistan in the 1980s to fight against the Soviet invasion. In Bin Laden's mind, Muslims and their values were under siege from Christians in America and Europe. To be sure, almost no Muslims in the world supported his extreme views, but he found a small following and the conservative government of Afghanistan in the 1990s protected him and his group. They called themselves al-Qaeda and planned and carried out terrorist suicide attacks on American targets.

In 1996, bin Laden personally engineered a plot to assassinate United States President Bill Clinton while the president was visiting the Philippines. However, intelligence agents discovered the plot and alerted the Secret Service. Agents later discovered a bomb planted under a bridge.

On August 7, 1998, al-Qaeda **bombed the US embassies** in the East African nations of Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people, including 12 Americans. In retaliation, President Clinton ordered an attack with cruise missiles against an al-Qaeda base in Afghanistan.

In 2000, al-Qaeda militants in Yemen **bombed the missile destroyer USS Cole** in a suicide attack, killing 17 navy servicemen and damaging the vessel while it lay offshore. Inspired by the success of such a brazen attack, al-Qaeda's command core began to prepare for an attack on the United States itself.



Bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building: 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building killing 168 people. It was the most deadly terrorist attack in America before 9/11 and the most deadly every carried out by American citizens.



Al-Qaeda: Terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden that carried out the 9/11 attacks.



Osama bin Laden: Leader of al-Qaeda and mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks. He was eventually killed by American special forces in 2011.



1998 Embassy Bombings: Attacks by al-Qaeda suicide bombers against Americans in Kenya and Tanzania in Africa before the 9/11 attack.



USS Cole Attack: Suicide bombing of an American navy destroyer in 2000 by al-Qaeda.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Shortly after takeoff on the morning of **September 11, 2001**, teams of hijackers seized control of four American airliners. Two of the airplanes were flown into the twin towers of the **World Trade Center** in Lower Manhattan. Morning news programs assumed it had been an accident. Turning their cameras on the burning building, they captured and aired live footage of the second plane as it barreled into the other tower in a flash of fire and smoke. Less than two hours later, the heat from the crash and the explosion of jet fuel caused the upper floors of both buildings to collapse onto the lower floors, destroying the towers and damaging many of the surrounding skyscrapers as well. The passengers and crew on both planes, as well as 2,606 people on the ground died, including 343 New York City firefighters who rushed in to save victims shortly before the towers collapsed.

The third hijacked plane was flown into the **Pentagon**, the headquarters of the military, just outside Washington, DC, killing everyone on board and 125 people on the ground. The fourth plane, also heading towards Washington, crashed in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, when passengers, aware of the other attacks, attempted to storm the cockpit and disarm the hijackers. Everyone on board was killed.



 **September 11, 2001:** The most deadly terrorist attack in American history. Al-Qaeda members hijacked four airlines and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon across the river from Washington, DC. A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania when passengers attempted to retake control.

 **World Trade Center:** Largest skyscrapers in America in 2001 before they collapsed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

 **Pentagon:** Headquarters of the American military. The large building is across the Potomac River from Washington, DC and was the target of one of the hijacked planes in the 9/11 attack.

Primary Source: Photograph

Firefighters raised an American flag on the rubble of the collapsed World Trade Center. Americans were enormously unified in the wake of the attack and supportive of President Bush. This photograph has often been compared to the images of the flag raising on Iwo Jima by marines during World War II.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

THE BUSH DOCTRINE

That evening, President Bush promised the nation that those responsible for the attacks would be brought to justice. Three days later, Congress issued a joint resolution authorizing the president to use all means necessary against the individuals, organizations, or nations involved in the attacks. On September 20, in an address to a joint session of Congress, **Bush declared war on terrorism**, blamed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden for the attacks, and demanded that the radical Islamic fundamentalists who ruled Afghanistan, the Taliban, turn bin Laden over or face attack by the United States. This speech encapsulated what became known as the **Bush Doctrine**, the belief that the United States has the right to protect itself from terrorist acts by engaging in pre-emptive wars or ousting hostile governments in favor of friendly, preferably democratic, regimes.

World leaders and millions of their citizens expressed support for the United States and condemned the deadly attacks. Russian president Vladimir Putin characterized them as a bold challenge to humanity itself. German chancellor Gerhard Schroder said the events of that day were “not only attacks on the people in the United States, our friends in America, but also against the entire civilized world, against our own freedom, against our own values, values which we share with the American people.” Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and a veteran of several bloody struggles against Israel, was dumbfounded by the news and announced to reporters in Gaza, “We completely condemn this very dangerous attack, and I convey my condolences to the American people, to the American president and to the American administration.”

THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

When it became clear that the mastermind behind the attack was Osama bin Laden, the full attention of the United States turned to Afghanistan and the government there that was protecting him. Like many others from around the Islamic world, bin Laden had come to Afghanistan to help a group called the **Taliban** fight to oust the Soviets during the 1980s. Ironically, both bin Laden and the Taliban had received support from the United States since the war there was one of the many proxy fights of the Cold War. By the late 1980s, the Soviets and the Americans had both left, but not bin Laden.

When the Soviets left, the Taliban took over the government of Afghanistan and ran it as a strict Islamic theocracy, applying extreme interpretations of Muslim teaching to civil law. Many of their ideas seemed draconian to Americans, such as refusing to allow girls to attend school, or even leave their homes without a male relative escort. Those who dared to break these laws or speak out against them were beaten.



War on Terror: The fight against al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other terrorist groups that has dominated American foreign policy after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.



Bush Doctrine: The belief that the United States has the right to engage in preemptive war and to use force without the help of allies is acceptable.



Taliban: Ultra-conservative Muslim group that took over the government of Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion ended. They harbored Osama bin Laden and were defeated by the United States in 2002, but have since waged an insurgency against the American occupation and new Afghan government.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

President George W. Bush demanded that the Taliban turn over bin Laden and the other members of al-Qaeda, and when they refused, **he ordered an invasion**. The United States formed an alliance with the Afghan Northern Alliance, a coalition of tribal leaders opposed to the Taliban and by November of 2001, only two months after the terrorist attacks, the Taliban had been ousted from power. Osama bin Laden and his followers had already escaped across the Afghan border into Pakistan, however, where they remained hidden for many years.



War in Afghanistan: War that began in 2002 in an attempt to capture the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attack. It continued on as a war against the Taliban insurgency and is now the longest war in American history.

Primary Source: Photograph

An American soldier in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan turned out to be the longest in American history.

THE IRAQ WAR

At the same time that the military was taking control of Afghanistan, the Bush administration was looking to a new and larger war with Iraq. Relations between the United States and Iraq had been strained since the Gulf War a decade earlier. Economic sanctions imposed on Iraq by the United Nations, and American attempts to foster internal revolts against President Saddam Hussein's government had further tainted the relationship. A group of advisors within George W. Bush's administration, sometimes labeled **neoconservatives**, or neocons, believed Iraq's resistance in the face of overwhelming American military superiority represented a dangerous model for terrorist groups around the world. Powerful members of this faction, including Vice President **Dick Cheney** and Secretary of Defense **Donald Rumsfeld**, believed the time to strike Iraq and solve this festering problem was right then in the wake of 9/11. Others, like Secretary of State Colin Powell, a highly respected veteran of the Vietnam War and former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were more cautious about initiating an attack.



Neoconservatives: A group of Republican advisors to President George W. Bush who advocated for the invasion of Iraq and argued that it was morally acceptable to invade a nation that had not attacked the United States in order to prevent possible future attacks.



Richard "Dick" Cheney: Vice President for George W. Bush. He was a strong supporter of the Iraq War.



Donald Rumsfeld: First Secretary of Defense for George W. Bush. He was a strong supporter of the Iraq War but later resigned when it went poorly.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

President Bush himself had singled out Iraq as one of the America's most significant enemies in his State of the Union Speech in January 2002, when he called Iraq, Iran and North Korea an **Axis of Evil**. Borrowing on both the name for America's enemies in World War II and Reagan's famous nickname for the Soviet Union, the Axis of Evil had a nice ring to it, and Bush returned again and again to this simple way of labeling America's adversaries during the rest of his presidency.

Attacking Iraq was a difficult decision for many people in the United States. On one hand, no one thought that Saddam Hussein was a good person, and it was clear that he had done terrible things to both his own people and his neighbors. On the other hand, he had not directly attacked America, nor had he supported terrorists. Many wondered if it was legal or moral to attack first.

Neoconservatives who favored preemptive action won, and the argument for war was gradually laid out for the American people. The immediate impetus to the invasion, the neocons argued, was the fear that Hussein was stockpiling **weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)**. Specifically they claimed that Hussein had nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons capable of wreaking great havoc, especially if he used them against Israel. Hussein had in fact used chemical weapons during his war with Iran in the 1980s, and against the Kurds, an ethnic minority group who opposed his government in northern Iraq in 1988.

Following the Gulf War, inspectors from the United Nations Special Commission and International Atomic Energy Agency had located and destroyed stockpiles of Iraqi weapons. Those arguing for a new Iraqi invasion insisted that Saddam Hussein had been able to hide nuclear weapons. President Bush himself told the nation in October 2002 that the United States was "facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud."

The head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, Hans Blix, dismissed these claims. Blix argued that while Saddam Hussein was not being entirely forthright, he did not appear to be in possession of WMDs. Despite Blix's findings and his own earlier misgivings, Secretary of State Colin Powell argued in 2003 before the United Nations General Assembly that Hussein had violated UN resolutions. Much of his evidence relied on secret information provided by an informant that was later proven to be false. On March 17, 2003, the United States cut off all relations with Iraq. Two days later, in a coalition with Great Britain, Australia, and Poland, the United States began Operation Iraqi Freedom with an **invasion of Iraq**.

Other arguments supporting the invasion noted the ease with which the operation could be accomplished. In February 2002, some in the



Axis of Evil: President George W. Bush's nickname for Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.



Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs): Name for weapons that can kill large numbers of people in a single attack such as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.



Iraq War: 2003-2014 war initiated by President George W. Bush in an effort to capture WMDs held by Saddam Hussein and eventually concluded by President Obama. It was always controversial and ultimately very unpopular.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Department of Defense were suggesting the war would be “a cakewalk.” In November, reference to the short and successful First Gulf War, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told the American people it was absurd, as some were claiming, that the conflict would degenerate into a long, drawn-out quagmire. “Five days or five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn’t going to last any longer than that,” he insisted. “It won’t be a World War III.” And, just days before the start of combat operations in 2003, Vice President Cheney announced that American forces would likely “be greeted as liberators,” and the war would be over in “weeks rather than months.” Early in the conflict, these predictions seemed to be coming true. The march into Bagdad went fairly smoothly. Americans back home watched on television as American soldiers and the Iraqi people worked together to topple statues of Saddam Hussein around the capital.

The reality, however, was far more complex. While American deaths had been few, thousands of Iraqis had died. Even those who did not like Saddam Hussein, did not like the idea of Americans invading their homeland and killing their fellow citizens.

The destruction of Saddam Hussein’s regime had other unintended consequences. Iraq is a large country with many different groups of people. There are Sunni and Shia Muslims within its borders. These two groups have sometimes gone to war with one another. A large Kurdish minority in the North of Iraq had for many years wanted independence from the central government. While he was in power, Hussein had ruled as a dictator and kept all of these groups in line with force. Without his unifying presence, they all began jockeying for power.



Primary Source: Photograph

Although he never said the words “mission accomplished” the banner behind him gave Americans the impression that President Bush thought the war was over. Later when the insurgency in Iraq dragged on, the speech was used by his political rivals to demonstrate the failure of his foreign policy team to prepare for what would happen in Iraq after the initial military victory against Saddam Hussein’s forces.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Bush and his advisors had not anticipated a long war and had not prepared for a long period of occupation. They had also not prepared for the inevitable problems of law and order, or for the violent conflicts that emerged between groups within Iraq who began to compete for power after Saddam Hussein was gone. Bush proudly announced victory in May 2003, on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln with a banner proclaiming **Mission Accomplished** prominently displayed behind him, but the celebration proved premature. Although Bush stated at the time, “Our mission continues” and “We have difficult work to do in Iraq,” he also stated that it was the end to major combat operations in Iraq. Bush never uttered the phrase “Mission Accomplished.” However, Bush’s assertion and the sign itself haunted his presidency as fighting in Iraq continued. The vast majority of casualties, both military and civilian, occurred after the speech.

GROWING DISCONTENT

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Americans had rallied around their president, giving Bush approval ratings of 90%. Even following the first few months of the Iraq War, his approval rating remained historically high at approximately 70%. But as the 2004 presidential election approached, opposition to the war in Iraq began to grow. The president was persistently dogged by rising criticism of the violence of the Iraq War and the fact that his administration’s claims of WMDs had been greatly overstated. In the end, no such weapons were ever found.

These criticisms were amplified by growing international concern over the treatment of prisoners at the **Guantanamo Bay detention camp**. American authorities did not want to bring captured terrorist suspects from Afghanistan to the United States because they would be subject to American law and guaranteed a right to lawyers and a trial. Nor did they want to leave these potential terrorists in Afghanistan or Iraq where they feared local authorities might set them free. Instead, 779 prisoners were transported to the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, the last bit of land on Cuba the United States controlled. Many people in the United States and around the world criticized the Bush administration for finding a loophole around the law. Criticism went further when it was revealed that the prisoners were being tortured in order to extract information. For Americans who had been tortured as prisoners in Vietnam, including Senator John McCain, finding out that their own nation was repeating that terrible practice came as a shock and tremendous disappointment. When Barack Obama ran for president in 2008, he explicitly promised to end the practice and close the detention camp at Guantanamo Bay. Although torture did stop, the camp remained open throughout both his and Donald Trump’s presidencies. As of January 2021, 40 prisoners were still held there, although President Biden announced that we wanted to close the camp.

There was also widespread disgust when photographs surfaced showing the unauthorized torture of Iraqis by American troops at the **Abu Ghraib prison**



Bush’s Mission Accomplished

Speech: Speech by George W. Bush after the successful invasion of Iraq and destruction of Saddam Hussein’s government in 2003. It became a symbol of his problems in Iraq after the insurgency began”



Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp:

Prison built to house terrorists captured in Afghanistan and elsewhere. It has been criticized because the prisoners there are not guaranteed a trial and were tortured during the George W. Bush Presidency.



Abu Ghraib Prison:

Prison in Iraq that was the site of torture by American guards. Photos of the incidents were leaked and turned many against the war, and many around the world against the United States and its war in Iraq.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

in Iraq. Just as the United States had lost moral authority after the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam, America was losing its moral authority to fight for freedom and justice in the War on Terror.

Despite these challenges, George W. Bush won reelection against Senator John Kerry in 2004. Bush's reelection meant that the occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq continued.

THE IRAQI INSURGENCY

In March 2004, an ambush by Iraqi insurgents of a convoy of private military contractors from Blackwater USA and the subsequent torture and mutilation of the four captured mercenaries shocked the American public. But the event also highlighted the growing **insurgency against the American occupation**, and the escalating sectarian conflict between competing groups of Iraqis. Just as importantly, the American campaign in Iraq had diverted resources from the war against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan where troops were no closer to capturing Osama bin Laden than they had been years before.

As the United States and our ally the United Kingdom tried to secure Iraq and enable the development of a new government, foreign fighters from around the Middle East as well as al-Qaeda in Iraq, an affiliated al-Qaeda, added to the anti-American and anti-British insurgency. As the insurgency grew there was a distinct change in targeting. No longer were American and British troops the primary targets. The insurgents began attacking the new Iraqi Security Forces the Americans had been training and hundreds of Iraqi civilians and police officers were killed in a series of massive bombings.



Iraqi Insurgency: Fight by various groups in Iraq against the American occupation. The effort to rebuild the nation after the initial destruction of Saddam Hussein's government went poorly and was not well planned. This phase of the war included numerous suicide bombings against American and Iraqi government targets.

Primary Source: Photograph

American tanks patrol the streets of Tal Afar, Iraq in February 2005. Patrols and convoys of trucks were frequent targets of homemade bombs during the insurgency.



The Americans found themselves in a situation eerily similar to the Vietnam War. Soldiers were looking for enemy fighters who blended in with the

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?



civilians. Although some of the insurgents fought in units, Americans grew frustrated as they read reports of casualties in battles to clear insurgents from towns that had supposedly been pacified just months before.

Hopes for a quick end to the insurgency and a withdrawal of American troops were dashed as suicide bombers struck at targets throughout Iraq. To counter the growing unrest, President Bush proposed a **surge of 21,500 more troops**, a jobs program for Iraqis, and \$1.2 billion for reconstruction programs. He hoped the combination of increased security and the rebuilding of Iraq would win of the **hearts and minds** of the people. Pressure on the United States to make their strategy work was compounded as the United Kingdom withdrew its forces. The war had become so unpopular there that politicians simply quit the job of trying to stabilize Iraq and left the task to the United States.

The Iraq War was a significant issue in the 2008 presidential campaign, especially in the Democratic primary race between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. When they were both senators, Clinton had voted to approve President Bush's proposal to invade Iraq, whereas Obama had opposed it. By 2008, many Democratic primary voters had turned against the war entirely, and although Clinton also took a position against continuing the war, her earlier vote hurt her at the polls. In the general election, the Republican candidate, John McCain had a difficult time countering Obama's claim that the war in Afghanistan had been justified in the hunt for Osama bin Laden, whereas the war in Iraq had been a mistake.

True to his campaign rhetoric, after winning election, President Obama announced a plan to slowly withdraw American troops from Iraq and turn over the nation's security to the Iraqi army they had worked so hard to train. In December of 2011, the last American combat units came home, leaving only a small group of advisors.

In the summer of 2014, President Obama announced the return of American forces to Iraq, but only in the form of air support in an effort to halt the advance of the **Islamic State**, or **ISIS** terrorist army, render humanitarian aid to stranded refugees and stabilize the political situation. A civil war between ISIS and the central government continued for the next three years, until ISIS was crushed near the end of 2017. As of 2020, Iraq was mostly peaceful and the Iraqi parliament voted to request that all foreign troops leave their country.

President Obama also kept his campaign promise to fully prosecute the hunt for terrorists in Afghanistan. Like Bush had done in Iraq, Obama implemented a surge of troops in Afghanistan to fight against Taliban insurgents who threatened to undermine the central government America supported. One great challenge in Afghanistan remained the fact that Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, remained at large. After the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 2002, he had escaped into



The Surge: An increase of 21,500 troops in Iraq in 2007 during the insurgency. It was intended to increase security in order to allow rebuilding programs and government stabilization to take place.



Winning Hearts and Minds: Phrase to describe the counter-insurgency objective of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. It shows an emphasis on convincing the people to support the new government rather than on winning territory.



Islamic State (ISIS): Terrorist group that became powerful in 2014 during the Iraqi insurgency and captured territory in Iraq and Syria during the Syrian Civil War. They practiced an extreme version of Islam and have been the primary target of the American War on Terror in recent years. They were defeated by a combination of Iraqi and American forces.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

the mountains. Finally, in 2011, spy agencies located him hidden in a house in neighboring Pakistan. In April 2011, President Obama ordered a covert operation to kill or capture America's most wanted man, and on May 2, a somber president announced that Navy SEALs had successfully flown into Pakistan without being detected, killed bin Laden, and buried his body at sea.

A full three years later, and five years after becoming president, Obama declared that combat operations in Afghanistan were over. Despite that, over 8,000 American troops remained in the country to help fight terrorists and provide training for the Afghan security forces. President Trump continued to reduce this number, but still maintained an American presence in the country, hoping to prevent the return of the Taliban to power. In 2021, newly-elected President Biden announced that all American troops would leave Afghanistan by September 11, 2021, the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attack that led America into Afghanistan in the first place. It is the longest war in American history, by far.



Primary Source: Photograph

President Obama, along with this foreign policy team and military leaders wait and watch in the White House Situation room for the results of the mission to kill or capture Osama bin Laden.

The years of warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the United States few rewards. In Iraq, 4,475 American soldiers died and 32,220 were wounded. In Afghanistan, the toll through the beginning of 2021 was 2,420 dead and 19,950 wounded. Iraqi and Afghani deaths, including both combatants and civilians could be as high as 2 million. By some estimates, the total monetary cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could easily reach \$4 trillion and the cost of providing medical care for the veterans could easily surpass \$8 billion. For the generation whose taxes will pay this bill, the cost to the nation's wealth and prosperity is still unknown.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

PRIVACY AND SECURITY

The attacks of September 11 awakened many to the reality that the end of the Cold War did not mean an end to violent threats from abroad. Just like the Red Scare of the 1950s, some Americans grew fearful of possible enemies in their midst and there was a rise in hate crimes against Muslim Americans. Fearing that terrorists might strike within the nation's borders again, and aware of the chronic lack of cooperation among different federal law enforcement agencies, President Bush created the Office of Homeland Security in October 2001. The next year, Congress passed the Homeland Security Act, creating the **Department of Homeland Security**, which centralized control over a number of different government functions in order to better defend against threats at home. For most Americans, the most noticeable consequence of the War on Terror is the **Transportation Security Administration (TSA)**. Gone are the days when anyone could go through airport security and meet their friends at the gate.



The Bush administration also pushed the **USA Patriot Act** through Congress, which was intended to give law enforcement agencies the powers they needed to discover terrorist plots and stop attacks before they happened. For some, too much privacy was handed away to the government with the passage of the Patriot Act. For example, the law enabled government agencies to monitor citizens' e-mails and phone conversations without a warrant. Beginning in 2002, the Bush administration implemented a wide-ranging program of warrantless domestic wiretapping run by the **National Security Agency (NSA)**. The program ended when it was exposed by leaks from within the agency and the New York Times published an account of what the government was doing.

 **Department of Homeland Security:** New government department formed after the 9/11 attacks that includes the Coast Guard, TSA, and agencies responsible for customs, border patrol, and immigration.

 **Transportation Security Administration (TSA):** Government agency responsible for security airports and air travel. It was created after the 9/11 attacks and replaced private security guards in the job of inspecting people and baggage on American flights.

Primary Source: Photograph

For most Americans, the TSA is the most visible evidence of the War on Terror.

 **USA Patriot Act:** Law passed in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks that gave law enforcement agencies expanded powers to gather information in order to prevent terrorist attacks. Some of its provisions have been criticized and reversed as invasions of personal freedom and privacy.

 **National Security Agency (NSA):** Government spy agency that has grown during the War on Terror. Unlike the CIA, they do not rely on human spies, but use data collection instead. They carried out the cell phone surveillance program that was widely criticized.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

The struggle between the government's desire for secrecy and the public's right to know what its government is doing in their name has been heightened by the War on Terror. In 2013, a government contractor named **Edward Snowden** stole a trove of intelligence files and turned them over to the press. In June 2013, the first of Snowden's documents were published simultaneously by The Washington Post and The Guardian in London, attracting considerable public attention. The disclosure continued throughout 2013, and a small portion of the estimated full cache of documents was later published by other media outlets worldwide, most notably The New York Times in the United States.

 **Edward Snowden:** Government contractor who stole and released a trove of documents that detailed some of the activities in the War on Terror. He is seen by some as a traitor and by others as a hero depending on one's position on government spying and secrecy.

Primary Source: Editorial Cartoon

This cartoon pokes fun at President Obama's efforts to reign in the expansive surveillance programs at the NSA, and at the extensive nature of the NSA programs themselves. For many Americans, learning about what the NSA knew and how much information it had collected was frightening and made them question how much privacy and individual freedom they were willing to give up in the name of protection from potential terror attacks.



These media reports have shed light on several secret treaties in which the United States and its allies agreed to share information about their citizens. For many, Snowden's actions and the publication of the documents he stole reminded them of the Pentagon Papers, which had also revealed government secrecy and lies about the Vietnam War. For the Obama Administration, Snowden's actions were dangerous. President Barack Obama made a public appearance on national television where he told Americans that "We don't have a domestic spying program" and that "There is no spying on Americans". Prosecutors charged Snowden with espionage and theft of government property. He fled to Russia where Vladimir Putin granted him asylum. For those who support the government's efforts to root out terrorists, Snowden is a traitor. For those who believe the government has taken too much power, Snowden is celebrated as a hero for exposing illegal government activities.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

GUN VIOLENCE

In addition to international terrorism and home-grown politically motivated bombings, the nation has recently been plagued with a uniquely American form of terror: mass shootings. The Washington Post began collecting and sharing statistics about mass shootings beginning with the murder of 18 people at the University of Texas in 1966. However, there were only a few such incidents each year, with relatively few casualties, until the 1990s. Beginning with the 1999 attack by two students on **Columbine High School** in Colorado in which 17 people died, such incidents have become more frequent and more deadly. In the past ten years there have been multiple mass shootings each year, not only at schools, but also at workplaces, theaters, nightclubs, military bases, and churches.

The deadliest school shootings were in 2007 at Virginia Tech in which 33 people died and at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 when 28 people were killed. The deadliest of all attacks was the **2017 Las Vegas attack** during a concert in which 61 people were murdered and 849 more were injured. Second most deadly was the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting which left 50 people dead.

Although mass shootings are covered extensively in the media, they account for only a small fraction of gun-related deaths in the United States. In 2018, 39,740 people died from gun-related injuries. Of these deaths 61% were suicides, 13,958 homicides, and over 1,000 deaths due to accidents or negligence. Additionally, another 115,000 people were injured. According to a study published in 2016, compared to 22 other high-income nations, the American gun-related murder rate is 25 times higher. Although it has half the population of the other 22 nations combined, the United States had 82% of all gun deaths, 90% of all women killed with guns, 91% of children under 14 and 92% of young people between ages 15 and 24 killed with guns.

In 2020, Gallup reported that 44% of Americans live in homes with guns, and in the United States today, there are more guns than people. Gun violence is most common in poor urban areas and frequently associated with gang violence, although as the highly publicized mass shootings show, gun ownership and gun violence is spread through the nation.

THE SECOND AMENDMENT

Naturally, many people have sought ways to reduce gun violence, most recently by trying to pass laws that reduce access to guns. However, guns have a special place in the nation's history and politics, stemming back to the founding of the country. Because Americans owned guns in the 1770s, they were able to form militias and fight against British occupation. Eventually, an army of citizens defeated the mighty British army and the United States came into existence. The Founding Fathers who wrote the new nation's Constitution recognized the importance of the relationship between a



Columbine High School Shooting: 1999 attack at a Colorado high school that resulted in 17 deaths.

Although not the very first mass shooting, it inspired many copycat attacks.



2017 Las Vegas Shooting: Most deadly mass shooting in the United States. 61 people were killed at an outdoor concert.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

government and citizens with weapons. In order to prevent the new government from abusing the rights of the people, they added the **Second Amendment** to the Constitution, guaranteeing the right of Americans to own guns. The Second Amendment reads: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” For most of America’s history, the Second Amendment has been mostly taken for granted. Americans were farmers and explorers and gun ownership was common. Recently, however, as cities have grown and urban crime increased, Americans have started rethinking the meaning of the Second Amendment.



Second Amendment: Constitutional amendment that guarantees citizens the right to own and carry guns.



Primary Source: Photograph

A gun show in Houston, Texas. A frequent target of gun regulation activists is the fact that people who want to buy guns do not have to complete background checks when making their purchases at gun shows.

Today, gun politics is defined by two primary opposing ideologies about civilian gun ownership. People who advocate for gun control support increasing regulation of gun ownership. These people point to the first half of the Second Amendment, noting that it guarantees the right to bear arms in order to participate in a well-regulated militia. For these people, the Amendment clearly provides a reason for gun ownership. Guns that are unnecessary for the purpose of joining a militia should, they argue, be restricted or banned.

Alternatively, people who advocate for gun rights point to the second half of the Amendment as evidence that the government has no power to limit gun ownership. The Supreme Court normally settles disagreements about the meaning of the Constitution, but has only recently taken any cases about gun rights, and when they did, they sided with the view that gun ownership is a fundamental right. In the **District of Columbia v. Heller** decision in 2008, the Court struck down a ban on handguns on the basis that the Second Amendment does not give the government the right to pick and choose



District of Columbia v. Heller: 2008 Supreme Court case that upheld the right own and carry guns (by striking down a ban on handguns) but affirmed the government’s power to regulate gun ownership.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

which types of guns people are allowed to own. However, the Court also stated in the Heller decision that the right to bear arms was not unlimited. It remains to be seen what restrictions they might be willing to uphold in future decisions.

In other nations where the right to own guns is not written the constitution, mass shootings have resulted in quick political action. After a mass shooting at a mosque in New Zealand, that nation's government banned almost all forms of military-style weapons. In Australia, a mass shooting resulted in an almost universal ban on gun ownership. In the United Kingdom, gun ownership is so rare that even police officers do not carry guns.

In the United States today, the **National Rifle Association (NRA)** serves as a powerful protector of gun rights. They are a well-funded interest group that supports political candidates and works to affect public opinion about gun ownership. The NRA started their lobbying practices in conjunction with the conservative revolution in the 1970s and has a mutually supportive relationship with the Republican Party. Most Republicans support gun rights, and the NRA has been an important donor to many Republican politicians. In 2016 alone they spent \$412 million on political activities. Like the Moral Majority, the NRA produces voter information materials that encourage people to make decisions on Election Day based on a candidate's stance on gun rights.



National Rifle Association (NRA): Powerful interest group that lobbies for gun rights and brings gun rights cases to court.



Primary Source: Photograph

Students protest gun violence outside the White House in Washington, DC. After the shooting in Parkland, Florida, survivors from Stoneman Douglas High School organized a student movement to advocate for legislative change.

After the 2018 **Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting** in Parkland, Florida that left 17 dead, student survivors organized a movement to demand passage of gun control measures. Many of the students blamed the NRA and the politicians who accept money from them for preventing



Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting: 2018 mass shooting that inspired a student movement for gun regulation.

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?



enactment of any gun control proposals after previous shootings. An NRA spokesman responded by defending gun ownership and blaming the shooting on the FBI and the media. The NRA also said in a statement that the incident was proof that more guns were immediately required in schools in the hands both security guards and teachers in order to “harden” them against similar assaults in the future. A Florida law passed in the wake of the shooting, which includes a provision to ban the sale of firearms to people under 21 was immediately challenged in federal court by the NRA on the grounds that it is “violating the constitutional rights of 18- to 21-year-olds.”

Based on events of the past 20 years, both the danger of gun violence, and the debate over gun ownership seem to be part of America’s future.

CONCLUSION

Over time, Americans have held different ideas about what it means to be free. When the nation was founded, freedom meant the freedom from foreign domination. In the 1800s, freedom was about the right to move west and start a new life in the untamed wilderness. In the 1930s, Americans wanted to be free from hunger and turned to their government to provide a New Deal to ensure this right. In the Cold War, we wanted our government to protect our existence. We wanted freedom from death in a nuclear war.

In the past two decades, freedom has again changed meanings. Franklin Roosevelt’s old “freedom from fear” has taken on new significance as we want our government to protect us from terrorism. Of course, as resistance to surveillance measures such as the USA Patriot Act, and resistance to gun regulation both show, we do not want so much protection that our freedom of privacy or right to protect ourselves is infringed.

Thus, the War on Terror has had many casualties. We have given up some of our privacy and some of our rights to purchase more security. We have sacrificed billions of dollars and spend thousands of lives in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in an effort to root out those who attacked us. In the process, the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay and stories of torture have damaged the reputation of the United States in the eyes of the world.

Is it worth it? Are the things we have lost equal to the security we have won? Are you willing to wait in long lines at TSA checkpoints in order to be sure no hijackers are on your flight? Would you be comfortable walking through a metal detector every morning before school if it meant that you knew none of your fellow students had guns hidden in their bags?

What do you think? Has the War on Terror been worth the cost?

2 IS THE WAR ON TERROR WORTH THE COST?



SUMMARY

BIG IDEA: Since 2001, the primary foreign policy concern of American presidents has been to prevent terrorist attacks. American forces have fought long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with mixed results. Back home, Americans have had to give up some of their privacy in exchange for protection. As mass shootings have become more frequent, a debate has grown about balancing safety and Second Amendment rights.

In the 1990s, a major terrorist attack took place in Oklahoma City at a federal office building. The attackers were anti-government veterans.

The September 11 attacks were carried out by al-Qaeda, a group operating out of Afghanistan that was led by Osama bin Laden. They hijacked airplanes and crashed them into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and into the Pentagon near Washington, DC. A fourth plane crashed when the passengers tried to retake control from the hijackers. It was the worst terrorist attack in American history.

Al-Qaeda was not new. They had attacked two American embassies in Africa and a navy ship. President Clinton had ordered a missile strike on one of their bases in response.

After 9/11 President George W. Bush proposed the Bush Doctrine, arguing that America should strike first to prevent attacks. This idea justified war against Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States invaded Afghanistan in order to destroy Al-Qaeda. The war ended quickly as American forces toppled the Taliban government. Unfortunately, creating a new, stable government proved difficult, and American forces spent 20 years in Afghanistan trying to support the new government and fight Taliban insurgents.

Bush decided to invade Iraq, claiming that Saddam Hussein still had chemical and nuclear weapons. The invasion went well, but getting rid of Hussein, who had kept everyone in line, led to fighting among groups within the country and an insurgency against the American occupation. The ongoing war ruined Bush's popularity. Revelations of torture of prisoners in Iraq and the detention of terror suspects in Guantanamo Bay upset many Americans and damaged America's reputation in the world.

In order to find terrorists and stop their attacks, Congress passed laws permitting extensive surveillance of American citizens. Eventually some of this power was taken away as people learned how much privacy they were giving up in the name of security.

In recent years mass shootings have come to be a new sort of terror and political movements have started to try to limit access to guns. Students form an important anti-gun group, while the NRA serves as a well-funded pro-gun lobby. The Second Amendment guarantees Americans' right to own guns, which makes gun regulation less likely in the United States than in other nations.



EVENTS

Branch Davidian Raid: 1993 raid by the FBI and other law enforcement authorities on the compound of a cult group in Waco, Texas after a long standoff. The raid went badly and the cult members set their compound on fire and committed suicide. The raid inspired the Oklahoma City bombing.

Bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building: 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building killing 168 people. It was the most deadly terrorist attack in America before 9/11 and the most deadly every carried out by American citizens.

1998 Embassy Bombings: Attacks by al-Qaeda suicide bombers against Americans in Kenya and Tanzania in Africa before the 9/11 attack.

USS Cole Attack: Suicide bombing of an American navy destroyer in 2000 by al-Qaeda.

September 11, 2001: The most deadly terrorist attack in American history. Al-Qaeda members hijacked four airlines and flew them into the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon across the river from Washington, DC. A fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania when passengers attempted to retake control.

War on Terror: The fight against al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and other terrorist groups that has dominated American foreign policy after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.

Invasion of Afghanistan: War that began in 2002 in an attempt to capture the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attack. It continued on as a war against the Taliban insurgency and is now the longest war in American history.

Iraq War: 2003-2014 war initiated by President George W. Bush in an effort to capture WMDs held by Saddam Hussein and eventually concluded by President Obama. It was always controversial and ultimately very unpopular.

Iraqi Insurgency: Fight by various groups in Iraq against the American occupation. The effort to rebuild the nation after the initial destruction of Saddam Hussein's government went poorly and was not well planned. This phase of the war included numerous suicide bombings against American and Iraqi government targets.

The Surge: An increase of 21,500 troops in Iraq in 2007 during the insurgency. It was intended to increase security in order to allow rebuilding programs and government stabilization to take place.

Columbine High School Shooting: 1999 attack at a Colorado high school that resulted in 17 deaths. Although not the very first mass shooting, it inspired many copycat attacks.

2017 Las Vegas Shooting: Most deadly mass shooting in the United States. 61 people were killed at an outdoor concert.

Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting: 2018 mass shooting that inspired a student movement for gun regulation.



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Al-Qaeda: Terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden that carried out the 9/11 attacks.

Osama bin Laden: Leader of al-Qaeda and mastermind of the 9/11 terror attacks. He was eventually killed by American special forces in 2011.

Taliban: Ultra-conservative Muslim group that took over the government of Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion ended. They harbored Osama bin Laden and were defeated by the United States in 2002, but have since waged an insurgency against the American occupation and new Afghan government.

Neoconservatives: A group of Republican advisors to President George W. Bush who advocated for the invasion of Iraq and argued that it was morally acceptable to invade a nation that had not attacked the United States in order to prevent possible future attacks.

Richard "Dick" Cheney: Vice President for George W. Bush. He was a strong supporter of the Iraq War.

Donald Rumsfeld: First Secretary of Defense for George W. Bush. He was a strong supporter of the Iraq War but later resigned when it went poorly.

Islamic State (ISIS): Terrorist group that became powerful in 2014 during the Iraqi insurgency and captured territory in Iraq and Syria during the Syrian Civil War. They practiced an extreme version of Islam and have been the primary target of the American War on Terror in recent years. They were defeated by a combination of Iraqi and American forces.

Edward Snowden: Government contractor who stole and released a trove of documents that detailed some of the activities in the War on Terror. He is seen by some as a traitor and by others as a hero depending on one's position on government spying and secrecy.

National Rifle Association (NRA): Powerful interest group that lobbies for gun rights and brings gun rights cases to court.



SPEECHES

Bush's Mission Accomplished Speech: Speech by George W. Bush after the successful invasion of Iraq and destruction of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. It became a symbol of his problems in Iraq after the insurgency began.



KEY CONCEPTS

Bush Doctrine: The belief that the United States has the right to engage in preemptive war and to use force without the help of allies is acceptable.

Axis of Evil: President George W. Bush's nickname for Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs): Name for weapons that can kill large numbers of people in a single attack such as nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

Winning Hearts and Minds: Phrase to describe the counter-insurgency objective of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. It shows an emphasis on convincing the people to support the new government rather than on winning territory.



LOCATIONS

World Trade Center: Largest skyscrapers in America in 2001 before they collapsed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Pentagon: Headquarters of the American military. The large building is across the Potomac River from Washington, DC and was the target of one of the hijacked planes in the 9/11 attack.

Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp: Prison built to house terrorists captured in Afghanistan and elsewhere. It has been criticized because the prisoners there are not guaranteed a trial and were tortured during the George W. Bush Presidency.

Abu Ghraib Prison: Prison in Iraq that was the site of torture by American guards. Photos of the incidents were leaked and turned many against the war, and many around the world against the United States and its war in Iraq.



LAWS

USA Patriot Act: Law passed in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks that gave law enforcement agencies expanded powers to gather information in order to prevent terrorist attacks. Some of its provisions have been criticized and reversed as invasions of personal freedom and privacy.

Second Amendment: Constitutional amendment that guarantees citizens the right to own and carry guns.



COURT CASES

District of Columbia v. Heller: 2008 Supreme Court case that upheld the right own and carry guns (by striking down a ban on handguns) but affirmed the government's power to regulate gun ownership.



GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Department of Homeland Security: New government department formed after the 9/11 attacks that includes the Coast Guard, TSA, and agencies responsible for customs, border patrol, and immigration.

Transportation Security Administration (TSA): Government agency responsible for security airports and air travel. It was created after the 9/11 attacks and replaced private security guards in the job of inspecting people and baggage on American flights.

National Security Agency (NSA): Government spy agency that has grown during the War on Terror. Unlike the CIA, they do not rely on human spies, but use data collection instead. They carried out the cell phone surveillance program that was widely criticized.

3

T H I R D Q U E S T I O N WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of our study of American history, we've learned a lot about different groups of people who have shaped our country's history. Native Americans, immigrants, minorities fighting for equal rights, and young people, are just a few of the groups we've studied. However, the future of our country will be shaped by the people who are here now, not by those who have gone before us.

So, who are the American people? It turns out that we are quite different from the Americans who have come before us, and we will be quite different in the coming years. Additionally, it's worth asking how the different generations that make up our nation's population are different from one another, and how that will impact us going forward. A lot has changed in the past 50 years, and those changes have shaped our outlook, willingness to take risks, and values. As we look to the future, we should ask ourselves who we are.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



A CHANGING POPULATION

The United States is the third most populous country in the world, with a population of approximately 331 million in 2020. However, it only makes up about 4.5% of the world's population. While the United States has more than doubled its number of people since 1950, it still pales in comparison to the two most populous countries in the world, China and India.

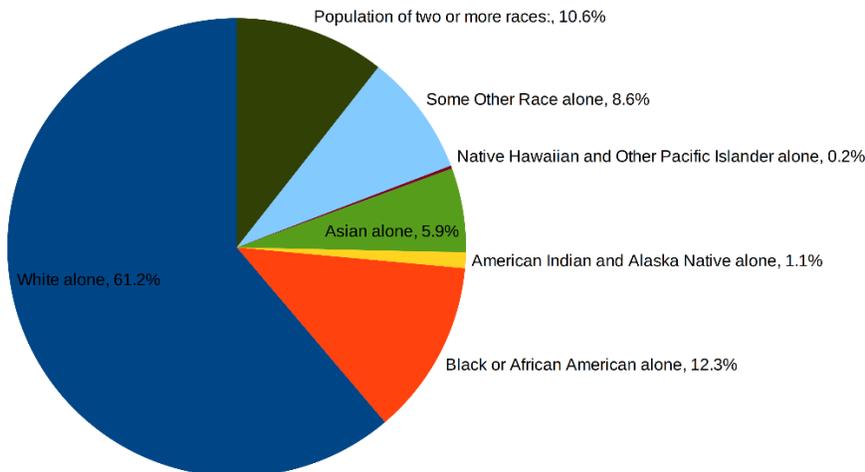
As it is growing, the United States is experiencing significant demographic changes. One of the most notable changes is the ethnic and racial breakdown of the population. White Americans, who have historically been the majority, are projected to fall below 50% of the population by around 2050, at which point the country will be a **minority-majority** nation. Six states are already majority-minority as of 2019: Hawaii, New Mexico, California, Texas, Nevada, and Maryland. Despite the overall growth of minority populations, Whites are expected to continue to be the majority of the elderly population. On the other hand, Hispanics are growing in proportion and are projected to make up about 25% of the population by 2050. The other ethnic and racial groups in the United States are mostly stable, but there is a significant increase in mixed-race Americans, which is expected to reach 20% by 2050.



Minority-Majority: A situation when the largest group within a population makes up less than 50% of the overall population. By 2050 Whites, currently the majority of Americans, are expected to make up less than 50% of the total population making the United States a majority-minority country.

Racial Makeup of the US, 2020 Census.

Source: US Census Bureau, 2022.



Primary Source: Chart

The ethnic breakdown of the US population as of the 2020 Census shows that the country remains a White majority nation, although predictions indicated that the White portion of the country will fall below 50% around 2050.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration has been a significant part of the United States' history, with millions of people from around the world coming to the country to start a new life. While immigration has ebbed and flowed as the country has been more or less open to outsiders, immigration is today a major driver of demographic change.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



The current American policy on permanent immigration is based on four principles: the reunification of families, the admission of immigrants with special skills, the protection of refugees, and the diversity of admissions by country of origin. These principles are rooted in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which abolished the previous national-origin quotas system and established a new immigration policy that focused on family reunification and skilled immigration.

The **reunification** of families is an important principle of American immigration policy, as it allows citizens and permanent residents to sponsor certain family members for immigration to the United States. This principle recognizes the importance of family ties and allows families to be reunited in the United States. The admission of immigrants with special skills is another important principle, as it helps to fill critical labor shortages and drive innovation in the United States. This principle allows American employers to sponsor foreign workers with specialized skills or knowledge for temporary or permanent employment in the United States.

The protection of **refugees** is also a key principle of immigration policy. The United States is committed to providing a safe haven for refugees who are fleeing persecution, war, or violence in their home countries. The government's refugee program is designed to identify and assist refugees who are in need of protection and resettlement in the United States.

The diversity of admissions by country of origin is the final principle of immigration policy. This principle recognizes the importance of diversity in American society and allows for a range of immigrants from different countries and backgrounds to enter the United States. The diversity principle ensures that the United States continues to be a melting pot of cultures and ideas.

The leading source countries for legal immigrants in 2009 were Mexico, China, the Philippines, India, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Vietnam. These countries accounted for over 40% of all legal immigrants to the United States in that year. The primary destination states for legal immigrants in 2009 were California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey. These six states accounted for over 60% of all legal immigrants to the United States in that year. Ten metropolitan areas were the intended residence of 57% of all legal immigrants in 2009, with the New York City region, Los Angeles area and Miami area being the leading destinations.

Immigration has been a significant driver of population growth in the United States, with one-third of the country's population growth due to immigration. Legal immigration to the United States has been influenced by several legal changes over the years, including the **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965**, which abolished national-origin quotas, and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which established penalties for



Reunification: A policy of allowing immigrants to come to the United States if they already have family members legally living in the country. The policy is aimed at keeping families together.



Refugee: A person who has to leave their home to escape persecution, war, or violence.



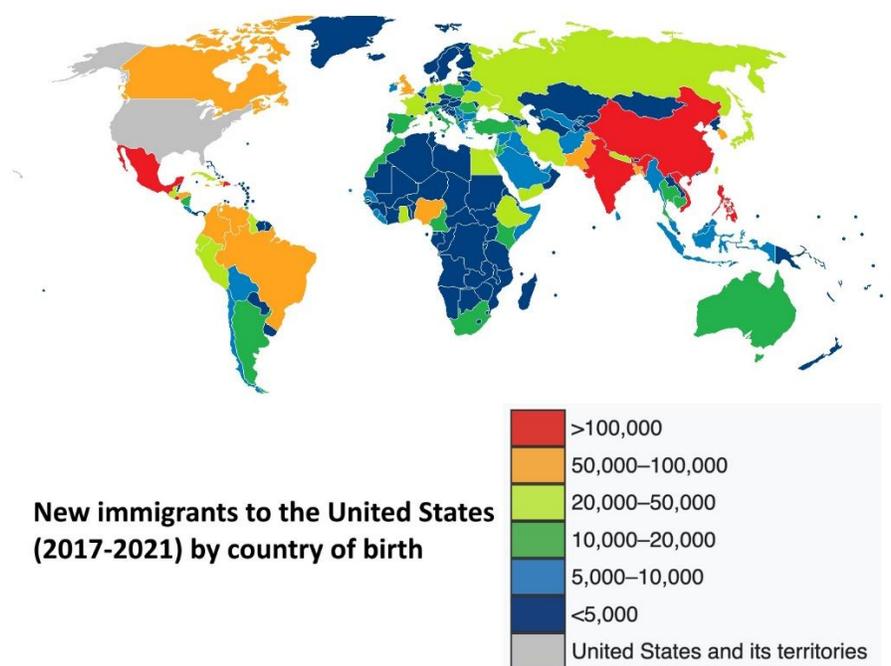
Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Major revision to immigration law passed in 1965 that eliminated national quotas and instead encouraged family reunification. It led to a tremendous increase in immigration from Asia, Latin America and Africa.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



employers who hired undocumented workers. In 2007, a comprehensive immigration reform bill was introduced in the Senate, but it failed to pass.

The issue of immigration remains a contentious and complex one in the United States. While there is broad consensus around the principles of family reunification, skilled immigration, refugee protection, and diversity, there is disagreement over the specific policies and programs that should be put in place to achieve these goals. Some argue that the current legal immigration system is too restrictive and should be expanded, while others argue that it should be tightened to reduce illegal immigration. The issue of immigration is likely to remain a key policy area for debate and discussion in the United States in the years to come.



New immigrants to the United States (2017–2021) by country of birth

Secondary Source: Map

This map clearly indicates that immigration to the United States is now much more ethnically diverse than it was before the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965.

NATIVISM

Throughout the history of the United States, immigration has been a central issue that has sparked both debates and conflicts. Despite the principles of family reunification, skilled immigration, refugee protection, and diversity that guide immigration policy, there have been moments of intense nativism in the country's history. **Nativism** is a political ideology that promotes the interests of native-born or established inhabitants of a country over those of immigrants or newcomers. In the past 30 years, the United States has experienced several instances of nativism that have contributed to tensions and divisions within society.

One example of nativism in the United States is **Prop 187** in California. The ballot initiative was passed in 1994 and aimed to deny public services to undocumented immigrants. Prop 187 would have prevented undocumented



Nativism: A belief that people born in the United States are superior to immigrants.



Prop 187: A 1994 ballot initiative in California, which would have stopped undocumented immigrants from being able to use some public services including education and healthcare. An example of nativist sentiment, the proposal was controversial and did not pass.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

immigrants from accessing public education, non-emergency healthcare, and other services. The initiative was widely seen as discriminatory and unconstitutional, and it was challenged in court. In the end, a federal judge issued an injunction against Prop 187, and it was never implemented. However, the initiative highlighted the nativist sentiments that existed in California and other parts of the country.

Another example of nativism in the United States is the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-Asian hate crimes have increased dramatically since the pandemic began, with verbal harassment, physical assault, and even murder targeting Asian Americans. Many of these hate crimes have been attributed to the false belief that Asian Americans are responsible for the spread of COVID-19. This is just one example of how fear and misinformation can lead to discrimination and violence against immigrants and minority groups.



Primary Source: Photograph

Demonstrators hold signs protesting President Trump's anti-immigrant policies

The rise of far-right parties in Europe and anti-refugee sentiment in various parts of the world have contributed to nativism in the United States. The Trump administration's policies, such as the **Muslim Ban**, the **border wall** with Mexico, and family separation at the border, were seen by many as nativist. The **Alt-Right movement**, characterized by white nationalist and nativist beliefs, also gained attention during the 2016 presidential campaign and has since been associated with hate crimes and violence.

Nativism in the United States is not a new phenomenon, and it has been present throughout the country's history. However, it is important to recognize that nativism is a divisive and harmful ideology that undermines the principles of democracy and equality that the United States was founded

Muslim Ban: Nickname for Executive Order 13769, which was signed by President Donald Trump in 2017. The order restricted entry into the United States for citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries and was widely criticized for being discriminatory.

Border Wall: A nickname for the physical barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border that was a key proposal of candidate Trump during the 2018 presidential election.

Alt-Right Movement: A movement of various far-right groups that emphasizes white nationalism and anti-Semitism. These groups have grown in public exposure during the presidency of Donald Trump.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



upon. The United States has always been a country of immigrants, and it is through the contributions of immigrants that the country has become the vibrant and diverse nation that it is today. It is essential to uphold the values of inclusion, respect, and compassion towards all immigrants and to reject any form of nativism or discrimination.

INTERNAL MIGRATION

Internal migration refers to the movement of people within a country's borders. The United States has a long history of internal migration, with people moving from one region of the country to another in search of better opportunities, more favorable climates, or for other reasons. The Okies of the 1930s and the growth of suburbs in the 1950s are two examples of internal migration. One notable trend in internal migration in recent decades has been the movement of people from the North to the South.

The **Sunbelt** refers to the region in the southern and western parts of the United States, which has seen significant population growth in recent decades. This trend began in the post-World War II era when many people moved to the Sunbelt for jobs and better weather. Many of the Sunbelt states, such as Florida and Arizona, have warm climates that are attractive to retirees and other people looking to escape the cold winters of the North. The growth of the Sunbelt has also coincided with the availability of air conditioning. Additionally, the growth of industries such as technology and finance in cities like Austin, Texas, and Atlanta, Georgia, has contributed to the Sunbelt's appeal. Phoenix, Arizona is currently the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country, increasing in size by 11% between 2010 and 2020.

Another trend in internal migration is the phenomenon of **Snowbirds**. These are people who live in the northern part of the country during the warmer months and then move south for the winter. Many of these Snowbirds are retirees or people with vacation homes in warmer climates such as Florida, Arizona and California.

Military bases are also a significant driver of internal migration, with many bases located in the southern part of the country where a lack of snow makes year-round operations easier. The military is one of the largest employers in the country, and the location of military bases can have a significant impact on local economies. Many service members and their families choose to stay in the area around the base after their service ends, contributing to population growth in these areas.

Changes in the economy, including the closing of factories in the Rust Belt have also contributed to the shift of America's population southward toward new opportunities that don't revolve around manufacturing.

The shift in population from the North to the South has also been reflected in politics. The South has traditionally been more conservative than the



Internal Migration: The movement of people inside a country from one region to another.



Sunbelt: A region in the southern and southwestern United States that has experienced significant population growth in recent decades. The region is known for its warm climate and economic opportunities.



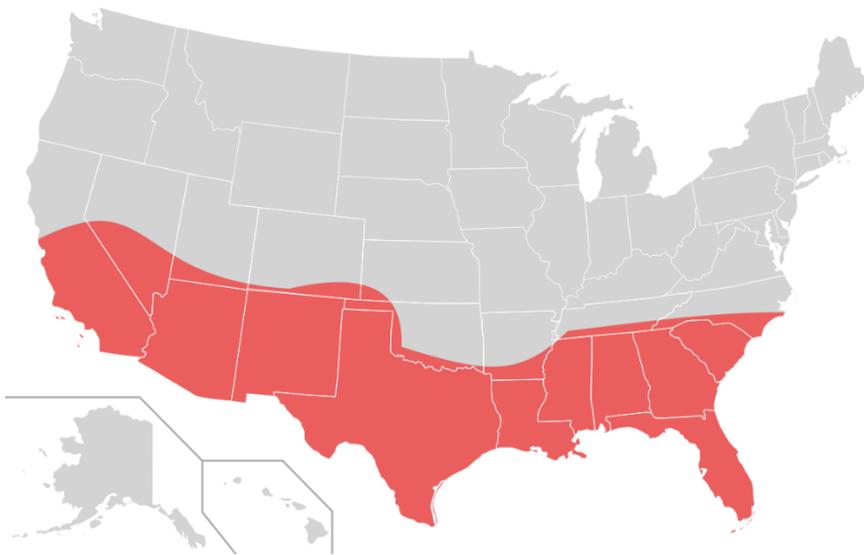
Snowbirds: Retirees who live in the North but spend their winters in Florida or other southern states.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



North, and this has translated into political power. Southern states and leaders from the South are playing an increasingly influential role in shaping the country's policies.

At the same time that the Sunbelt has grown because of internal migration from the North, it has also been augmented by immigration, especially by Hispanics, coming northward from Latin America. Often Northern Whites moving south and Hispanic immigrants moving north have conflicting values, cultures and political opinions, making the Sunbelt one of the most politically dynamic regions of the nation.



Secondary Source: Map

This map shows the area of the country often referred to as the Sunbelt. Warm and growing, the Sunbelt includes some of the nation's fastest growing metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, Oklahoma City, Atlanta and Miami.

THE BABY BOOMERS

The **Baby Boomers** are a generation of Americans born between 1946 and 1964, making them the largest generation in American history up to that point with approximately 76 million people. The children of the Greatest Generation, the Baby Boomers were born after World War II when there was a surge in births due to returning soldiers and an improving economy. Baby Boomers grew up during the 1950s and 1960s, a time of social and political change.

As a generation, the Baby Boomers had a significant impact on American culture and society. They were known for their optimism and idealism, and many of them became leaders in the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, and the feminist movement. They were known for having a significant generation gap with their parents because of the huge differences in experiences they had as children and their willingness to experiment with new ways of living and thinking.

In terms of their attitude toward government, Baby Boomers were initially very trusting and supportive of the government during the post-war period of prosperity. However, this trust eroded in the 1960s and 1970s due to the



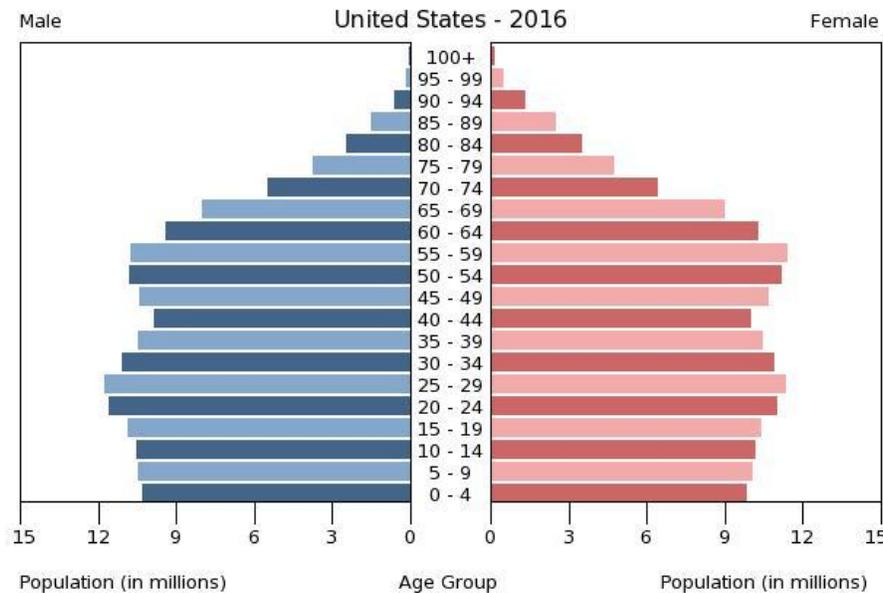
Baby Boomers: Americans born between 1946 and 1964, during a period of high birth rates in the United States. They came of age during the 1960s and 1970s and make up the bulk of America's retirees.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



Vietnam War, civil rights protests, and the Watergate scandal. Many Baby Boomers became disillusioned with the government and developed a more skeptical outlook.

Prominent Boomer leaders in politics include Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, while in business, Boomers such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Oprah Winfrey became pioneers in the fields of technology, entertainment, and business. In fact, Baby Boomers are often credited with inventing the internet, personal computers and cell phones, which have changed the world as we know it.



Secondary Source: Chart

The population pyramid of the United States as of 2016. The Baby Boomers can clearly be seen as a bump in the population of people in their 60s on this chart.

As the population of the United States continues to age, there has been a significant increase in the number of people over the age of 65. This trend is expected to continue as the Baby Boomer generation enters retirement age. According to the Census Bureau, there were 52 million people over the age of 65 in 2018, accounting for approximately 16% of the total population. This number is expected to grow to over 95 million by 2060, accounting for approximately 23% of the total population.

The increase in the number of centenarians, or individuals over the age of 100, is also a notable trend. In 1980, there were only 32,000 centenarians in the United States. By 2030, this number is expected to reach 130,000 and by 2060, it is projected to reach 600,000.

The overall increase in the population of Americans who are retired has led to the term **silver tsunami**, as the aging population puts a strain on healthcare and social security systems. While this term has been criticized as ageist, since it emphasizes the negative effects the aging population might have, there can be no doubt that having a huge number of retired Americans



Silver Tsunami: A term that describes the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and the impact that this will have on society, such as on healthcare and other social services. It has been criticized as being ageist.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



who are living longer and longer than their parents ever did, will have an impact on the country.

GEN X

Gen X, which most demographers and researchers consider those born between 1965 and 1980, is the last generation of Americans who were born before computers, cellphones and the internet became widespread. This means that they experienced a world that was vastly different from the one we know today. They grew up in a time when people used typewriters and rotary phones, and computers were large, clunky machines found only in research labs and big corporations. Because of this, Gen X has a unique perspective on technology and the impact it has on society. They are able to understand the benefits of modern technology while also recognizing its potential drawbacks.

Gen Xers are approaching the middle of their working careers and potential peak earning years. They came of age during the 1970s and 80s. Families with two working parents, single-parent households, and divorce were becoming more common, and many Gen Xers had to learn to be self-sufficient at an early age. This experience has made them more independent and self-reliant than previous generations. They are also more likely to rebel against authority and question established norms and traditions.

Despite their skepticism and independent nature, many Gen Xers are emerging as leaders in both business and politics. Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos are just a few examples of successful entrepreneurs who belong to this generation. Barack Obama, the first Black President of the United States, is another prominent Gen X leader. He is known for his progressive policies and his ability to inspire young people to get involved in politics. Similarly, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been praised for his inclusive leadership style and his efforts to promote diversity and social justice. These examples suggest that Gen X's unique perspective and resilience are valuable assets in leadership roles.

MILLENNIALS

The **Millennials**, also known as Gen Y, includes individuals born between 1981 and 1996. They are considered to be the first digital natives, having grown up with computers and the internet. Millennials became adults around the time of the new millennium, and as a result, they are often associated with a sense of optimism, ambition, and technological savvy.

Born well after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed, the Millennials grew up in a much more diverse America than their predecessors. As a result, Millennials value diversity and inclusivity and are more accepting of different backgrounds and cultures.

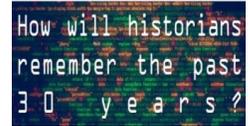


Gen X: The generation of Americans born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s. They are now at the prime working ages of their lives and are emerging as the nation's leaders. They were the last generation to grow up before computers and the Internet are common.



Millennials: The generation of Americans born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. They are now young adults and are the first generation to grow up with computers and cell phones.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



Another notable trait of millennials is their pro-government stance. Compared to older generations, millennials express greater confidence in the federal government's ability to solve problems. They believe in the power of collective action and are often politically engaged.

The Great Recession and War on Terror shaped millennials' early experiences, as many graduated from college during a difficult job market. This led to a sense of financial insecurity and a general pessimism about the future. However, despite these challenges, millennials are known for their positive attitude toward business and their drive to work toward achieving their goals.

GEN Z

Gen Z, also known as Zoomers, refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. This generation is unique in that the mean average age of first-time mothers has been on the rise, currently at 25 years old. The rise in age is a reflection of a shift in societal attitudes towards starting families, with more emphasis placed on education and career advancement.



Gen Z: The generation of Americans born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. High schoolers today are part of this generation.

Gen Z is a generation that has grown up in a time of great social and political upheaval. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has had a significant impact on their lives, with many experiencing the stress and grief that comes with losing loved ones, unemployment, and interrupted learning. Despite these challenges, Gen Z remains optimistic about the future and has been active in social justice movements such as the Black Lives Matter protests and environmentalism.

Social media has played a significant role in shaping the worldview of Gen Z, with platforms like TikTok and Instagram offering a window into the lives of others. This generation grew up with technology and can't remember a time before smartphones. This proficiency with technology has made them adept at adapting to changing circumstances and finding new ways to connect with one another.

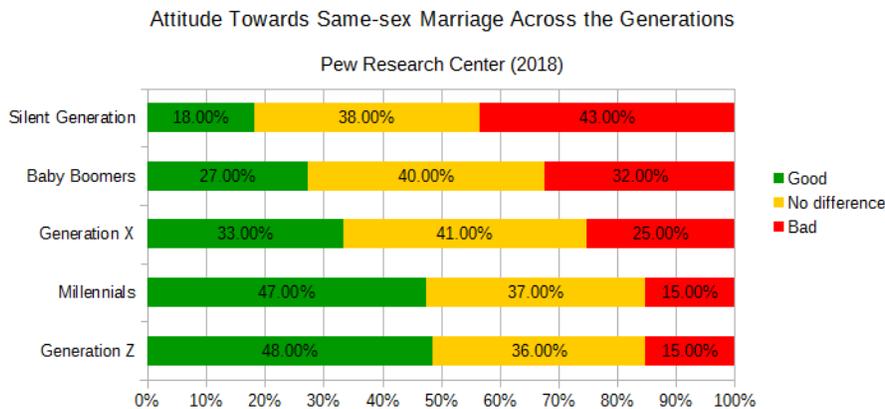
Gen Z is also a generation that is outspoken and passionate about issues such as LGBTQ rights. They are more open and accepting of diverse identities than previous generations, and many have been vocal advocates for equality. Despite this progress, the generation still faces stress, with 35% frequently experiencing it. However, this stress has also led to a focus on emotional intelligence and mental health, making them one of the most compassionate and empathetic generations yet.

In terms of leadership, Gen Z has already produced several prominent figures, including Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist, and Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani education activist. Additionally, athletes like Simone Biles, who is considered one of the greatest gymnasts of all time, and Billie Eilish, the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter, have become cultural icons for their generation.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



In conclusion, Gen Z is a generation that has grown up in a world of rapid change and uncertainty. They are technologically savvy, socially conscious, and passionate about creating a more equitable world. Despite the challenges they face, they remain optimistic about the future and have the potential to become one of the most intelligent and influential generations in history.



Secondary Source: Chart

The youngest generations of Americans have had a significant impact already on social policy, especially surrounding acceptance of LGBTQ Americans.

GENERATION ALPHA

Generation Alpha, the generation born after Gen Z, is typically defined as those born from 2010 to 2025. They are the children of Gen X and Millennials. They are the first generation to be born entirely in the 21st century and are often referred to as **digital natives**. This generation has grown up in a world where technology is ubiquitous, and they are comfortable with it from a very young age. In fact, one of the defining characteristics of Gen Alpha is their connection to technology. They are more tech-savvy than any generation before them and incredibly comfortable using devices from a young age, often understanding how to use mobile devices and apps before learning to read.

 **Generation Alpha:** The generation of Americans born after 2010. The term is still relatively new and is used to describe the children of millennials and Gen Zers.

 **Digital Natives:** People who have grown up using digital technology, such as computers and smartphones, from a young age. The term is often used to describe millennials, Gen Zers, and members of Generation Alpha.

Although the future of Generation Alpha is still unknown, as they are still very young, it is expected that they will be heavily influenced by the events and trends of their time, just as previous generations have been shaped by the events and trends of their own eras. As they grow up, we may begin to see some of the defining characteristics of this generation become more apparent. With their technological proficiency and unique experiences, they may bring about changes and advancements in various fields. It will be interesting to see how they navigate a world that is constantly changing and evolving. While we can only speculate about the future of Generation Alpha, it is clear that they will continue to be shaped by the ever-increasing role of technology in our lives.

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



CONCLUSION

So, we Americans are a varied and changing group of people. We are rapidly becoming more ethnically diverse, and more ethnically mixed. We are getting older and living longer, but as the Baby Boomers retire and younger generations take over leadership roles, our priorities and perspectives are changing. We're also moving, southward to be precise, and the shifting of our population centers will also shift our politics and culture. As we move into the future and approach new opportunities and challenges, we can take this moment to take stock of who we are today, and who we expect to be in the years to come.

Who are the Americans?

3 WHO ARE THE AMERICANS?



SUMMARY

BIG IDEA: The population of the United States is undergoing significant change. Since the 1960s, immigration and internal migration from North to South have reshaped the ethnic makeup and distribution of our population. The country is projected to be a majority-minority country by 2050. That change, along with new values held by younger Americans who are digital natives and the retirement of the Baby Boomers will have significant impacts on the culture and politics of the country.

Immigration continues to play a significant role in demographic changes. Since 1965, immigration policy has favored family reunification, admitting immigrants with special skills, protecting refugees, and promoting diversity.

Immigration remains a politically divisive issue. Nativists have promoted anti-immigrant policies such as Prop 187 in California which, had it passed, would have prevented undocumented immigrants from attending school, and the recent rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic are examples.

Internal migration has also reshaped America. The growth of the Sunbelt is being driven by warmer climates, new job opportunities, snowbirds, retirees, military bases, and job losses in the Rust Belt. The increase in population in the South has also led to political and cultural change.

The Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, grew up during a time of social and political change, with many joining the civil rights, anti-war, and feminist movements. They are skeptical of the government after living through the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal. As they retire, there are growing concerns about the strain this unprecedented number of aging Americans will place on the healthcare and social security systems.

Gen X, born between 1965 and 1980, is the last generation of Americans to grow up before computers and cellphones were common. Known for their independence, self-reliance, and tendency to question authority, Gen X is poised to take over leadership of the country as the Boomers retire.

Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996 and are considered to be the first digital natives. They value diversity and inclusivity and express confidence in the federal government's ability to solve problems and are often politically engaged. Despite growing up in challenging economic times, they are known for their positive attitude toward business and their drive to work toward achieving their goals.

Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, are technologically savvy. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on their lives, but despite the challenges, they remain optimistic about the future and are active in social justice movements. Gen Z is also a generation that is outspoken and passionate about issues such as LGBTQ rights and mental health.



KEY CONCEPTS

Minority-Majority: A situation when the largest group within a population makes up less than 50% of the overall population. By 2050 Whites, currently the majority of Americans, are expected to make up less than 50% of the total population making the United States a majority-minority country.

Reunification: A policy of allowing immigrants to come to the United States if they already have family members legally living in the country. The policy is aimed at keeping families together.

Nativism: A belief that people born in the United States are superior to immigrants.

Alt-Right Movement: A movement of various far-right groups that emphasizes white nationalism and anti-Semitism. These groups have grown in public exposure during the presidency of Donald Trump.

Internal Migration: The movement of people inside a country from one region to another.

Silver Tsunami: A term that describes the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and the impact that this will have on society, such as on healthcare and other social services. It has been criticized as being ageist.

Border Wall: A nickname for the physical barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border that was a key proposal of candidate Trump during the 2018 presidential election.



LAWS

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Major revision to immigration law passed in 1965 that eliminated national quotas and instead encouraged family reunification. It led to a tremendous increase in immigration from Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Prop 187: A 1994 ballot initiative in California, which would have stopped undocumented immigrants from being able to use some public services including education and healthcare. An example of nativist sentiment, the proposal was controversial and did not pass.

Muslim Ban: Nickname for Executive Order 13769, which was signed by President Donald Trump in 2017. The order restricted entry into the United States for citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries and was widely criticized for being discriminatory.



LOCATIONS

Sunbelt: A region in the southern and southwestern United States that has experienced significant population growth in recent decades. The region is known for its warm climate and economic opportunities.



PEOPLE & GROUPS

Refugee: A person who has to leave their home to escape persecution, war, or violence.

Snowbirds: Retirees who live in the North but spend their winters in Florida or other southern states.

Baby Boomers: Americans born between 1946 and 1964, during a period of high birth rates in the United States. They came of age during the 1960s and 1970s and make up the bulk of America's retirees.

Gen X: The generation of Americans born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s. They are now at the prime working ages of their lives and are emerging as the nation's leaders. They were the last generation to grow up before computers and the Internet are common.

Millennials: The generation of Americans born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s. They are now young adults and are the first generation to grow up with computers and cell phones.

Gen Z: The generation of Americans born between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s. High schoolers today are part of this generation.

Generation Alpha: The generation of Americans born after 2010. The term is still relatively new and is used to describe the children of millennials and Gen Zers.

Digital Natives: People who have grown up using digital technology, such as computers and smartphones, from a young age. The term is often used to describe millennials, Gen Zers, and members of Generation Alpha.

4

F O U R T H Q U E S T I O N WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

A graphic with a dark, textured background and colorful, pixelated text that reads: "How will historians remember the past 30 years?"

INTRODUCTION

Most American high school students graduate without learning a complete history of race relations in our country. Unfortunately, summer vacation arrives before most history teachers have made it past the 60s or 70s in the textbook and the last thing most students have learned is that Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement broke down the Jim Crow system of segregation, Congress passed the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, and that we celebrate Black History Month each February to mark the achievements of great African Americans. Little or no mention is made of the urban riots in Los Angeles in the 1990s, the emotional trial of OJ Simpson, the election of Barack Obama, or challenges to voting rights in the past decade. This is unfortunate, because race relations are an important element in our current national discourse.

It is forgivable that people might think the days of racial division are over. After all, we elected an African American president. In fact, after Obama's election, some commentators began talking about a post-racial America in which we no longer see color. They thought or hoped that we had arrived at the "promised land" Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about and envisioned when he described his dream for the nation. A quick glance at the news tells us that that is not true. From police shootings to Black Lives Matter protests to football players kneeling during the national anthem there is abundant evidence that race still plays an important role in America. But, those who are hopeful still wonder: Does it always have to be this way?

What do you think? Will there ever be a post-racial America?

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



SEGREGATION TODAY

Despite important legal achievements and the election of an African American president, America remains a deeply racially divided nation. Evidence of continued divisions can also be found in demographics. For instance, African-Americans account for less than 14% of the total population of the state Michigan, but more than 78% of the population of Detroit, the state's largest city.

Dozens of cities across the North and West repeat Detroit's model. During the Great Migration 100 years ago, African Americans from the South flocked to the North in search of jobs and to escape prejudice. Although life in the North was an improvement for many, the people they met were not universally welcoming and urban ghettos developed as African Americans were concentrated into segregated neighborhoods. The lack of opportunities and poverty in these neighborhoods were primary factors that fueled the frustration that has repeatedly boiled over into violence. They are the same factors that drive young people toward gang life and drug use, two problems stereotypically associated with African American urban neighborhoods. This is nothing new in African American life. The Kerner Commission reported on this situation in 1968.

In the 1980s when cities began to struggle as manufacturing jobs moved overseas, White residents moved to the suburbs, leaving mostly African American residents behind in the urban core. This phenomenon was so widespread that it got a name: **White Flight**. In short, segregation continues, not necessarily because laws dictate that Americans of different races must live apart from one another, but because systemic factors like redlining or hiring practices have made integration unlikely.

There are important consequences of this ongoing segregation. Because American schools are mostly neighborhood-based, they remain mostly segregated. In 2012, researchers at the UCLA found that 15% of African American students, and 14% of Hispanic students, attend schools where Whites make up 0 to 1% of the enrollment. While this sort of racial separation is common for African American students in northern cities like Chicago and New York it is also common for Hispanic students in Los Angeles.

There is a similar dynamic in the South. About 62% of the population of Louisiana is White, but its largest city, New Orleans, is 59% African American. Like other major urban areas, the neighborhoods of New Orleans are further segregated. The Lower Ninth Ward, for example, is 90% African American.

Many have criticized civic leaders for taking care of mostly White neighborhoods first, and using what is left of tax dollars to provide services for minority neighborhoods. Parks, roads and trash collection is often better in predominantly White neighborhoods. A glaring examples of this was in **Flint, Michigan** in 2014, where White state officials changed the source of the city's drinking water from Lake Huron and the Detroit River to the less costly



White Flight: The movement of Whites out of inner cities into suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s that resulted in poorer urban cores populated by African Americans and Hispanics surrounded by suburbs of almost all White residents.



Flint Water Crisis: Health crisis revealed in 2014 in which the mostly African American residents of Flint, Michigan were drinking tap water contaminated with lead.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Flint River. Due to insufficient water treatment, lead leached from water pipes into the drinking water, exposing over 100,000 mostly African American residents to elevated lead levels.

New Orleans provides another example. The **Lower Ninth Ward** experienced the most catastrophic flooding after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and class was a major factor in who survived the disaster. Those who lived in areas better protected from flooding, and those who were able to evacuate before the storm, tended to be wealthier and Whiter. At the time, President George W. Bush acknowledged that this poverty had “roots in the history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunities of America”.



BARACK OBAMA

Barack Obama was a Baby Boomer and was elected in 2008 by Baby Boomer voters who had grown up during the Civil Rights Movement. For many, it was a dream come true. As teenagers and young adults they had lived through the turbulent 1960s and had fought for equal rights. Finally, it seemed, as adults the goals they had worked so hard for had come true. They saw the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama and his election in 2008 as the first African American president of the United States as a sign that the nation had, in fact, become post-racial. The conservative radio host Lou Dobbs, for example, said in November 2009, “We are now in a 21st Century post-partisan, post-racial society.” Two months later, Chris Matthews of MSNBC revealed just how much Americans wished that that to be true, while at the same to showing that it was not when he said of President Obama, “He is post-racial by all appearances. You know, I forgot he was black tonight for an hour.”

President Obama actively promoted the idea that American was overcoming its divided past. His **keynote speech at the 2002 Democratic National**



Lower Ninth Ward: Mostly African American neighborhood in New Orleans that was devastated by flooding in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina.

Primary Source: Photograph

Senator Barack Obama announcing his candidacy for president in 2007. Obama went on to defeat Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary and then John McCain in the general election. He won reelection in 2012, serving eight years as the nation’s first African American president.



Barack Obama: First African American president. He is a Democrat and was elected in 2008 and reelected 2012.



2002 Democratic National Convention Keynote Speech: Speech by then-Senator Barack Obama in which he rejected divisions in America. It is sometimes called the “Purple America” speech in reference to the merging of blue and red. Obama’s performance propelled him to national fame.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



Convention has been widely regarded as the moment that propelled him to the national stage. In that address he said, “There’s not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America; there’s the United States of America.”

However, public opinion on whether the United States had indeed moved past its old divisions and become post-racial is itself divided starkly by race. A Pew Research Center poll in 2020 showed that 86% of African Americans thought the nation had not yet made enough progress on racial equality, however only 39% of Whites agreed. 60% of all Whites thought the nation had done enough or gone too far in seeking racial equality, whereas only 11% of African Americans agreed.

Obama himself understood that some wanted his presidency to mean the end of racial division. But he also knew that his historic election was not going to be the final chapter in the nation’s long struggle for racial justice.

During the 2008 campaign, he directly addressed the issue of race in one of his most famous speeches, entitled **A More Perfect Union**. He said, “Contrary to the claims of some of my critics, black and white, I have never been so naïve as to believe that we can get beyond our racial divisions in a single election cycle, or with a single candidacy... But I have asserted a firm conviction... that, working together, we can move beyond some of our old racial wounds, and that in fact we have no choice if we are to continue on the path of a more perfect union. For the African-American community, that path means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances — for better health care and better schools and better jobs — to the larger aspirations of all Americans...”



A More Perfect Union Speech:

Speech by Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign in which he explicitly addressed the issue of race. Some political historians regard it as a turning point in the campaign.

During his presidency, Obama was alternately criticized for spending too much time working to help African Americans, or not taking advantage of his eight years in the White House to adequately address their concerns. In the end, President Obama’s civil rights legacy is mixed. Sentencing reform and the end of long jail terms for drug offenders has been tremendously important. Perhaps, however, his greatest impact will simply be the fact that he was president at all. One should not underestimate the power of a positive role model. If Obama could be president, why should any African American child doubt that he or she too, could be president one day?

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Arguments that the United States is not post-racial frequently emphasize the treatment of African-Americans and other racial minorities in the criminal justice system and in interactions with the police. In 2015, according to a study by The Guardian newspaper, young African American men were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by police officers in 2015.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



Killings of unarmed African Americans by police officers exploded as a public issue during Obama's presidency. For African Americans, violence at the hands of White police officers was nothing new. After all, the beating of Rodney King in 1991 was famous because it was captured on video, not because it was unusual.

However, as cell phone with video cameras and social media became widespread during Obama's presidency, so did videos of killings and beatings of African Americans by White law enforcement officers. Such killings had a marked effect on public attitudes. By 2020, the number of Americans who rated race relations as the nation's most important problem rose to the highest it has been since the 1960s.

The **Black Lives Matter (BLM)** movement, grew up with social media and is an ongoing effort by African Americans to bring awareness to their concerns, affect police reform, and seek justice. Although BLM claims inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, Pan-Africanism, the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, hip hop, LGBTQ social movements, and Occupy Wall Street, it is in fact distinct in important ways. The BLM leaders and protesters are young. They do not share the same ideas, experiences, and values as the older Baby Boomer Generation of African American leaders. They have an aversion to middle-class traditions such as church involvement, Democratic Party loyalty, and respectability politics. They do not have a single unifying leader like Martin Luther King, Jr. BLM protesters are from Generation X, and they look, sound, think and act like Gen X. The term Black Lives Matter itself, was born in a truly Gen X way: it was a hashtag.

THE OBAMA YEARS

As cell phone cameras and social media became more sophisticated during Obama's presidency, so did too did American's awareness of violence against unarmed African American men. To understand both the problem and how the movement grew, we can look more closely at some of these events. By no means is this a comprehensive list of violence against African American, but rather a discussion of some of the events that proved to be the most consequential.

The death that launched the hashtag and the movement was the killing of **Treyvon Martin** in Florida. On the night of February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman was patrolling his gated neighborhood. Although not a police officer, Zimmerman had volunteered to serve as a members of a citizen's watch group and was carrying a gun. That night he encountered Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American high school student who was visiting his relatives and had gone out to buy some candy. Zimmerman approached Martin and they had some sort of fight. Although Martin was unarmed, Zimmerman shot and killed him. In the trial afterward Zimmerman, who had not been injured, claimed self-defense. Florida has a **stand-your-ground law**



Black Lives Matter (BLM): Racial justice movement that developed around 2014 and focuses on police brutality. It is led by younger Americans rather than the generation that led the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.



Treyvon Martin: African American teenager who was murdered in 2012 while walking home from buying candy from a convenience store in Florida. His death sparked the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement.



Stand-Your-Ground Laws: Laws that permit citizens to use deadly force to defend themselves if they feel threatened.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

that allows people to use deadly force when they feel threatened, and even though Martin had not had any weapons and was only a teenager when Zimmerman shot him, Zimmerman was acquitted of murder.



Primary Source: Photograph

Trayvon Martin was only 17 when he was killed on his way home from a convenience store in Florida in 2012. His death marked the start of the modern campaign to bring attention to the killing of unarmed African American men and boys.

The death of **Eric Garner** in New York City in 2014 resulted in one of the movement's most potent slogans. According to bystanders, including a friend of Garner, who recorded the incident on his cell phone, Garner had just broken up a fight, which may have drawn the attention of the police. When a police officer approached Garner from behind and attempted to handcuff him, Garner pulled his arms away, saying "Don't touch me, please." The officer then put Garner in a chokehold from behind as other officers swarmed in. After 15 seconds, the video showed that the officer had let go of Garner's neck but then used his hands to push his face into the sidewalk. Garner is heard saying "I can't breathe" eleven times while lying face down on the sidewalk. Garner lay motionless, handcuffed, and unresponsive for several minutes before an ambulance arrived. According to police, Garner had a heart attack while being transported to Richmond University Medical Center. He was pronounced dead at the hospital one hour later.



Eric Garner: African American man who died in 2014 after being held in a chokehold by New York City Police. His last words were "I can't breathe" which became a slogan of anti-police brutality protests.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?



Primary Source: Photograph

A protester at a rally in Virginia. "I Can't Breathe" were Eric Garner's last words and "I can't breathe, mama" were some of George Floyd's last words.

A grand jury decided not to indict the officer who had originally wrapped his arm around Garner's neck. After the announcement, citizens in New York City, San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, Washington, DC and Baltimore, Minneapolis, Berkley, Atlanta and even London gathered in protest. Garner's last words, "**i can't breathe**", have now become a common chant against police brutality.

On August 9, 2014, 18-year-old **Michael Brown Jr.** was fatally shot by police officer Darren Wilson in the city of Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis. The exact nature of their initial encounter is debated, but after some sort of altercation, Brown began to run away with Wilson in pursuit. Wilson stated that Brown stopped and charged him, but Brown's friend who was there as well contradicted this account, stating that Brown turned around with his hands raised after Wilson shot at his back. According to the friend, Wilson then shot Brown multiple times. Other officers from the Ferguson Police Department were on the scene within minutes, as were crowds of residents, some expressing hostility toward the police. Brown's body was covered with sheets by paramedics, but police were widely criticized for leaving him on the road for four hours before taking him away. Many saw this delay as demeaning and disrespectful.

Already before Brown's death, residents of Ferguson had reason to distrust and dislike their police department. As is the case in many predominantly African American cities, the police department had hired mostly White officers who lived in surrounding towns. A subsequent investigation found that the police department regularly pulled over African American drivers for minor infractions such as broken taillights. The resulting tickets produced an



I Can't Breathe: Eric Garner's last words. They became a slogan of protesters against police brutality.



Michael Brown, Jr.: African American teenager killed by police in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. Protests after his death were the first to feature large numbers of participants organized by the Black Lives Matter movement.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

important part of the money the city received to support its budget. In effect, city officials were taxing African American citizens through traffic tickets. Additionally, police departments in many places have had an antagonistic relationship with African American citizens for generations, stemming from their role in enforcing Jim Crow segregation laws.



Primary Source: Photograph

The unrest in Ferguson, Missouri following the death of Michael Brown. The police were criticized for using militarized tactics against the demonstrators including armored vehicles and tear gas.

Michael Brown's death ignited **unrest in Ferguson**. Protesters used the slogan "**Hands up, don't shoot**" in both peaceful and violent protests that lasted for more than a week. Media and politicians criticized the Ferguson and other area police agencies for their militarized response. As part of the War on Terror after the September 11 Attacks, many police forces had used money given to them by the federal government to combat terrorism to purchase riot shields, tear gas, body armor, automatic weapons, and armored vehicles. Now the Ferguson protesters were facing off with what looked like an army, rather than police officers.

A few months after Brown's death, a grand jury decided not to indict Wilson for murder. A separate Department of Justice investigation cleared Wilson of civil rights violations in the shooting. They concluded that Wilson shot Brown in self-defense. Instead of providing a sense of justice and peace, the message many minority communities heard was: police officers could use the cover of their badge to kill African Americans without consequences.

Three months after Michael Brown's death, media attention was again transfixed, this time by a shooting in Cleveland, Ohio. Two police officers had responded to a police dispatch call of an African American male that "keeps pulling a gun out of his pants and pointing it at people" at a local recreation center. When officers arrived at the park they shot and killed the suspect. The victim turned out to be **Tamir Rice**, a 12-year-old and his gun was an



Ferguson Unrest: Weeklong protests and confrontations between protesters and law enforcement after the death of Michael Brown in 2014. Protests restarted after the announcement that the officer who shot him would not be indicted, and again on the anniversary of Brown's death.



Hands Up, Don't Shoot: The last words some believe Michael Brown said before being killed by police in 2014. They became a slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement.



Tamir Rice: 12-year-old African American boy killed by police in 2014 who believed he was carrying a gun. It turned out to be an air pistol. His death was widely protested as part of the Black Lives Matter movement.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

airsoft replica that lacked the orange-tipped barrel which would have indicated it was an air gun. A surveillance video of the incident was released by police four days later showing that the police had shot and killed Rice immediately after getting out of their car, had not provided any sort of first aid for at least four minutes, and when his sister tried to run to him about two minutes after the shooting they tackled, handcuffed and put her in the police car. The next year, prosecutors declined to press charges against the officers, claiming that it appeared Rice was pulling an actual gun out from under his shirt when he was killed. Protesters have pointed to Rice's death as evidence that police officers too often jump to conclusions about African Americans rather than relying on evidence and making reasonable judgements. Furthermore, they point out that the case of the police shooting a 12-year-old, in addition to the shooting of Trayvon Martin is evidence that too many Americans associate African American men and boys with danger, no matter how young they are.



Primary Source: Photograph

The death of Freddie Gray launched protests that turned violent in Baltimore, Maryland. Eventually the National Guard was brought to the city to restore order. Baltimore has been one of the nation's most deeply segregated cities.

In 2015, **Freddie Gray, Jr.**, a 25-year-old man, was arrested by the Baltimore Police Department for possessing what the police alleged was an illegal knife. While being transported in a police van, Gray fell into a coma and was taken to a trauma center where he later died. The circumstances of the injuries were initially unclear. Eyewitness accounts suggested that the officers involved used unnecessary force against Gray during the arrest which was denied by all officers involved. The police commissioner reported that, contrary to department policy, the officers did not secure him inside the van while driving to the police station. The medical investigation found that Gray had sustained the injuries to his spine while in transport, and the Maryland state attorney announced that her office had filed charges against six police officers. Although African Americans across the country praised the state attorney for bringing charges against the officers, none of them were found

 **Freddie Gray, Jr.:** African American man who died in a police van from spinal cord injuries in 2015 in Baltimore. His death sparked protests that turned violent.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

guilty. The case against the first officer ended in a mistrial, three were found not guilty by their juries, and the charges against the remaining officers were dropped.

Gray's hospitalization and subsequent death resulted in a series of protests. A major **protest in downtown Baltimore** turned violent, resulting in 34 arrests and injuries to 15 police officers. After Gray's funeral, civil disorder intensified with looting and burning of local businesses and a CVS drug store, culminating with the governor declaring a state of emergency and the deployment of the National Guard to Baltimore to restore order.



The Black Lives Matter movement has protested dozens of killings of unarmed African American men, but protesters have also highlighted other acts of police violence and disrespect. The **McKinney pool party** incident in 2015 is one example. That year, at a pool party in a gated McKinney, Texas, community, a police officer recorded violently restraining Dajerria Becton, a 15-year-old African American girl. He later drew his handgun, evidence many protesters believe of how quickly officers resort to deadly force when working with African American citizens, regardless of their age, gender, or whether or not they are armed. The officer shown in the video was placed on administrative leave and later resigned.

In 2015, #BlackLivesMatter was joined by the **#SayHerName** campaign. This was an effort to bring attention to female victims of police brutality and was a response to the emphasis the Black Lives Matter movement and the media had placed on male victims. Of the dozens of victims the #SayHerName campaign has tried to bring attention to, perhaps most famous is **Breonna Taylor**, a 26-year-old EMT. Police had suspected that Taylor's boyfriend was



2015 Baltimore Protest: Violent unrest after the death of Freddie Gray in 2015. The protests resulted in arson, arrests, injuries to police and the calling of the National Guard to restore order.

Primary Source: Video

A moment from the video of the intervention at the McKinney pool party in 2015.



McKinney Pool Party: 2015 incident in Texas in which a White police officer tackled an African American teenage girl outside a pool party and then later pulled his gun. The incident was captured on video.



#SayHerName: An outgrowth of the Black Lives Matter movement focuses on bringing attention to police violence against African American Women.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

receiving drugs in the mail at Taylor's apartment and after midnight, three police officers dressed in plain clothes knocked on Taylor's door before forcing entry using a battering ram. The officers claimed that they announced they were police, but 11 of 12 neighbors interviewed by the New York Times said they heard them say, "police." Fearing that their house was being invaded, Taylor's boyfriend called 911 and then got his gun and fired at the people he thought were intruders. In the resulting firefight Taylor was killed. The police never searched for the drugs they had suspected were at the apartment. Afterward the police were criticized for their tactics. Many felt that they unnecessarily incited the deadly exchange. One of the officers was charged for endangering the White family who lived next door. None were charged with any crimes related to Taylor's death.



Breonna Taylor: African American woman killed when police attempted to carry out a no-knock warrant of her apartment. Her death helped give rise to the #SayHerName campaign.

Primary Source: Photograph

Breonna Taylor was an EMT in Kentucky. Her death when police raided her apartment inspired the #SayHerName campaign to bring attention to African American women killed by police.

Another woman the #SayHerName movement has brought attention to is **Sandra Bland** who was pulled over for failing to use her turn signal when changing lanes. She was arrested and was discovered hanged three days later in her jail cell. Subsequent investigations found that the police making the traffic stop and the corrections officers at the jail had failed to follow procedures, including failing to check on the inmates regularly and allowing Bland access to marijuana. In 2017, Texas passed the Sandra Bland Act which mandates training for officers in how to de-escalate conflicts and how to work with people with substance abuse or mental health issues.

Sandra Bland: An African American woman who died while in police custody. Her story gained national attention through the #SayHerName movement and led to police reforms in Texas.

In addition to nationwide protest days, movement gained the support of the WNBA. Players dedicated their 2020 season to "long history of inequality, implicit bias and racism that disproportionately impacts communities of color." The first weekend of their season the players wore jerseys honoring

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Breonna Taylor and the #SayHerName movement. The WNBA and the NBA unified to postpone two days of games as well to bring public attention to violence against African American women.

THE CONFEDERATE FLAG

The **Confederate battle flag** from the Civil War is a potent symbol of racism and White supremacy. Although its use died out after the Civil War ended in 1865, the flag was reintroduced as an element of the Georgia state flag in 1956 just two years after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that ended segregation in public school. It was also raised at the University of Mississippi during protests against integration and added to multiple southern state flags, including the flag of South Carolina.

Confederate Battle Flag: The flag carried by troops from the South into battle during the Civil War. It was resurrected in the 1960s by White Southerners who opposed the Civil Rights Movement and is now a powerful symbol of hate and racism.

Primary Source: Photograph

The Charleston Church Shooting launched protests aimed at removing symbols of the old Confederacy, especially the Confederate battle flag from government buildings and monuments.



While some White Southerners associate the Confederate battle flag with pride in their heritage and traditions, for many outsiders it is impossible to separate the flag from its association with the defense of slavery and racism. Southern historian Gordon Rhea wrote in 2011 that, “It is no accident that Confederate symbols have been the mainstay of white supremacist organizations, from the Ku Klux Klan to the skinheads. They did not appropriate the Confederate battle flag simply because it was pretty. They picked it because it was the flag of a nation dedicated to their ideals: ‘that the negro is not equal to the white man’. The Confederate flag, we are told, represents heritage, not hate. But why should we celebrate a heritage grounded in hate, a heritage whose self-avowed reason for existence was the exploitation and debasement of a sizeable segment of its population?”

While debate over displays of the Confederate flag simmered for years, they were brought to national attention in 2015 when a 21-year-old White

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

supremacist **murdered nine African Americans** during a prayer service at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in downtown Charleston. The morning after the attack, police arrested the shooter who confessed to carrying out the attack in the hope of igniting a race war.

Because the murderer, who was sentenced to life in prison, had espoused racial hatred in both a website manifesto published before the shooting and a journal written from jail afterwards, and because photographs posted on the website showed him posing with the Confederate battle flag, the shooting triggered a public debate and widespread public protests about the continued use of the flag.

Shortly after the shooting and after intense public pressure, the South Carolina General Assembly voted to remove the flag from a memorial on the State Capitol grounds. In 2016, the United States House of Representatives voted to ban the display of Confederate flags on flagpoles at Veterans Administration cemeteries. The author of the amendment was California congressman Jared Huffman, who stated that the flag represented “racism, slavery and division.” In 2016, Republicans in Congress attempted to reverse the flag ban but their bill was blocked by Democrats.

SPORTS AND POPULAR CULTURE

Protests regarding racial division have spilled over into many areas of life. In 2015, a Facebook post by the **University of Missouri’s** student government president Payton Head described bigotry and anti-gay sentiment around the college campus. He claimed that in an incident off campus, unidentified people in the back of a passing pickup truck taunted him with racial slurs. “For those of you who wonder why I’m always talking about the importance of inclusion and respect, it’s because I’ve experienced moments like this multiple times at THIS university, making me not feel included here.” An incident involving a drunken student gave rise to more racial tensions. While an African-American student group was preparing for homecoming, a White student walked on stage and was asked to leave. Supposedly, while departing the premises the student said, “These niggers are getting aggressive with me.” Student protests resulted calling for the university chancellor to resign for not having done enough to address racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and other forms of prejudice on campus. The protesters gained an enormous ally when the school’s football players announced they would not practice or play until the chancellor resigned, potentially costing the university a \$1 million fine if they had to forfeit an upcoming game. The chancellor resigned.

The National Football League has been another aspect of the world of sports where African American players have used their influence as national stars to make public statements about racism. Beginning in 2016, some athletes have protested against police brutality and racism by kneeling during the playing of The Star Spangled Banner.



Charleston Church Shooting: Mass shooting of African Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015 by a White supremacist. The attack sparked a debate over public displays of the Confederate battle flag.



University of Missouri Protests: Protests in 2015 at the University of Missouri when students decided the school’s chancellor had not done enough to address racism and hate on campus. The protests succeeded when the school’s football team refused to play.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

The protests became widely known in 2016 when San Francisco 49ers quarterback **Colin Kaepernick** knelt during the anthem. Throughout the following seasons, members of various NFL and other sports teams have engaged in similar silent protests. Eric Reid explained their intentioned in Twitter writing, “We chose to kneel because it’s a respectful gesture. I remember thinking our posture was like a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy.” Torrey Smith, a wide receiver for the Carolina Panthers, added in an interview, “I understand why people are offended by people protesting the National Anthem. My father served 25 years. When he dies, he’s going to be wrapped in an American flag. But my dad is also out of the Army, and he drives trucks all over the country, and he’s a black man everywhere he goes, and sometimes he has racial incidents still today. That doesn’t protect him, just because he served our country. And I think that’s important.” In 2017, the NFL protests became more widespread when over 200 players sat or knelt in response to President Donald Trump’s calling for owners to “fire” the protesting players.



Colin Kaepernick: NFL quarterback who knelt during The Star Spangled Banner beginning in 2016. His actions launched a wider use of that non-violent protest among professional athletes.

Primary Source: Photograph

Members of the NFL’s San Francisco 49ers kneel during the playing of the national anthem before a football game. This particular form of protest was first noticed by the national media when Colin Kaepernick knelt in 2016.

Americans are divided on the intended meaning of the anthem and the player protests. Some believe the anthem salutes military and police officers who have died on duty. For others, it honors the United States generally. A 2020 poll found that 52% of Americans felt that it was ok for the players to kneel during the anthem. However, opinion was divided as only 20% of Republican respondents agreed.

Superstar **Beyoncé** sent a political message in her own way during her performance at America’s most-watched event: the Super Bowl. When she performed her single Formation at the **Super Bowl halftime show in 2016**, she and her backup dancers wore all black outfits, and she incorporated the

Beyoncé: Pop star who used Black Power symbolism to protest treatment of African Americans by police during the 2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Black Power salute made famous by Olympic runners in 1968 into the choreography. Former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani accused the performance of being anti-police, saying, “This is football, not Hollywood, and I thought it was really outrageous that she used it as a platform to attack police officers who are the people who protect her and protect us, and keep us alive.”



2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show:

Performance by Beyoncé in which she used Black Power symbolism to protest treatment of African Americans by police.

Primary Source: Photograph

Beyoncé’s performance at the 2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show bore similarities to the Black Power salute that made some Americans proud and others uneasy.

THE RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT DURING THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

The election of President Trump in 2016 marked a shift in the modern movement for racial justice on the part of both the Black Lives Matter movement and related efforts. Trump himself had entered the political world spreading the myth that President Obama had not been born in the United States. **Birtherism** as this lie was called, was an effort to undermine the legitimacy of Obama’s historic presidency. Although not invented by Trump, he used his influence as a television celebrity and later candidate and president to repeat it. In addition to birtherism, Trump was infamous for other **dog whistle** phrases that signaled to racist Americans his ideas in ways he could deny when challenged. In his own tweets, or messages he retweeted, he disparaged countries with majority non-White populations and wondered why America did not have more immigrants from Norway, a nation that is almost entirely White. Black Lives Matter leaders had campaigned for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and in both the campaign and as president, Trump criticized the movement.

One of the most clear demonstrations of racist sentiment in America occurred in 2017 in Charlottesville, Virginia. Various alt-right, neo-Confederates, neo-fascists, White nationalists, neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klansmen, and right-wing militia groups gathered for the **Unite the Right** rally. Some groups carried torches, weapons, Confederate battle flags, Nazi symbols and posters proclaiming their racist ideas. As they marched they chanted slogans such as “White lives matter” and “You will not replace us.” The organizers wanted to



Birtherism: The lie that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States. Before running for president himself, Donald Trump was famous for spreading this lie.



Dog Whistle: A phrase or comment used by politicians to show support for a group but that other groups of voters will not notice or find offensive.



Unite the Right: A rally held by various White supremacist groups in 2017 in Charlottesville. Trump’s comments about the rally resulted in the lowest approval rating of his presidency.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



prevent the removal of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee from a park in Charlottesville and unify the American white nationalist movement overall. Participation with these groups had been growing during the 2010s, in part as a reaction to Barack Obama's presidency and because new social media platforms helped the organize and recruit members.

The white supremacists were met in Charlottesville by thousands of counter-protesters from multiple groups, including many local residents who wanted to show that their town did not support such racist ideas. By the second day of the rally, the state governor declared a state of emergency, stating that the police were no longer able to keep the peace and needed the help of the national guard. The Virginia State Police declared the rally to be unlawful and tried to close it down. That afternoon, one of the White supremacists rammed his car into a crowd of counter-protesters, killing one woman and injuring 19 other people.

The Unite the Right rally proved to be the low point of President Donald Trump's popularity as a result what he told the press when they asked for his response to event. Trump replied by condemning "hatred, bigotry, and violence on many sides". When asked to explain what he meant, he defended himself and said that there were "very fine people on both sides". While the president's most ardent supporters denied that he had ill intentions, many Americans felt that Trump's comments revealed that he saw the white supremacists and the counter-protesters as morally equivalent. White supremacist groups celebrated publicly what they saw as support from the White House.

As of 2021, the most significant of all the events of the current racial justice movement has been the **protests in the summer of 2020**. The event that launched the protests was the murder of **George Floyd**, a 46-year-old African American man who died when a Minneapolis Police Department officer knelt on his neck for over nine minutes as three other officers prevented onlookers from intervening.

Within hours, protests began as people learned about what had happened and saw videos posted on social media. From the location of Floyd's death, protests quickly spread nationwide and to over 2,000 cities and towns. Despite the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, an estimated 15 to 26 million people participated at some point in the demonstrations in the United States, making them the largest in the nation's history. Inspired by the marches in the United States, people also gathered in over 60 countries around the world.

While the majority of protests were peaceful, demonstrations in some cities escalated into riots, looting, and street fighting with police and counter-protesters. Some police responded to protests with instances of notable violence, including against reporters. At least 200 cities imposed curfews, while more than 30 states and Washington, D.C. activated the National Guard



George Floyd Protests: The largest racial justice protests in American history. They were held in dozens of cities around the nation during the summer of 2020.



George Floyd: African American man who died when a police officer knelt on his neck for over nine minutes. His death in 2020 sparked the largest racial justice protests in American history.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

or employed the military to preserve order. Although more than 90% of the protests around the country were peaceful, arson, vandalism, and looting caused over \$1 billion in damage, surpassing the record set in Los Angeles in 1992 after the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King.



Primary Source: Photograph

A rally in Philadelphia during the summer of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd.

President Trump staked out a position against the protests and strongly in favor of the police, further antagonizing many young voters who overwhelmingly support the racial justice movement. Early in the protests President Trump posted on Twitter, “These THUGS are dishonoring the memory of George Floyd, and I won’t let that happen. Just spoke to [Minnesota] Governor Tim Walz and told him that the Military is with him all the way. Any difficulty and we will assume control but, when the looting starts, the shooting starts. Thank you!” The tweet was flagged by Twitter for violating its policy against glorifying violence. Within days other top administration officials were echoing the president’s law-and-order message. Attorney General Barr noted that “law enforcement response is not going to work unless we dominate the streets” and Defense Secretary Mark Esper said, “we need to dominate the battlespace.”

When protesters outside the White House grounds threw objects at Secret Service agents and pulled down temporary fencing, then crossed barricades near the Treasury Department more than 60 Secret Service agents were injured. As a precaution the Secret Service placed the White House on lockdown and moved Trump and his family move to the Presidential Emergency Operations Center, an underground bunker. The president spent almost an hour in the bunker until security was restored outside the White House.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

were responsible for enforcing the Jim Crow system. Some argue that problems that have led to violent interactions between police and citizens could be better solved by professionals from social service agencies. They think that defunding the police is about shifting tax money away from law enforcement and toward social services such as housing, substance abuse treatment or mental health care.

Some critics accuse Black Lives Matter of being anti-police. In response, a counter movement named **Blue Lives Matter** has emerged in support of law enforcement officers who clearly have a difficult and sometimes dangerous job to do. The **Thin Blue Line Flag** was created as a symbol of support for police.

Former New York City Mayor and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani said that Black Lives Matter is “inherently racist” and called the movement anti-American. According to Giuliani, the BLM movement divides people and exacerbates racial tensions. His perspective has gained support among many conservatives who think that America is not fundamentally racist, that systemic racism is not as deep a problem as it has been made out to be in the media, and that ongoing protests and attention paid to police violence serve to divide Americans rather than heal tensions.



Blue Lives Matter: Slogan of a movement in support of police officers in response to criticism from the Black Lives Matter movement.



Thin Blue Line Flag: A modified American flag that is black and white with one blue line across the center. It is used to show support for the police.

Primary Source: Photograph

The Washington, DC mayor renamed a section of 16th Street near the White House Black Lives Matter Plaza and had the words painted on the road.

The protests had widespread consequences. The Georgia legislature voted to change the design of their state flag. Georgia was the last state to incorporate the Confederate battle flag into its design. The military banned displays of the Confederate flag on any base, ship, cemetery, memorial, or battlefield site. NASCAR banned the flag for its racing events. Mrs. Butterworth, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben’s and Cream of Wheat changed their names or packaging to remove depictions of African Americans that incorporated historical

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



stereotypes. The online game Fortnite removed police cars and hundreds of racial slurs were taken out of the official Scrabble dictionary. Over a dozen high schools abandoned nicknames like Rebels, Redskins, or Indians. Animated shows such as The Simpsons, Central Park and Family Guy replaced White actors who had been voicing non-White characters. Netflix and other streaming services pulled movies and episodes with racist jokes or offensive themes. Dozens of schools, museums, streets, parks and other public places were renamed so as not to honor people who participated in the Confederacy or were connected with slavery. The Washington, DC mayor renamed the street across from St. John’s Church and the White House Black Lives Matter Plaza and painted those words in giant letters on the road.

Criticism of the officers who had first tried to arrest George Floyd was widespread among police forces across the country, even if some of those police chiefs and officers were not fully supportive of the protests that followed. Numerous reforms were initiated, most notably bans on the kind of chokeholds that killed Floyd. Training programs to help officers learn strategies to de-escalate conflicts and bans of tear gas, pepper spray and rubber bullets have been initiated. The use of **body cameras** to record police activities has become far more common and some cities have begun using other professionals to respond to non-violent problems such as homeless complaints and neighborhood disputes. More officers are begin trained and assigned to **community policing**, a practice in which officers get out of their patrol cars to talk with citizens and participate in activities such as youth sports leagues in order to develop relationships with the people they serve.

In the end, the four police officers who had participated in the arrest and murder of George Floyd were themselves arrested. In April 2021, the officer who knelt on George Floyd’s neck was found guilty, a rare outcome in cases of police violence. The trials for the three other officers are scheduled for August of 2021.

The racial justice movement has begun to expand beyond the concerns of African Americans to encompass other marginalized groups as well. During the coronavirus pandemic, Asian Americans became targets of violence. Anti-Asian sentiment is not new, as far back as the middle of the 1800s violence and punitive laws against Chinese immigrants was common. In fact, immigration for China was banned entirely in 1882. During World War II prejudice was so strong against Japanese Americans that President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the mass internment of this entire group of people.

Because the coronavirus pandemic originated in China, some Americas took out their frustration against anyone they believed was of Asian ancestry. A study by NBC News found that there was a 150% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020, especially concentrated in New York, Boston and Los Angeles but the pattern was common across the country. Many criticized President Trump for fanning the prejudice that fueled this rise by insisting on using phrases like “Wuhan Virus” and “China Virus” and by claiming, without

- ✓ **Community Policing:** Police practices that include meeting people instead of only riding in cars, and doing public relations activities such as running children’s sports leagues.
- ✓ **Body Cameras:** Small digital video cameras worn by police officers.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

evidence, that the Chinese government had intentionally synthesized and released the virus.

Unlike the problem the Black Lives Matter movement has sought to address, most anti-Asian hate crimes are not perpetrated by police officers. Additionally, the victims were people of all walks of life. For example, a man out for a run when two women spit at him and told him to “go back to China.” A 52-year-old woman was attacked on a city bus by teenagers who accused her of spreading the virus. A 65-year-old Filipino woman was attacked near Times Square in broad daylight by a man who was making anti-Asian comments.

The most egregious of all these attacks was the murder of eight workers at three spas or massage parlors in the Atlanta area in March of 2021. Six of the victims were Asian American women. The perpetrator, a 21-year-old man claimed that he was struggling with sexual addiction. The targeting of Asian women as objects of obsession is not new in America, and the attack, in addition to other events, helped spur Asian American and Pacific Islander groups to organized marches and online campaigns to address the problem. The phrase **Stop AAPI Hate** joined the various slogans of the Black Lives Matter movement.



Stop AAPI Hate: Movement that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic to combat violence and prejudice against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Primary Source: Photograph

Protests against anti-Asian prejudice and violence became part of the racial justice movement during the coronavirus pandemic.

VOTING RIGHTS

The idea that America is post-racial or close to it has played a role in at least one United States Supreme Court decision. In **Shelby County v. Holder** in 2013, the court invalidated a section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that had required nine states with particularly severe histories of racial discrimination to obtain approval from the federal Justice Department for any change to their election laws. The ruling, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, said in part, “Our country has changed.” It added that in the decades since the Voting Rights Act was passed, “voting tests were abolished, disparities in voter



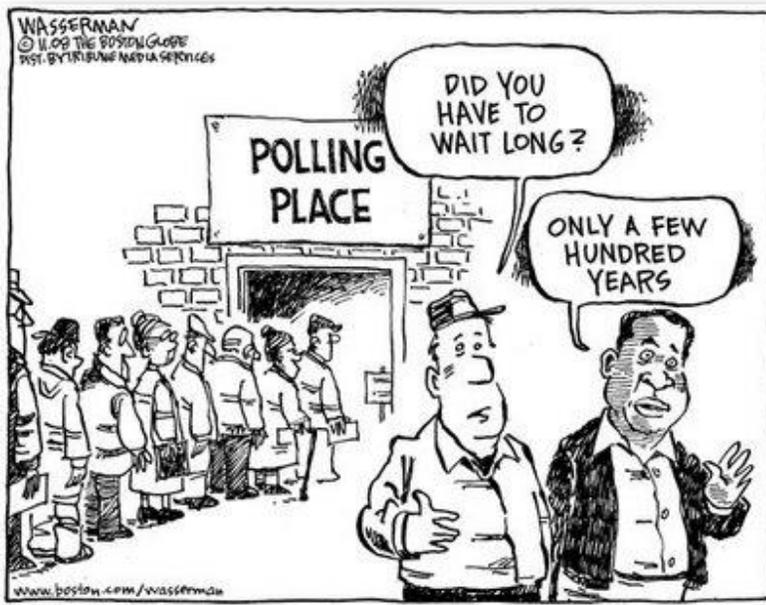
Shelby County v. Holder: 2013 Supreme Court case in which the Court ruled that large sections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act no longer applied. After the ruling, Republican politicians in many states implemented changes designed to suppress the minority vote.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

registration and turnout due to race were erased, and African-Americans attained political office in record numbers.” In short, the Court found that the evidence suggested racial discrimination in voting practices had ended and therefore the Voting Rights Act was unnecessary.

Shortly after the ruling, state legislatures controlled by Republican majorities began passing laws they claimed were intended to stop voter fraud such as voting twice or claiming to be someone else when voting. Democrats and minority rights advocates point out that incidents of voter fraud are almost nonexistent in the United States, and that the true intention of these laws is to **voter suppression**, an effort disenfranchise minority and lower income voters. After the 2020 presidential election and President Trump’s lie that he did not really lose, Republican state governments intensified these efforts.



The most common laws require voters to show identification. These **voter ID laws** seem like common sense to many, but they affect voters who do not normally maintain driver’s licenses, or move frequently and do not have accurate identification. In conjunction with voter identification laws, states began limiting access to offices where citizens can obtain the required documents. In Alabama, the Republican-controlled state government closed DMV offices in eight of ten counties which had the highest percentage African American population, but only three in the ten counties with the lowest percentage. The specific types of identification required also have been in contention. In 2016, a federal appeals court found that Texas’s voter ID law discriminated against African American and Hispanic voters because only a few types of ID were allowed. For example, military IDs and concealed carry

✔ **Voter Suppression:** Any action designed to make voting harder. After the *Shelby County v. Holder* Supreme Court case, numerous laws and policies have been implemented to this effect.

Primary Source: Editorial Cartoon

This cartoon comments on both the long lines some voters have faced on Election Day when many people have to vote in one place, and the long history of disenfranchisement African Americans have faced in America.

✍ **Voter ID Laws:** Laws that require voters to show photo identification. Proponents claim they will stop voter fraud. Opponents claim they make voting harder, especially for the elderly, minorities and the poor.

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



gun permits were allowed, but state employee photo IDs and university photo IDs were not.

Running elections is expensive, and Republicans who claim to want to save money have closed down polling stations, often in minority neighborhood. They also have stopped early voting which provides opportunities to vote for people who cannot get out of work on Election Day. Some have proposed making Election Day a national holiday or moving our elections to a Saturday.

Other laws ban convicted felons from voting. Since minorities make up the bulk of incarcerated Americans, this disproportionately affects minority voters.

Perhaps the greatest threat to voting access is simply the closing of polling places. Since 2013, hundreds of polling places across the South have been shut down completely. Ostensibly an effort to save money, critics note that the closing of polling places results in longer distances needed to travel and longer lines waiting to vote. When polling places are closed in minority neighborhoods, the effect is a reduction of minority voters.

CONCLUSION

Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote in *The Atlantic* in 2015 that the phrase post-racial was “usually employed by talk-show hosts and news anchors looking to measure progress in the Obama era.” And Anna Holmes wrote in *The New York Times*, “Chattel slavery and the legacies it left behind continue to shape American society. Sometimes it seems as if the desire for a ‘post-racial’ America is an attempt by white people to liberate themselves from the burden of having to deal with that legacy.”

However, others argue that post-racial politics is not about never seeing race, but about being a champion of aggressive action to deliver economic opportunity and weed out police misconduct. They argue that when the media amplifies division, it makes racial healing and justice more difficult. Because events demonstrating racial harmony are dismissed as non-newsworthy, they would say the media’s emphasis on conflict undermines trust and impedes progress.

So, our question could be answered in multiple ways. Do you think that we have arrived at a time when we no longer see race? Or, have we arrived at a time when we can see through the media’s obsession with division and can work together on justice for all? Alternatively, do you think we have not achieved either of those goals? In that case, how should we define a post-racial America?

What do you think? Will there ever be a post-racial America?

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



SUMMARY

BIG IDEA: During the 2010s the Black Lives Matter movement emerged as a response to police violence against African American men. The movement expanded as events brought a wide variety of problems facing minority communities to the nation's attention. Despite the election of the first African American president, the past decade shows how divided and unequal America remains.

Even after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, America remains a racially segregation nation. People tend to live in communities with other people of their same race. In some places such as Flint, Michigan or New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, White community leaders have been accused of harming African American neighborhoods by neglecting to provide proper services.

Barack Obama was elected in 2008 as the first African American president. In the beginning, he encouraged people to think that the nation was moving past its divided past, but later he explicitly dealt with race in speeches.

During Obama's presidency, new cell phone cameras and social media made evidence of shootings of unarmed African Americans common and the Black Lives Matter movement grew to bring attention to this ongoing problem. Protests took place after numerous shootings. Protests in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland turned violent and were met with police using military equipment and tactics.

A shooting in at an African American church in Charleston, South Carolina by a White nationalist led to a movement to remove symbols of the Confederacy, especially the old Confederate battle flag and statues of Confederate soldiers.

Athletes have supported these protests by kneeling during the national anthem. Beyoncé protested by using Black Power symbolism during her performance at the Super Bowl.

Other groups such as African American women and Asian and Pacific Islanders have also begun movements to address racism and violence.

President Trump was criticized by many Americans for his comments and actions related to racial conflicts. Some felt that he was encouraging White supremacists or disrespecting the right of people to assemble and protest.

The most significant racial justice protests since the 1960s happened in the summer of 2020 when marches were held in hundreds of cities to protest police violence after the murder of George Floyd. Numerous changes have been enacted as a result, including changing names and increased efforts to make sure minority groups are represented and portrayed respectfully in business and popular culture.

BLM has been criticized as anti-police and encouraging racial division. Although there has not been a decline in police shootings, police departments

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



around the country have implemented reforms such as an increased emphasis on community policing, banning some tactics, and the use of body cameras.

The Shelby County v. Holder case invalidated parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and in many Republican-controlled states new restrictions on voting rights have been enacted.



KEY CONCEPTS

White Flight: The movement of Whites out of inner cities into suburbs in the 1970s and 1980s that resulted in poorer urban cores populated by African Americans and Hispanics surrounded by suburbs of almost all White residents.

Community Policing: Police practices that include meeting people instead of only riding in cars, and doing public relations activities such as running children’s sports leagues.

Body Cameras: Small digital video cameras worn by police officers.

Bertherism: The lie that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States. Before running for president himself, Donald Trump was famous for spreading this lie.

Dog Whistle: A phrase or comment used by politicians to show support for a group but that other groups of voters will not notice or find offensive.

Defund the Police: A rallying cry and policy proposal that grew out of the George Floyd protests of 2020. It frightens some Americans who favor law-and-order and lowered overall public support for the protests.

Voter Suppression: Any action designed to make voting harder. After the Shelby County v. Holder Supreme Court case, numerous laws and policies have been implemented to this effect.



COURT CASES

Shelby County v. Holder: 2013 Supreme Court case in which the Court ruled that large sections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act no longer applied. After the ruling, Republican politicians in many states implemented changes designed to suppress the minority vote.



LOCATIONS

Lower Ninth Ward: Mostly African American neighborhood in New Orleans that was devastated by flooding in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina.



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Barack Obama: First African American president. He is a Democrat and was elected in 2008 and reelected 2012.

Treyvon Martin: African American teenager who was murdered in 2012 while walking home from buying candy from a convenience store in Florida. His death sparked the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Eric Garner: African American man who died in 2014 after being held in a chokehold by New York City Police. His last words were “I can’t breathe” which became a slogan of anti-police brutality protests.

Michael Brown, Jr.: African American teenager killed by police in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri. Protests after his death were the first to feature large numbers of participants organized by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Tamir Rice: 12-year-old African American boy killed by police in 2014 who believed he was carrying a gun. It turned out to be an air pistol. His death was widely protested as part of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Freddie Gray, Jr.: African American man who died in a police van from spinal cord injuries in 2015 in Baltimore. His death sparked protests that turned violent.

Breonna Taylor: African American woman killed when police attempted to carry out a no-knock warrant of her apartment. Her death helped give rise to the #SayHerName campaign.

Sandra Bland: An African American woman who died while in police custody. Her story gained national attention through the #SayHerName movement and led to police reforms in Texas.

Colin Kaepernick: NFL quarterback who knelt during The Star Spangled Banner beginning in 2016. His actions launched a wider use of that non-violent protest among professional athletes.

Beyoncé: Pop star who used Black Power symbolism to protest treatment of African Americans by police during the 2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show.

George Floyd: African American man who died when a police officer knelt on his neck for over nine minutes. His death in 2020 sparked the largest racial justice protests in American history.



SPEECHES, SLOGANS & SYMBOLS

2002 Democratic National Convention Keynote

Speech: Speech by then-Senator Barack Obama in which he rejected divisions in America. It is sometimes called the “Purple America” speech in reference to the merging of blue and red. Obama’s performance propelled him to national fame.

A More Perfect Union Speech: Speech by Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential campaign in which he explicitly addressed the issue of race. Some political historians regard it as a turning point in the campaign.

I Can’t Breathe: Eric Garner’s last words. They became a slogan of protesters against police brutality.

Hands Up, Don’t Shoot: The last words some believe Michael Brown said before being killed by police in 2014. They became a slogan of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Confederate Battle Flag: The flag carried by troops from the South into battle during the Civil War. It was resurrected in the 1960s by White Southerners who opposed the Civil Rights Movement and is now a powerful symbol of hate and racism.

Thin Blue Line Flag: A modified American flag that is black and white with one blue line across the center. It is used to show support for the police.



LAWS

Stand-Your-Ground Laws: Laws that permit citizens to use deadly force to defend themselves if they feel threatened.

Voter ID Laws: Laws that require voters to show photo identification. Proponents claim they will stop voter fraud. Opponents claim they make voting harder, especially for the elderly, minorities and the poor

4 WILL THERE EVER BE A POST-RACIAL AMERICA?



EVENTS

Flint Water Crisis: Health crisis revealed in 2014 in which the mostly African American residents of Flint, Michigan were drinking tap water contaminated with lead.

Black Lives Matter (BLM): Racial justice movement that developed around 2014 and focuses on police brutality. It is led by younger Americans rather than the generation that led the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Ferguson Unrest: Weeklong protests and confrontations between protesters and law enforcement after the death of Michael Brown in 2014. Protests restarted after the announcement that the officer who shot him would not be indicted, and again on the anniversary of Brown's death.

2015 Baltimore Protest: Violent unrest after the death of Freddie Gray in 2015. The protests resulted in arson, arrests, injuries to police and the calling of the National Guard to restore order.

McKinney Pool Party: 2015 incident in Texas in which a White police officer tackled an African American teenage girl outside a pool party and then later pulled his gun. The incident was captured on video.

#SayHerName: An outgrowth of the Black Lives Matter movement focuses on bringing attention to police violence against African American Women.

Charleston Church Shooting: Mass shooting of African Americans at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015 by a White supremacist. The attack sparked a debate over public displays of the Confederate battle flag.

University of Missouri Protests: Protests in 2015 at the University of Missouri when students decided the school's chancellor had not done enough to address racism and hate on campus. The protests succeeded when the school's football team refused to play.

2016 Super Bowl Halftime Show: Performance by Beyoncé in which she used Black Power symbolism to protest treatment of African Americans by police.

Unite the Right: A rally held by various White supremacist groups in 2017 in Charlottesville. Trump's comments about the rally resulted in the lowest approval rating of his presidency.

George Floyd Protests: The largest racial justice protests in American history. They were held in dozens of cities around the nation during the summer of 2020.

Trump's Photo Op at St. John's Church: During the George Floyd protests in the summer of 2020 President Trump ordered police to forcibly remove peaceful protesters so he could have a photo taken holding a Bible in front of a church near the White House. His attempt to capture public support backfired.

Blue Lives Matter: Slogan of a movement in support of police officers in response to criticism from the Black Lives Matter movement.

Stop AAPI Hate: Movement that emerged during the coronavirus pandemic to combat violence and prejudice against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

5

F I F T H Q U E S T I O N HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

A graphic with a dark background and colorful, pixelated text that reads "How will historians remember the past 30 years?"

INTRODUCTION

For most of American history, major changes in daily life came from new machines: the railroad, electricity, cars, and airplanes. In the last 30 years, one invention has been just as important, even though you cannot see it the same way you can see a highway or a power line. The internet has reshaped the economy, entertainment, and politics. It has changed how people work, how families communicate, and how students learn. Many Americans now carry a powerful computer in their pocket and can get information instantly.

In many ways, the internet has expanded opportunities by making information, communication, and creativity cheaper and faster than ever before. It can help people learn new skills, find jobs, build communities, and participate in public debates in ways that were difficult in earlier eras.

But the internet has also created new problems that are still unfolding. It can spread misinformation quickly. It can expose private information. It can reward anger more than truth. And it can leave behind people and communities without good access. Some historians argue that the internet represents the greatest expansion of knowledge access in human history. Others argue it may be weakening democratic trust.

So, when historians look back on the past 30 years, they will almost certainly debate the same question we are asking now: Has the internet made America a better place?

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



THE ORIGINS OF THE INTERNET

The **internet** did not begin as a shopping mall, a streaming service, or a place for social media. It began as part of a Cold War struggle over power, technology, and security. As you know, fears of a nuclear strike were high in the early decades of the Cold War, and American leaders worried about communication in such a crisis. If the Soviet Union attacked a major command center like the White House or the Pentagon, could the United States still send messages and coordinate a response? Cold War fears encouraged leaders to support communication systems that could keep working even if parts were damaged or destroyed. In the late 1960s, the government and military began funding research that led to **ARPANET**, an early network that linked computers at universities and research centers. Historians generally agree that the first message sent over what became the internet was in 1969, when computers at UCLA and the Stanford Research Institute shared the message “LO”, short for “login.”

The key idea of ARPANET was packet switching, which is still key to the internet today. Packet switching meant breaking information into small pieces and sending them through different routes. If one route was blocked, the data could travel another way. Thus, the internet was more like a spider’s web than a straight road between two computers and thus fulfilled the Cold War need of finding a way to pass messages even if one point in the network had been destroyed.

It wasn’t just the military and government that was working on the early internet. Before the internet, scientists and researchers had to wait for books or journals to be published to find out what one another were working on. They wanted a quicker way to share their ideas and data. To achieve this, they linked computers through telephone lines and developed common rules for sending information from one computer network to another. These rules are called protocols, and the most important was TCP/IP. When many different networks followed the same rules, they could become one larger “network of networks.” In 1983, TCP/IP became the standard protocol for ARPANET, and many historians mark that moment as the true birth of the modern internet.

Notice that the internet was not suddenly born overnight, but rather was developed over time, and its inventors did not have today’s world of smartphones, apps, streaming video and social media in mind when they made it. All of these developments happened over time, and each was the response to a particular need people had at the moment.



Internet: A global “network of networks” that connects computers and allows information to move between them.



ARPANET: An early computer network that connected universities and research centers and helped lay the groundwork for today’s internet. It was funded in part by the government because of Cold War fears.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



THE INTERNET & THE INFORMATION AGE

As the internet developed, the American economy was also shifting in deeper ways. By the late 1900s, people were starting to talk about a new era in history: the **Information Age**. In earlier periods, the most important resources were often physical. In the Industrial Revolution, economic power came from factories, machines, railroads, oil, and mass production. In the Information Age, power increasingly comes from data, communication, and knowledge.

In other words, the internet mattered not only because it was a new technology, but also because it fit into a new kind of economy where information, communication, and speed became more valuable than ever.

This does not mean that factories and physical goods stopped mattering. Americans still need food, housing, and energy. But many of the fastest-growing industries began to focus on creating, organizing, selling, and controlling information. The Information Age has grown alongside globalization. In the 1970s and 1980s, many American companies moved manufacturing overseas to places where labor was cheaper. This weakened old industrial regions in the United States and helped create the Rust Belt. At the same time, the United States grew more dependent on jobs tied to technology, finance, education, media, and services.

However, the Information Age has never been evenly shared. Many countries and regions remain deeply tied to agriculture or factory production, and even within the United States, not all communities benefited equally from the shift. In some places, globalization and the Information Age brought new opportunities. In other places, these changes mean job loss, wage pressure, and a sense that the economy has changed too fast.

The shift to the Information Age has also increased the demand for higher education. In the early 1900s, the country went through a major change in which high school became increasingly important for working in a modern industrial economy and towns across the nation built high schools. After World War II, college became much more common, especially as returning veterans used the GI Bill to attend universities. Today, as more jobs are tied to information, technology, and specialized skills, some form of education or training beyond high school has become close to essential for people who want to work in the information sector.

HOME COMPUTERS & THE EARLY INTERNET

In the 1960s and 1970s, computers were mostly huge mainframes owned by universities, the military, and large corporations. Ordinary Americans rarely touched one directly. But in the late 1970s and early 1980s, **personal computers** began shrinking in size and price. Companies like Apple, IBM, and Commodore marketed computers for home and small business use. This was



Information Age: A modern era, beginning in the late 1900s in which economic and political power increasingly comes from data, communication, and knowledge.



Personal Computer: Smaller, affordable computer designed for home and small business use. These became common in the late 1970s and 1980s.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

a major transition: computers were no longer just tools for experts in labs. They were becoming consumer products.

A key moment came in 1984, when **Steve Jobs**, the CEO of **Apple**, introduced the **Macintosh**, a computer designed for everyday users. Unlike earlier machines that required typing commands, the Macintosh used a **graphical user interface (GUI)** with windows, icons, and a mouse. That design made computers feel less intimidating and helped expand the audience beyond hobbyists.

Many Americans also encountered computers *before* they owned one at home. By the 1980s, offices increasingly used computers for payroll, spreadsheets, and word processing. Schools began adding computer labs, and students practiced typing, played educational games like Oregon Trail, and learned basic programming. This “workplace and classroom” exposure helped normalize computers and prepared families for the idea that a home computer could be useful, not just a luxury.

Apple introduces Macintosh.
The computer for the bemused, confused and intimidated.

That seems to create problems instead of solving them. So we decided, if computers are so smart, why don't we teach a computer how people work, instead of teaching people how computers work. The result is Macintosh. Macintosh is incredibly simple and easy to use. There are no complicated manuals. No command sequences. No computer languages. Macintosh works just the way you do now. In about the same amount of space as an 8 1/2 x 11 inch pad of paper. To understand how, forget computers. Imagine your desk. What do you see? An ink and that tray. A calendar. Pens, paper, scissors, tape. Stacks of memos. Lots of things to do. A calculator. Drawers of files. And at the side, a trash can.

All of these objects are on Macintosh's screen. Just as they are on your desk. Say, for example, you want a file. On other computers, you'd refer to a manual. Find a code. Type it on a keyboard. And wait. A slow, laborious process. Especially if you don't type. With Macintosh, there's no typing. To open a file, you move a hand-held device on your desk, called a mouse.

With twice the power of any 16-bit computer. And because Macintosh is an Apple 32-bit "SuperMac," it can work as a part of an integrated system with other Macintoshes, Lisa[®] and peripherals. It can also communicate with IBM[®] and IBM[®] mainframes. See Macintosh at your Apple dealer today. While it may amaze you, Macintosh certainly won't bemuse, confuse or intimidate you. And neither will the price. Soon there'll be just two kinds of people. Those who use computers and those who use Apple.

Macintosh's Personality. THE SERIOUS SIDE.

THE FUN SIDE.

The first Apple you can carry in a bag.

We understand how you feel. It's Catch-22. If you're busy enough to really benefit from a computer, you don't have the time to decipher the buzz words, jargon, claims and counter-claims of "Computer Speak." So you're left bemused, confused or intimidated by an information overload.

you can point, you can use Macintosh.

same way. Using the mouse, you can draw a chart. Cut it out. And paste it into the text of a memo. Just by pointing and clicking. With software like MacWrite[®], MacDraw[®], MacPaint[®] and MacTerminal[®], you work faster. More efficiently. And more creatively. And there are hundreds more software programs on the way. Each on 3 1/2 inch disks that let you carry file cabinets of information in your shirt pocket. Macintosh itself weighs only 20 pounds. Which means you can literally carry your whole office home with you. And to carry you through the largest workloads, is Macintosh's 32-bit microprocessor.

Apple, the Apple logo, MacWrite, MacDraw, MacPaint, MacTerminal, Lisa and SuperMac are registered trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc. Macintosh is a trademark of Apple Computer, Inc. IBM is a registered trademark of International Business Machines Corporation. IBM is a registered trademark of International Business Machines Corporation.

But home computers and the internet are two different things. Most people who bought computers in the 1980s had no idea that they would one day be used to connect to the internet. A turning point came in the 1990s with the development of the **World Wide Web (www)**, which made it easier for ordinary people to use the internet through web browsers. The distinction between the internet and the World Wide Web seems trivial today, but it mattered in history. The internet is the underlying infrastructure that connects computers together (developed mainly in the 1960s–1980s), while the World Wide Web is a layer on top of the internet that makes it easier for everyday users to click through pages.

 **Steve Jobs:** Apple leader who helped launch the iPhone in 2007, accelerating the shift to smartphones as everyday internet devices.

 **Apple:** Technology company that popularized the personal computer with the Mac and smartphones with the iPhone.

 **Macintosh:** Apple's 1984 personal computer that helped popularize a graphical user interface for everyday users.

 **Graphical User Interface (GUI):** A computer interface that uses windows, icons, and menus instead of typed commands. This design made computers much easier for the average person to use.

Primary Source: Advertisement

An ad for the first Macintosh emphasizing its user-friendly features, mouse, and graphical user interface featuring windows and icons.

 **World Wide Web (www):** A system of web pages and hyperlinks that runs on top of the internet and is accessed through a browser.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

What made the World Wide Web easier was simplicity. Earlier internet use often required typing commands and knowing exact addresses for services (for example, logging into a specific computer to access files). The World Wide Web introduced a system of web pages that could be connected by clickable hyperlinks, so users could move from one page to another without memorizing complicated commands. The Web also depended on **web browsers**, which turned the internet into something people could see and navigate. Early browsers like Mosaic and Netscape helped popularize the idea of “surfing” the web. Browsers made the internet feel more like reading and exploring than like programming. Over time, Chrome, Firefox, and Safari replaced the original browsers as the most popular options.



Web Browser: Software that lets users view and navigate web pages. Examples include Chrome and Safari.



Primary Source: Movie Poster

The movie You've Got Mail captured the spirit of the early internet when people were excited about email and the possibilities the internet promised.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



Another key development that helped was the **Domain Name System (DNS)**, which translates easy-to-remember names (like inquiryhistory.com) into the number-based IP addresses that computers use. While DNS was not invented specifically for the Web, it became even more important in the 1990s because it made it far easier for everyday users to find websites without needing to know strings of numbers.

Many families first got online at home using **dial-up** connections that ran through phone lines. Companies like **America Online (AOL)** provided internet connection service and software that helped make the early internet feel user-friendly. For many people, one of the first everyday uses of the internet was email, which made long-distance communication faster and cheaper than phone calls or letters. People also joined online chat forums and explored basic web pages. Even though the internet was still slow, it felt revolutionary.

Pop culture captured the excitement at the time in the 1998 romantic movie *You've Got Mail*, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. The plot of the story revolves around their daily ritual of arriving home and checking their email, eventually leading to love. Email is portrayed in the film as a small daily miracle, and the movie shows how online communication could create relationships that felt real, even between people who had never met face-to-face.

As the internet took off and Americans got used to going online (perhaps even finding love like Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan), money began flowing in. The result was the **Dot-Com Bubble**. Investors poured money into internet companies, even those with little profit, thinking that soon everything would be online and the key to getting rich was getting in early. Many of these start-up companies had no clear long-term revenue model, and some were valued more for hype and expectations than for real earnings. When they failed, which many did, the stock market dropped sharply in 2000–2001. This “dot-com crash” showed both the excitement and instability of the new digital economy.

A company that survived the dot-com crash was **Google**. In the mid-1990s, as the internet exploded, early tools struggled to keep up. Some, like Yahoo, relied partly on human-made directories like phone books, while others, like AltaVista, tried to search the web more directly. These **search engines** were experiments in a new problem: how to find information on the growing internet. In 1998, Stanford graduate students **Larry Page** and **Sergey Brin** launched Google, which became famous for ranking pages by relevance using links between sites as clues about trust and importance. The result was that Google usually produced faster, cleaner results, and Google became Americans’ go-to search engine. By the early 2000s, everyone knew what it meant “to google” something.



Domain Name System (DNS): The system that translates website names into the number-based addresses computers use.



Dial-Up: An early form of home internet connection that used telephone lines, which was slow and tied up the phone line while connected.



America Online (AOL): Company that helped many Americans get online in the 1990s through dial-up internet and an easy-to-use online service.



Dot-Com Bubble: Rapid growth of internet-based companies and investment, followed by major market losses.



Google: Company that started as a search engine in the late 1990s and then expanded into many other internet products and services.



Search Engine: A tool that helps users find information online by searching the web for keywords. Google became the dominant option by the early 2000s.



Larry Page & Sergey Brin: Co-founded Google (1998), which popularized a more effective way to search the growing web.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

By the late 1990s, many families could get online, but the experience was still limited by dial-up. It was slow, it tied up the phone line, and people had to “log on” for a short session rather than staying connected all day. Then, **broadband** changed everything. Broadband connections were based on a separate, permanent connection which was faster and always on, making the internet feel less like an occasional activity and more like a basic utility as important as electricity and running water. This shift opened the door to bigger changes, like online shopping, streaming video, and online gaming. Since then, mobile access through smartphones has made the internet even more integrated into daily life.



Broadband: A faster, always-on internet connection that replaced dial-up and made it easier to stream, shop online, and stay connected throughout the day.

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com homepage for the book "Hearts in Atlantis" by Stephen King. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with categories like Books, Music, Video, Toys & Games, Electronics, e-Cards, Auctions, and zShops. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with options like Book Search, Browse Subjects, Bestsellers, Featured in the Media, Award Winners, Computers & Internet, Kids, and Business & Investing. The main content area features the book's title, author, and a list price of \$28.00 with a current price of \$14.00 (50% off). It also displays the book's cover, availability information, and a "Shopping with us is 100% safe. Guaranteed." badge. A sidebar on the left contains a "Book Information" section with links for reviews, customer comments, and excerpts, as well as a "Keyword Search" box. At the bottom, there are sections for "Customers who bought this book also bought:" and "Our auction & zShops sellers recommend:".

Primary Source: Screenshot

The Amazon website as it appeared in 2000 after the company had already begun branching out and selling more than just books.

THE GROWTH OF E-BUSINESS

As the economy became more focused on information and data, and broadband access made fast and reliable connections normal, the internet offered new ways to buy and sell.

Online shopping, also called **e-commerce**, grew rapidly. The most famous of all the American online stores, Amazon, was founded in 1994 as an online bookstore, but has grown to become a massive marketplace that can deliver almost anything.



E-commerce: Online buying and selling (online shopping).

As e-commerce expanded, traditional brick-and-mortar stores struggled. For decades, Americans had shopped at department stores like Sears, JCPenney,

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

K-Mart, and Macy's. They spent weekends in suburban shopping malls. In the 2000s and 2010s, these stores lost customers as online shopping became easier and cheaper, and shopping malls across the country closed. Brick-and-mortar stores that have survived usually have an online option for customers in addition to their physical locations.

It's not just selling to individual consumers that has shaped the online economy. **Business-to-business (B2B)** sales have skyrocketed as well. No longer do offices stop at the local store for pens and paper. Now, they simply order in bulk online.

At the same time that new corporations like Amazon were killing off old ones like K-Mart, the internet has made it easier for small entrepreneurs to get started. People can sell used items on **eBay**. Artists and crafters can sell on Etsy. Payment tools like Square have helped small stores and individual vendors accept credit cards, even at impermanent locations like food trucks, farmers markets and craft fairs.

Banking has changed too. Services like PayPal and apps like Venmo made it normal to send money digitally. People can log into their bank's app or website and quickly transfer money. Over time, the old habit of writing checks has become less common.

Many government services have also moved online. Citizens can now renew licenses, fill out forms, file taxes, and access public information on government websites.



Another major shift has been the **gig economy**. To make extra money, or instead of working at traditional jobs, thousands of Americans have begun doing short-term work that could not exist without the internet. Companies like Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash offer flexible work. The gig economy is not without its critics, however. Worries that gig workers lack benefits and job security are growing, and in some states the government has started to pass laws regulating this new corner of the economy.



Business-to-Business (B2B): Online sales and services between companies (not directly to individual consumers).



eBay: Online marketplace that helped popularize person-to-person selling.

Primary Source: Photograph

Apps like Uber have created new opportunities for workers who want to participate in the gig economy.



Gig Economy: Work built around short-term jobs, often found through apps and online platforms like Uber or DoorDash.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

ENTERTAINMENT GOES DIGITAL

Like the shift from vaudeville to movies that revolutionized entertainment in the 1920s, the information age has upended the entertainment industry at the start of the 2000s.

Video games started in arcades, where people played short games by inserting coins. In the late 1970s and 1980s, home consoles like Atari brought gaming into living rooms. In the 1980s and 1990s, companies like Nintendo and Sega helped turn console video games into a huge part of youth culture.

In the 1990s and 2000s, improvements in computer power and internet connections made online gaming common. Players can now compete or cooperate with people around the world. Later, handheld gaming on systems like the GameBoy and Nintendo Switch, as well as smartphone games became widespread.



Primary Source: Photograph

Handheld games like this Leapster have replaced arcades and opened up a whole new category of entertainment.

Movies and TV also changed. In the past, families watched TV shows when the broadcasters played them, rented VHS tapes and DVDs from a brick-and-mortar store or went to movie theaters.

Over time, the internet helped push entertainment away from physical stores and scheduled programming and toward on-demand viewing at home. The big shift was **streaming**, which lets people watch instantly over the internet.

Netflix is the best example of this change. Netflix began in the late 1990s as a DVD-by-mail service but later shifted toward streaming. Streaming accelerated the decline of video rental stores. Blockbuster and Hollywood



Streaming: Watching or listening to media online without downloading the entire file first.



Netflix: Streaming platform that helped normalize on-demand TV and movie watching.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Video, chains of rental stores once found all over the country, filed for bankruptcy as streaming and mail-order rentals changed people's habits.

Streaming also changed who could create entertainment. **YouTube** allowed anyone to post videos and build an audience without a TV studio.



YouTube: Video platform where people can post videos and build audiences.

CELL PHONES TO SMARTPHONES

The invention of the **cell phone** added a new layer to the internet revolution.

The idea behind cellular communication is almost as old as the telephone, but the first modern **cell networks** were not created until the technologies that make them possible were fully formed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Japan launched one of the first commercial cellular networks in 1979, and in the United States, the first widely recognized commercial cell network (1G) began operating in 1983. The first cell phones were huge, and required batteries that filled car trunks, meaning cell phones were often called "car phones." In the 1990s the major cell phone networks were able to build out coverage for most American cities and by 2000, cell phone stores were popping up around the country, cell phones were small enough to fit in pockets and owning a cell phone was becoming common.



Cell Phone: Mobile phone that connects through networks of towers ("cells").



Cell Network: System of cell towers that allow mobile phones to communicate wirelessly.



Primary Source: Photograph

Apple's CEO Steve Jobs introducing the first iPhone on stage in 2007.

Then in 2007, Apple, led by Steve Jobs, released the **iPhone**, the first touchscreen **smartphone** and everything changed. Google and Samsung quickly copied the basic form of the iPhone and in 2008, Apple launched the App Store. By the early 2010s, the expansion of 4G networks helped make smartphones fast enough for video streaming, constant social media use, and always-on apps. The old days of cell phones were over, and with smartphones, almost anyone can carry a powerful computer in their pocket.



iPhone: Apple's smartphone (first released in 2007) that popularized the modern touchscreen smartphone and helped expand the app economy.



Smartphone: Cell phone that functions like a small computer with internet access and apps.

With smartphones and the app store, the app economy was born. Instead of using a few programs on a desktop computer, Americans began relying on

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



hundreds of small apps for daily tasks. Today, people order food, track workouts, find dates, listen to music, get directions, and manage money through apps.

Smartphones changed social norms and continue to shape them. Even before smartphones took over, texting helped make short, constant communication feel normal. Once smartphones arrived with their full keyboards, many conversations moved away from phone calls and toward quick written messages. Later, the advent of emoji accelerated this trend. In-person social norms changed as well. Now, friends stop to look up information in the middle of their conversations. Drivers navigate with GPS instead of paper maps. Many workplaces have begun to expect their employees to answer emails and messages outside of normal business hours. Smartphones also changed how people act in public and how relationships work. For example, it became normal for friends to sit together while also scrolling on their own devices and common to take photos of meals, vacations, and events specifically to post them online.

While smartphones have opened a world of possibilities, they also raised concerns. Constant notifications can weaken attention. Screen time can disrupt sleep and damage in-person social relationships. Some people worry that life has become more performative, with both students and adults trying to document experiences instead of simply living them.

WEB 2.0 & SOCIAL MEDIA

The early internet was similar to a library, with thousands of webpages that people could log on and read. But like a library, where only a few authors write books compared to the many readers, the internet had few authors compared to its many users. Then suddenly the internet shifted to a place where millions of users created information. This change transformed the internet into something more social, more interactive, and more influential in daily life. The shift to interactivity was nicknamed **Web 2.0**. In Web 2.0, users no longer just read what's online. They post their own photos, videos, and ideas.

Knowing a few specific examples helps us see this shift over time, because different platforms made different parts of Web 2.0 possible.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, people began using chat rooms, forums, and comment sections on web pages. Soon after, early **social media** sites made it possible to create online profiles and share life updates. MySpace launched in 2003 and became one of the first widely used social media sites. **Facebook**, launched in 2004, expanded quickly and eventually became the dominant social network. Over time social media diversified to include video and then variations on the way people shared their lives. YouTube (2005), Twitter/X (2006), Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), and TikTok (2017 in the US) all helped create an internet that was increasingly centered on sharing, not just on reading.



Web 2.0: A phase of the internet when users increasingly created and shared content, not just read it.



Social Media: Websites and apps where users create profiles, share content, and interact with others. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are examples.

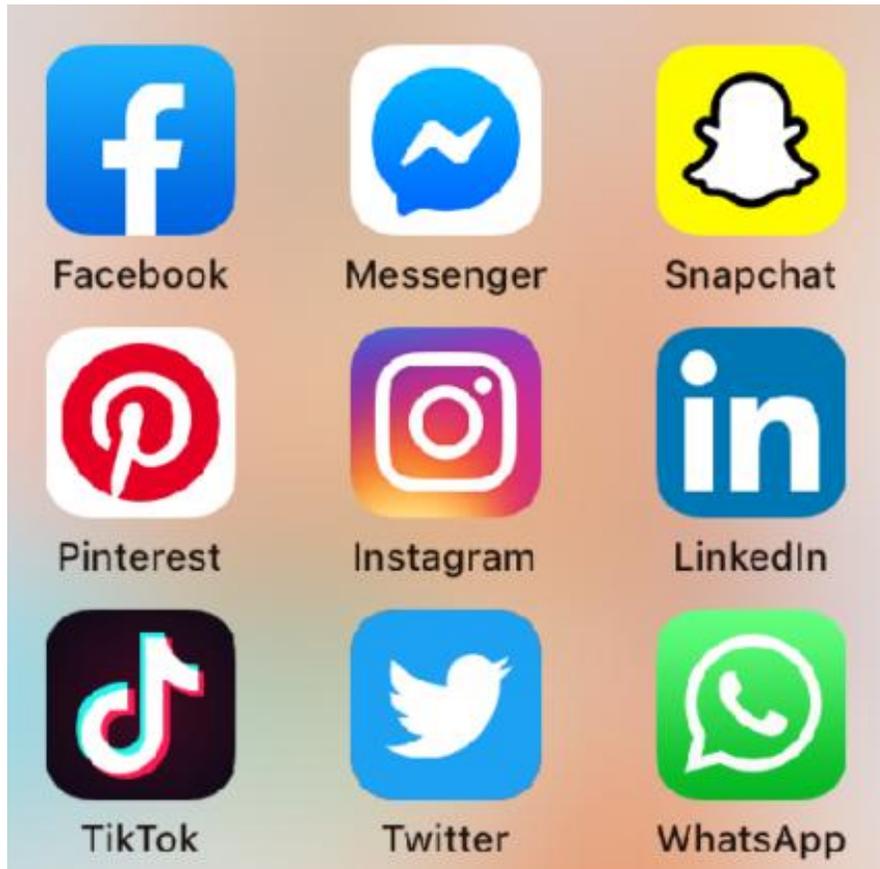


Facebook: Social media platform launched in 2004 that became a dominant network for online communication.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Smartphones mattered here. Once phones had cameras and high-speed connections, people could upload photos and videos instantly. Social media became a constant part of daily life, not something you did only on a home computer.



Primary Source: Screenshot

A sample of the social media options available in 2000.

Social media has helped people find communities and spread ideas quickly, and it continues to shape how Americans communicate and organize. It has played a role in political movements and protests by helping organizers share information, raise money, and attract attention from the media. One dramatic example outside the United States was the Arab Spring of 2011. In countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, protesters used social media to spread videos, share information about demonstrations, and draw international attention. In Egypt especially, Facebook and Twitter/X were widely used to promote protests and share updates. Social media did not cause these uprisings by itself, but it helped people coordinate faster than older methods. Over time, however, authoritarian governments adapted. Some governments learned to monitor social media, spread their own propaganda, and use digital tools for surveillance. A domestic example of social media's political impact was the rise of #BlackLivesMatter (2013–2015). After the hashtag began spreading online, activists used platforms like Twitter/X,

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



Facebook, and Instagram to share videos, organize protests, and push the issue of police violence and racial justice into national news.

A new kind of celebrity also emerged with the growth of social media: **influencers**. Influencers build large audiences and earn money through sponsorships, advertising, and product promotion. In some cases, top influencers can earn millions of dollars through brand partnerships. In one way, they are much like the celebrities of old who appear in advertisements on television or in magazines, but in many ways the influencers of social media are an entirely new sort of celebrity.

Smartphones and the rise of social media are a good way to understand another shift in the history of the internet: the growth of what some historians call the **platform era**. In the early web, the internet was mostly pages and links that you visited through a browser. With smartphones, apps, and centralized networks, information is now centralized in databases and displayed on customized platforms, sometimes as webpages on a computer, but just as often in an app or on a smartwatch. And that centralization of information, and the way that it is sliced, diced, and fed to us, is key to understanding our next topic: the dangers of the Information Age.

DANGERS & CHALLENGES OF THE INFORMATION AGE

The internet has created real benefits, but it has also created new dangers. Over time, each wave of development, from the early web, to broadband, to smartphones, to social media, and now AI has made online life faster and more powerful. But each wave has also increased the scale of harm, because information can spread more quickly, reach more people, last longer, and be monetized more aggressively. The biggest risks today include cybercrime, privacy loss, misinformation, the digital divide, and the growing power of a few companies that control large parts of online life.

One reason these risks matter is that the internet is not “the cloud” in a magical sense. It depends on real infrastructure and on decisions about who owns and controls it. Most global internet traffic travels through undersea fiber-optic cables, and much of what we do online relies on huge **data centers** and **cloud computing** services that store and deliver videos, apps, and websites quickly. When these systems are controlled by a small number of companies, questions about competition, security, and political power become harder to ignore.

New technology brings new risks. In 1999, the **Y2K Scare** swept the world. To save memory, many early computer programs used only two digits for the year. That meant “1999” was stored as “99.” When 2000 arrived and the date became “00,” would computers misread the year as 1900 and cause failures in banking, power systems, transportation, and government? The disaster did not happen, partly because companies and governments spent billions fixing their code, but the scare reminded people how dependent modern life had become on computers.



Influencer: An online personality who builds a large audience on social media and earns money through advertising, sponsorships, or product promotion.



Platform Era: A later phase of the internet when information is no longer written out into static webpages but is stored in databases and formatted into apps, feeds, and webpages that people interact with.



Data Centers: Large warehouses filled with servers that store and process online information.



Cloud Computing: Using remote servers (often in data centers) to store, run, and deliver apps and data over the internet.



Y2K Scare: Late-1990s fear that computers would malfunction in 2000 because many programs stored years using only two digits.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



Other threats have turned out to be more serious.

One is **hacking**, when someone breaks into a computer system to steal information or take control. One major example was the Equifax breach (2017), in which hackers accessed sensitive personal data connected to millions of Americans. The breach showed how **identity theft** can become easier when large companies fail to protect user data.

Another danger is **ransomware**, which can lock important files and shut down services. A major example was the Colonial Pipeline ransomware attack (2021), in which hackers disrupted an oil pipeline by targeting the computer systems the company relied on. But cybercrime is not always a dramatic national headline. Routine **phishing** scams target ordinary people every day, and schools and hospitals have increasingly been hit by ransomware that disrupts learning and patient care.

- ✓ **Hacking:** Breaking into computer systems, often to steal information, disrupt services, or take control.
- ✓ **Identity Theft:** Stealing personal information to commit fraud, such as opening accounts in someone else's name
- ✓ **Ransomware:** Malware that locks files or systems until a ransom is paid.
- ✓ **Phishing:** A scam that tricks people into revealing passwords or personal information, often through fake emails or messages.



Primary Source: Screenshot

A screenshot of the WannaCry ransomware attack that spread through Microsoft Windows computers in 2017. The malicious app encrypting data until users paid a ransom in bitcoin.

Countries can also engage in **cyberwar**, using hacking to weaken rivals by targeting infrastructure, military systems, or elections. For example, Russia has been linked to cyberattacks on Ukrainian infrastructure, including attacks that shut down parts of the electrical power grid.

- ✓ **Cyberwar:** Conflict between countries that involves hacking to disrupt infrastructure or weaken rivals
- ✓ **Digital Divide:** The gap between people who have reliable internet access, devices, and digital skills

The **digital divide** is another major issue. Not everyone has fast internet, modern devices, or strong digital skills, and that gap can deepen inequality. In the Information Age, many people have argued that access to high-speed internet should be treated like access to electricity: a basic necessity for full participation in society. In many ways, the digital divide today echoes older challenges in American history, such as in the 1930s and 1940s when the

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



New Deal's Rural Electrification Administration worked to bring electricity to rural areas.

Another major concern is data and privacy. Companies and governments can collect huge amounts of information about people's behavior, purchases, and locations. Some of this is obvious, like targeted advertising. But much of it is routine and invisible. Websites and apps often rely on **cross-site tracking**, and a large industry of **data brokers** buys and sells information such as location histories, shopping habits, and demographic guesses. Over time, this creates a kind of digital "permanence," where old posts, photos, and searches can shape someone's reputation long after the moment has passed.

A major example of privacy concerns involving private companies was the Cambridge Analytica scandal, which showed how data connected to millions of Facebook users could be gathered and used for political targeting without clear user consent.

Businesses aren't the only ones collecting data. After the September 11 attacks, Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act, which expanded the government's power to collect information in the name of preventing terrorism. In 2013, contractor Edward Snowden revealed classified information about **government surveillance** programs, and Americans were shocked to learn how much data their government could collect, even on people who were not suspected of any crime. Those revelations reignited debates about privacy and security that continue today.

Another major political fight has been about regulation over **net neutrality**. Net neutrality is the idea that internet service providers (ISPs) should treat all websites and online services the same, instead of slowing down certain content or charging extra for "fast lanes." Supporters argue that without net neutrality, a few powerful companies could shape what people can access online by favoring some sites over others. They also argue that equal treatment protects competition, because small start-ups and independent creators can reach people without having to pay extra. Opponents argue that heavy regulation could discourage investment in broadband networks and make it harder for companies to improve service.

The debate has swung back and forth. In 2015, the FCC adopted net neutrality rules, but in 2017 those rules were repealed under the Trump administration. Since then, the issue has remained controversial because it raises a practical fairness question: If huge companies like Amazon or Netflix can pay internet providers for priority delivery of their content, why shouldn't they be allowed to, and what happens to smaller sites that cannot pay for the same advantage?

And often, money is at the heart of the challenges of the Information Age. The internet is shaped by how many companies make money. For websites and social media companies, online advertising is the dominant business



Cross-Site Tracking: A method that allows companies to record user activity across websites and apps and compile profiles of what users buy, read, watch, etc.



Data Brokers: Companies that buy and sell personal data, often collected from many sources.



Government Surveillance: Government monitoring or collection of people's communications or data, often justified for security.



Net Neutrality: The principle that internet service providers (companies that provide internet access) should treat all online traffic equally and not favor certain websites or services.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



model. Ads are often sold through automated ad auctions, and the system rewards detailed tracking and personalization. As a result, many platforms have strong incentives to keep users scrolling and clicking.

This connects to another major shift: the rise of the **attention economy**. Many social media apps use recommendation systems and algorithmic feeds to decide what people see next. Features like infinite scroll and constant notifications are designed to keep users engaged, sometimes by pushing content that is emotional, extreme, or addictive. This can lead people into “rabbit holes” of increasingly intense content, and belief in conspiracy theories and disbelief in authority are both on the rise.

The internet has also changed how people get news. Instead of most Americans relying on a few TV channels and local newspapers, the media environment has become more fragmented, with stories spreading through social media, podcasts, influencers, and algorithm-driven feeds. As advertising moved online, many local newspapers lost revenue, contributing to the decline of local journalism. At the same time, news aggregators and social platforms often spread the same story across multiple sites, sometimes stripping away context and making it harder to know where a story originated and if it is trustworthy.

Social media’s rise has led to new challenges around free speech and digital trust. In the past, it was harder for false information to spread widely unless a newspaper, TV station, or radio host repeated it. Now, anyone can post almost anything, and a viral post can reach millions of people within hours. One concrete example of misinformation and manipulation came during the 2016 election, when Russia conducted online disinformation campaigns designed to inflame conflict and influence American voters.

Misinformation can also become a public health and everyday life issue. During the COVID-19 pandemic, false claims about vaccines, masks, and “cures” spread widely online, sometimes leading people to make dangerous health choices and making it harder for communities to agree on basic facts.

So, should social media companies be responsible for limiting misinformation the way newspaper editors or book publishers do? Some people argue that social media companies should behave like neutral platforms, similar to phone companies that provide the lines but do not control what people say. Others argue that social media companies are more like publishers, because they use algorithms to promote some content over other content and therefore shape what ideas spread. This debate is closely tied to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (1996), a law that generally protects online platforms from legal responsibility for what their users post. The future of that law, and how responsible social media platforms are for what spreads on their sites, is still an open question.

Social media has also been linked to mental health concerns. Although much of the attention has focused on teenagers, who may be especially vulnerable



Attention Economy: A system in which digital platforms compete for user attention in order to sell advertising, often using algorithms and design features to keep people engaged as long as possible.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

to pressure about how they look or act, these pressures can affect anyone. Many people experience fear of missing out, compare their lives to the carefully curated versions they see online, or fall into the trap of treating what they see on social media as completely real.



Primary Source: Screenshot

In 2026, New Jersey became one of many states to pass laws trying to restrict students' use of cell phones at school.

These debates are not just theoretical. They shape everyday choices in schools, workplaces, and families, especially around smartphones and whether they should be allowed in classrooms. Many schools and states have debated rules about smartphones in classrooms, and those debates are still ongoing. Supporters of stricter rules argue that phones make it harder for students to focus, increase cheating, and pull attention away from in-person relationships. They note that constant notifications make it harder to read, write, and think deeply for long periods of time. Opponents of strict bans argue that phones can be useful tools for learning, translation, research, and communication, and that students and families may rely on them for safety, scheduling, or after-school jobs.

But even when schools agree on the goal, enforcing a smartphone policy can be a practical nightmare, consuming time and energy. Teachers end up spending precious minutes arguing with and scolding students instead of focusing on instruction and learning. The debate also raises questions about fairness. If phones are allowed, students with newer devices, unlimited data, and constant social media access may have a very different classroom experience than students without those advantages. If phones are banned, students who rely on phones for translation, accessibility supports, or family responsibilities may be affected more than others. So, policy ideas that

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



sound as simple as “no phones during school hours” quickly become a bigger argument about what is realistic and what is fair.

One final, and quite new challenge has arisen with the advent **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**. When ChatGPT was released in 2022, it was an earthquake in the tech world, and companies rushed to integrate AI into their products and release their own AI tools. Certainly, AI has the potential to be enormously useful. It can help people write, translate, tutor, brainstorm, and automate routine work. But it can also be used to create convincing fake images, audio, and video that look and sound real. This raises difficult questions for the future. Is it acceptable for someone to create fake images or videos of you, or mimic your voice, even as a joke? Who owns your likeness, and what rights should people have to protect it? And the problem is bigger than just embarrassment or harassment. If fake evidence can be produced quickly and spread instantly, then it becomes harder for the public to agree on basic facts. People may start to doubt real footage by calling it fake, or believe fake footage because it “feels” true. So the challenge of AI is not only about new technology. It is about trust. How can we tell what is real and what is fake? If people cannot agree on what is true, can democracy function the same way?



Artificial Intelligence (AI): Computer systems that can imitate tasks associated with human intelligence, such as generating text, images, or audio.

Taken together, the challenges we’ve described in this section show a pattern: as the internet became more powerful and more central to daily life, we’ve gained new opportunities, but we also face new risks that the generations before us never had to grapple with.

THE WORLD GOES ONLINE DURING COVID

Nothing made the promises and perils of the Information Age as clear as the **COVID-19 pandemic**. In 2020, Americans of all ages were pushed deeper into the digital world.



COVID-19 Pandemic: Public health crisis that pushed schools, work, healthcare, and services further online.

During lockdowns, people who had rarely used the internet before suddenly depended on it. Work, school, medicine, and even religious services moved online. Schools switched to virtual education, and many students used online classrooms, uploaded assignments, and attended meetings on video for the first time. People who had only used a phone for voice calls, especially older adults, suddenly faced the prospect of being cut off from the outside world.

This shift created real opportunities, but it also revealed major problems. Some students lacked reliable devices or internet access, and many struggled with motivation, isolation, and mental health. In many communities, the pandemic turned internet access from a convenience into a requirement for school and daily life. The pandemic also highlighted pre-existing inequalities in access to technology, making the digital divide even more visible. Schools still had a responsibility to teach all students, but were they now responsible for making sure every student had internet access and a device?

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?



Primary Source: Screenshot

The “I am not a Cat” viral video of a lawyer who couldn’t figure out who to turn off his cat filter on Zoom during an online court session was a humorous example of people trying to adjust to working entirely online during the pandemic.

For many Americans, platforms like **Zoom** and FaceTime became part of daily life for school, work, and family. Many jobs moved to **remote work**, and some workers never returned to the office. **Hybrid work** remains common in many industries. Old assumptions about commuting and office space began to be challenged, raising new questions about the future of cities, suburbs, and downtown business districts.

Healthcare changed too. **Telehealth** expanded rapidly and remains an important part of healthcare in many communities. Patients can now speak with doctors online, including for mental health services.

CONCLUSION

The internet has reshaped the economy, entertainment, and communication. It has opened doors for learning, creativity, and connection, but it has also created new problems: privacy risks, misinformation, cybercrime, and growing stress around screen time.

Like the railroad in the 1800s or television in the 1950s, the internet has reshaped how Americans live. But unlike those earlier technologies, it allows individuals to publish and influence millions instantly.

So, when historians look back on the past 30 years, they may say the rise of smartphones and the internet was one of the biggest forces shaping American life. They may also argue about whether its benefits outweighed its costs.

What do you think? Has the internet made America a better place?



Zoom: Video meeting platform widely used for school, work, and communication.



Remote Work: Working from home (or outside a traditional workplace) using the internet for communication, meetings, and job tasks.



Hybrid Work: A work arrangement that combines remote work with in-person work, such as coming into an office on some days but not others.



Telehealth: Healthcare services delivered through the internet (such as video appointments), allowing patients to consult with doctors remotely.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



SUMMARY

Big Idea: The internet has transformed American life by making information, communication, and commerce faster and cheaper, but it has also created new challenges around privacy, inequality, misinformation, and power.

The internet began as a government-funded Cold War project and coincided with the dawn of the Information Age, with the economy shifting away from factories and toward data, communication, and knowledge. Personal computers and the World Wide Web brought digital technology into homes, schools, and offices.

The internet revolutionized the economy and entertainment. It changed how Americans buy and sell as online sales pushed brick-and-mortar retailers out of business. At the same time, the internet lowered barriers for small entrepreneurs using sites like eBay and online payment tools. It also made gaming, streaming, and on-demand entertainment normal, as power shifted away from traditional TV and video rental stores and toward online platforms and independent creators.

Smartphones put the internet in people's pockets. Americans began relying on apps for daily life, changing social norms and raising new concerns about attention, sleep, and in-person relationships.

The internet shifted from mostly reading pages to creating and sharing content. Social media helped people build communities and organize, but it also concentrated influence in platforms and feeds that shape what people see.

As devices and networks became more capable, online life became more integrated into everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the integration of digital tools even further and showed both the benefits of the internet and the costs of unequal access, as the digital divide became a major obstacle for many families and communities. Cybercrime, privacy concerns, government surveillance, net neutrality debates, and misinformation all raise questions about who controls the internet and how society can protect trust and democracy.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



KEY CONCEPTS

Hacking: Breaking into computer systems, often to steal information, disrupt services, or take control.

Identity Theft: Stealing personal information to commit fraud, such as opening accounts in someone else's name.

Ransomware: Malware that locks files or systems until a ransom is paid.

Phishing: A scam that tricks people into revealing passwords or personal information, often through fake emails or messages.

Cyberwar: Conflict between countries that involves hacking to disrupt infrastructure or weaken rivals.

Digital Divide: The gap between people who have reliable internet access, devices, and digital skills

Cross-Site Tracking: A method that allows companies to record user activity across websites and apps and compile profiles of what users buy, read, watch, etc.

Government Surveillance: Government monitoring or collection of people's communications or data, often justified for security.

Net Neutrality: The principle that internet service providers (companies that provide internet access) should treat all online traffic equally and not favor certain websites or services.

Telehealth: Healthcare services delivered through the internet (such as video appointments), allowing patients to consult with doctors remotely.



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Steve Jobs: Apple leader who helped launch the iPhone in 2007, accelerating the shift to smartphones as everyday internet devices.

Larry Page & Sergey Brin: Co-founded Google (1998), which popularized a more effective way to search the growing web.

Influencer: An online personality who builds a large audience on social media and earns money through advertising, sponsorships, or product promotion.



BUSINESS

Apple: Technology company that popularized the personal computer with the Mac and smartphones with the iPhone.

America Online (AOL): Company that helped many Americans get online in the 1990s through dial-up internet and an easy-to-use online service.

Google: Company that started as a search engine in the late 1990s and then expanded into many other internet products and services.

E-commerce: Online buying and selling (online shopping).

Business-to-Business (B2B): Online sales and services between companies (not directly to individual consumers).

eBay: Online marketplace that helped popularize person-to-person selling.

Gig Economy: Work built around short-term jobs, often found through apps and online platforms like Uber or DoorDash.

Netflix: Streaming platform that helped normalize on-demand TV and movie watching.

YouTube: Video platform where people can post videos and build audiences.

Facebook: Social media platform launched in 2004 that became a dominant network for online communication.

Zoom: Video meeting platform widely used for school, work, and communication.

Data Brokers: Companies that buy and sell personal data, often collected from many sources.

Attention Economy: A system in which digital platforms compete for user attention in order to sell advertising, often using algorithms and design features to keep people engaged as long as possible.

Remote Work: Working from home (or outside a traditional workplace) using the internet for communication, meetings, and job tasks.

Hybrid Work: A work arrangement that combines remote work with in-person work, such as coming into an office on some days but not others.



EVENTS

Information Age: A modern era, beginning in the late 1900s in which economic and political power increasingly comes from data, communication, and knowledge.

Dot-Com Bubble: Rapid growth of internet-based companies and investment, followed by major market losses.

Y2K Scare: Late-1990s fear that computers would malfunction in 2000 because many programs stored years using only two digits.

Web 2.0: A phase of the internet when users increasingly created and shared content, not just read it.

Platform Era: A later phase of the internet when information is no longer written out into static webpages but is stored in databases and formatted into apps, feeds, and webpages that people interact with.

COVID-19 Pandemic: Public health crisis that pushed schools, work, healthcare, and services further online.



TECHNOLOGY

Internet: A global "network of networks" that connects computers and allows information to move between them.

ARPANET: An early computer network that connected universities and research centers and helped lay the groundwork for today's internet. It was funded in part by the government because of Cold War fears.

Personal Computer: Smaller, affordable computer designed for home and small business use. These became common in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Macintosh: Apple's 1984 personal computer that helped popularize a graphical user interface for everyday users.

Graphical User Interface (GUI): A computer interface that uses windows, icons, and menus instead of typed commands. This design made computers much easier for the average person to use.

World Wide Web (www): A system of web pages and hyperlinks that runs on top of the internet and is accessed through a browser.

Web Browser: Software that lets users view and navigate web pages. Examples include Chrome and Safari.

Domain Name System (DNS): The system that translates website names into the number-based addresses computers use.

5 HAS THE INTERNET MADE AMERICA A BETTER PLACE?



Dial-Up: An early form of home internet connection that used telephone lines, which was slow and tied up the phone line while connected.

Broadband: A faster, always-on internet connection that replaced dial-up and made it easier to stream, shop online, and stay connected throughout the day.

Search Engine: A tool that helps users find information online by searching the web for keywords. Google became the dominant option by the early 2000s.

Streaming: Watching or listening to media online without downloading the entire file first.

Cell Phone: Mobile phone that connects through networks of towers (“cells”).

Cell Network: System of cell towers that allow mobile phones to communicate wirelessly.

iPhone: Apple’s smartphone (first released in 2007) that popularized the modern touchscreen smartphone and helped expand the app economy.

Smartphone: Cell phone that functions like a small computer with internet access and apps.

Social Media: Websites and apps where users create profiles, share content, and interact with others. Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are examples.

Data Centers: Large warehouses filled with servers that store and process online information.

Cloud Computing: Using remote servers (often in data centers) to store, run, and deliver apps and data over the internet.

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Computer systems that can imitate tasks associated with human intelligence, such as generating text, images, or audio.

6

S I X T H Q U E S T I O N IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?



How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a nation in which the people vote, but the person who wins the election does not get to be president. Imagine a time when a president lies about an affair under oath but does not lose his job and instead is the most popular outgoing president ever. Imagine a nation in which greedy bankers cause a major economic collapse but then the government uses taxpayer money to save the bankers. Imagine a nation with a president who tells thousands of lies.

These are all descriptions of the United States in the past 30 years. George W. Bush and Donald Trump both lost the popular vote but became president by winning the electoral vote. Bill Clinton was impeached because of lies he told about his affair but left office with a 66% approval rating. The TARP bailouts saved the bankers who caused the Great Recession. President Trump told more than 12 lies every day during his time in office.

Doesn't this mean that something is wrong with our political system? Shouldn't we do something about it? How can these seemingly impossible things happen in our country?

What do you think? Is our political system broken?



GEORGE H. W. BUSH AND BILL CLINTON

President George H. W. Bush was the last of his generation to hold the office of the presidency. A World War II veteran, Bush had made a fortune as a businessman and had then gone on to a long and successful career in government, serving as head of the CIA and as vice president for Ronald Reagan. Although he promised to carry on Reagan's economic legacy, the problems Bush inherited made it difficult to do so. Reagan's policies of cutting taxes and increasing defense spending had exploded the federal budget deficit, making it three times larger in 1989 than when Reagan took office in 1980. Bush was further constrained by the emphatic pledge he had made at the 1988 Republican Convention, "**read my lips: no new taxes**" and found himself in the difficult position of trying to balance the budget and reduce the deficit without breaking his promise. He also faced a Congress controlled by the Democrats, who wanted to raise taxes on the rich. When he eventually broke his "no new taxes" pledge, he damaged his standing among conservatives who were crucial to his reelection chances.

The contrast between George H. W. Bush and **William "Bill" Clinton** could not have been greater. Bill Clinton was a Baby Boomer born in 1946 in Hope, Arkansas. Compared to Bush, Clinton was relaxed and approachable. He had excellent interpersonal skills and could make those around him feel like he really understood and cared about their problems.

Clinton's background distinguished him from the president as well. Whereas Bush was wealthy, Clinton had come from tough beginnings. Despite having a troubled home life, Clinton was highly intelligent and was an excellent student. He took an interest in politics after meeting President John F. Kennedy. As a student at Georgetown University he supported both the civil rights and antiwar movements and ran for student council president. In 1968, Clinton received a prestigious Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University. From Oxford he moved on to Yale where he earned his law degree in 1973. Clinton was elected Arkansas's youngest governor in 1978. Losing the office to his Republican opponent in 1980, he retook the governor's mansion in 1982 and remained governor of Arkansas until 1992 when he announced his candidacy for president.

During his campaign against George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton described himself as a **New Democrat**, a member of a faction of the Democratic Party that, like the Republicans, favored free trade and deregulation. He tried to appeal to the middle class by promising higher taxes on the rich and reform of the welfare system. Although Clinton garnered only 43% of the popular vote, he easily won in the Electoral College with 370 votes to President Bush's 188. Bush lost support among conservatives for both breaking his "no new taxes" pledge and because Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot won 19% of the popular vote, the best showing by any third-party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt ran for the Bull Moose Party in 1912.



"Read my lips: no new taxes":

Campaign promise by George H. W. Bush in 1988 that cost him support when he had to break it later as president.



Bill Clinton:

Former governor of Arkansas who won the presidency in 1992 as a Democrat and served eight years. His second term was rocked by scandal and impeachment.



New Democrats:

Democrats in the early 1990s who found ways to be elected after the Conservative Revolution by promoting free trade and welfare reform. Bill Clinton used this term to describe himself.

**Primary Source: Photograph**

Governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton campaigning for president as a New Democrat in 1992. He was the first Baby Boomer to be elected president.

CLINTON AND THE CONTRACT WITH AMERICA

True to his promise as a New Democrat, Clinton raised taxes on the wealthy, lowered taxes for the middle and lower classes and lowered tariffs to increase trade. Clinton worked to convince the Senate to ratify the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The treaty had been negotiated by the Bush Administration, and the leaders of all three nations had signed it in December 1992. However, because of strong opposition from American labor unions and some in Congress who feared the loss of jobs to Mexico, the treaty had not been ratified before Clinton took office. To allay the concerns of unions, he added an agreement to protect workers and also one to protect the environment.

During Clinton's administration, the nation experienced the longest period of economic expansion in its history, almost ten consecutive years. Year after year, job growth increased and the deficit shrank. Increased tax revenue and budget cuts erased the federal budget deficit and the government began to run as surplus. Reduced government borrowing freed up capital for private-sector use, and lower interest rates in turn fueled more growth. During the Clinton years, more people owned homes than ever before in the country's history. Much of the prosperity of the 1990s was related to technological change and the advent of new information systems. In 1994, the Clinton Administration became the first to launch an official White House website.

An important and popular part of Clinton's domestic agenda was healthcare reform. Clinton appointed his wife **Hillary Clinton**, a Yale Law School graduate and accomplished attorney, to head his Task Force on National Health Care Reform in 1993. The Health Security Act presented to Congress that year sought to offer universal coverage by raising taxes and using the money to pay everyone's medical bills. The outlook for the plan was good in 1993. It had the support of a number of institutions like the American

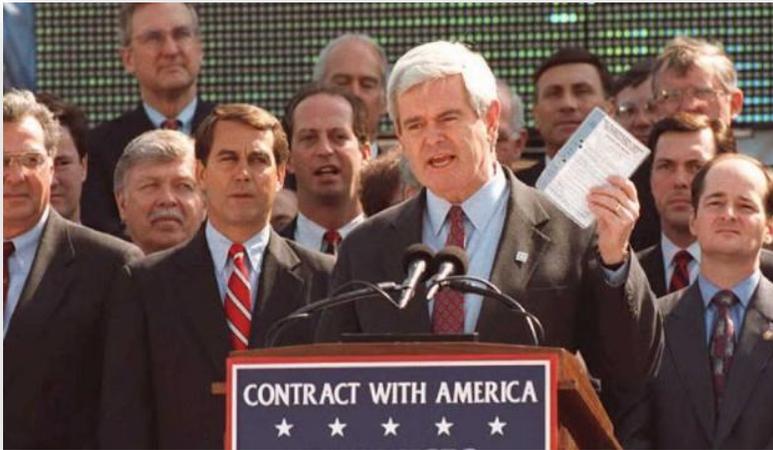


Hillary Clinton: First lady to Bill Clinton. She led a task force during his presidency to prepare for healthcare reform. Later she served as senator from New York, Secretary of State, and ran for president.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Medical Association and the Health Insurance Association of America. But in relatively short order the political winds changed. As budget battles distracted the administration and the midterm elections of 1994 approached, Republicans began to recognize the strategic benefits of opposing reform. Moderate conservatives dubbed the reform proposals “Hillarycare” and argued that the bill was an unwarranted expansion of the powers of the federal government that would interfere with people’s ability to choose the doctors they wanted.



Primary Source: Photograph

Newt Gingrich holds a copy of the Contract with America during a press conference. His proposals helped propel Republicans to electoral victory in 1994.

To rally Republican opposition to Clinton and the Democrats, **Newt Gingrich**, leader of the Republican minority in the House of Representatives, published a plan they called the **Contract with America**. It listed eight specific reforms or initiatives the Republicans would enact if they gained a majority in Congress in the upcoming midterm elections. Most of these dealt with reducing spending by eliminating government waste and most of the wording of the contract had been borrowed from Ronald Reagan’s speeches.

Lacking support, the healthcare bill died in Congress. Dislike of the proposed healthcare plan on the part of conservatives and the bold strategy laid out in the Contract with America enabled the Republican Party to retake both the Senate and House of Representatives in 1994. This **Republican Revolution** was the most sweeping change of power in Washington in decades. Newt Gingrich took the gavel as the Speaker of the House of Representatives becoming the primary political opponent of President Clinton.

The Republicans used their new power to push for conservative reforms. Clinton responded to his party’s electoral loss by finding ways to work with the Republicans. One law they negotiated and passed was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, known better as **welfare reform**. The act set time limits on welfare benefits and required most recipients to begin working within two years of receiving assistance.

 **Newt Gingrich:** Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives who proposed the Contract with America in 1994, lead the Republican Revolution, and was Bill Clinton’s leading political opponent.

 **Contract with America:** Set of eight proposals set out by Republicans in 1994 which helped propel them to retake the House of Representatives.

 **Republican Revolution:** Nickname for the electoral gains made by congressional Republicans in 1994. For the first time in decades Republicans took control of the House of Representatives.

 **Welfare Reform:** Efforts in the 1990s to change welfare laws by including a requirement that people receiving welfare begin working within two years.



Some historians view the Republican victories in 1994 as a major turning point in the history of modern politics. Newt Gingrich was different from many older politicians in that he was more combative, and more willing to pick fights, even those he probably would not win in order to show Republican voters that he was on their side. As time went by, this style was adopted by many more members of Congress and picking fights and refusing to compromise for the sake of impressing voters has become common today. In fact, politicians with a reputation for working with the other party often lose in primary elections to candidates who promise ideological purity.

THE IMPEACHMENT OF PRESIDENT CLINTON

From the moment he entered national politics, Bill Clinton's opponents had attempted to tie both him and Hillary to crimes and unethical activities. Multiple women had accused the president of rape and sexual abuse, but he had been able to shake these allegations, although they were most likely true. Some accusations were almost certainly false. One such wild story held that Clinton had murdered his childhood friend to prevent him from revealing secrets he knew about the president. One accusation the Clintons could not shake, however, was of possible improper involvement in a failed real estate deal associated with the Whitewater Development Corporation in Arkansas in the 1970s and 1980s. **Kenneth Starr**, a former judge, was appointed to investigate the matter.

While Starr was never able to prove any wrongdoing in the Whitewater deal, he soon turned up other allegations. Starr's team eventually learned about **Monica Lewinsky**, a young White House intern. Both Lewinsky and Clinton denied under oath that they had had a sexual relationship. The evidence, however, indicated otherwise, and Starr began to investigate the possibility that Clinton had committed **perjury** by lying under oath. Again, Clinton denied any relationship and even went on national television to assure the American people that he had done nothing wrong. His claim, "**I did not have sexual relations with that woman**" reminded many Americans of Nixon's claim, "I am not a crook." After receiving a promise of immunity, Lewinsky turned over evidence of her affair with Clinton, and the president admitted he and Lewinsky did an affair. He continued to deny that he had lied under oath.

Eager to force their political enemy and a man they believed unethical out of office, Republicans voted in the House of Representatives to send articles of **impeachment** to the Senate, charging Clinton with lying under oath and obstructing justice. In February 1998, the Senate voted 45-55 on the perjury charge and 50-50 on obstruction of justice. A few Republican senators from New England saved Clinton from losing his job when they voted against impeachment. For them, the entire process was not about removing a president for a crime, but instead about political vendetta and unethical behavior.

 **Kenneth Starr:** Independent prosecutor appointed to investigate Bill Clinton's wrongdoing. He investigated both the Whitewater real estate deal and Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky.

 **Monica Lewinsky:** White House intern who had an affair with President Bill Clinton.

 **Perjury:** Lying under oath. It is a crime.

 **"I did not have sexual relations with that woman":** Famous quote by President Bill Clinton when he denied his affair with Monica Lewinsky on television.

 **Impeachment:** The Constitutional process of removing an elected official or judge. In the case of a president, the House of Representatives serves as the prosecutors and the Senate as the jury.



Primary Source: Photograph

This famous photograph was taken a few months after President Clinton admitted his affair with Monica Lewinsky. Hillary did not leave him or move out of the White House and their teenage daughter, Chelsea helped bring them together. The photograph was taken as the First Family walked across the White House lawn to a helicopter.

Many thought that Clinton should have resigned the way Nixon had done instead of forcing the country to endure his impeachment. However, Clinton hung on, always believing that he could survive and outsmart his opponents. In the end, he did and remained popular, in large part because of his successful foreign policy endeavors in the Balkans and because the economy was doing well. He left office at the end of his second term with an approval rating of 66%, the highest of any outgoing president. Despite his popularity, the suspicion of wrongdoing following both Bill and Hillary Clinton into the future.

BUSH V. GORE

Despite Clinton's high approval rating, his vice president and the 2000 Democratic nominee for president, Al Gore, was eager to distance himself from scandal. Unfortunately, he also alienated Clinton loyalists and lost some of the benefit of Clinton's genuine popularity. On the Republican side, where strategists promised to "restore honor and dignity" to the White House, voters selected **George W. Bush**, governor of Texas and eldest son of former president Bush. Bush had the robust support of both the Christian Right and the Republican leadership.

One hundred million votes were cast in the 2000 election, and Gore topped Bush in the popular vote by 540,000 ballots, or 0.5%. The race was so close that news reports declared each candidate the winner at various times during the evening. It all came down to Florida, where Bush had a tiny lead over Gore after the votes were counted. Because there seemed to be

 **George W. Bush:** Republican president elected in 2000 and reelected in 2004. He is remembered mostly for prosecuting the War on Terror, but also instituted education reforms and oversaw the beginning of the Great Recession.



irregularities in four counties traditionally dominated by Democrats, especially in largely African American precincts, Gore called for a recount of the ballots by hand. Whoever won Florida would get the state's 25 electoral votes and secure the presidency.

Primary Source: Newspaper

The 2000 election was not decided for over a month as recounts and court proceedings dragged on. Finally the Supreme Court decided the election by a 5-4 vote.



Both sides went to court to argue about how to conduct the recount and America waited to find out who their next president would be as the case wound its way through the court system, eventually ending up at the



Supreme Court. The case, **Bush v. Gore** was decided 5-4 to stop the recount. Bush received Florida's electoral votes and became the next president of the United States with a total of 271 votes in the Electoral College to Gore's 266. It was only the second time in the nation's history that a son of a former president won the office himself. It was also the first time 112 that the winner of the popular vote did not win the Electoral College and become president.

GEORGE W. BUSH

George W. Bush is mostly remembered as the president during the War on Terror who launched the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. However, during his eight years in the White House he also initiated important domestic programs. In fact, before the September 11 Attacks he thought he would be remembered as the "Education President."

Bush and many Americans at the time believed that the best way to improve education was to hold schools accountable for raising standards and enabling students to meet them. Bush proudly signed the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** which created a system of testing to measure student performance in reading and math. Schools whose students performed poorly on the tests would be labeled "in need of improvement." There were punishments for schools that did not meet the high standards. In the end, more testing did not help all schools and proved to be unpopular. The law was once again changed in 2015 when President Obama signed the **Every Student Succeeds Act**. Students still are required to take standardized tests, but states have much more control over how to help struggling schools.

The second proposed solution was to give students the opportunity to attend a school of their choice outside their neighborhoods. Some of these might be **charter schools**, institutions funded by local tax money in the same way as public schools, but able to accept private donations. Charter schools are exempt from some of the rules public schools must follow giving them more freedom to innovate and experiment with new ideas to help students succeed. President Bush also encouraged states to grant **vouchers** to parents. Using a voucher, parents could send their children to private schools. The vouchers were funded by tax revenue. Unsurprisingly, teachers unions were strongly opposed to vouchers and fought against them.

Like most Republicans since Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, Bush believed in supply-side economics and in 2001, Bush and the Republicans pushed through a **tax cut** by lowering tax rates for everyone. However, they gave the largest cuts to those in the highest tax brackets. The cuts were controversial. The rich were getting richer while the middle and lower classes bore a proportionally larger share of the nation's tax burden. By 2005, dramatic examples of income inequity were increasing. For example, the CEO of Wal-Mart earned \$15 million. It would take over 900 average workers at Wal-Mart to make that much. Even as productivity climbed,



Bush v. Gore: 2000 Supreme Court case in which the Court ruled to end a recount of votes in Florida, thus handing the presidential election victory to George W. Bush. It marked an important turning point in the politicization of the Supreme Court.



No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Education reform law passed by George W. Bush in 2002 which introduced a system of high-stakes testing and the possibility of restructuring for low performing schools.



Every Student Succeeds Act: A replacement for NCLB passed in 2015. Schools must still conduct standardized testing but states have more control over supports for struggling schools.



Charter Schools: Independently run schools that operate with public funding. They are seen by many as opportunities for educators to innovate and provide options for families who live in neighborhoods with failing schools.



School Vouchers: A system in which parents can receive public tax dollars to pay for private school tuition. Proponents believe it gives parents choice and students a chance at a better education. Opponents believe it robs public schools of needed funding.



Bush Tax Cuts: Reductions in taxes for all Americans, but especially for the wealthy, implemented by George W. Bush in 2001.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?



workers' incomes stagnated. With a larger share of the wealth, the very rich further solidified their influence on public policy. Left with a smaller share of the economic pie, average workers had fewer resources to improve their lives or contribute to the nation's prosperity.

While Bush had wanted to be remembered as the education president, the September 11 attacks changed everything, and he will probably always be remembered as the president who led the nation into the War on Terror. Although the Iraq War proved to be difficult, Bush won reelection by defeating Senator John Kerry in 2004. Victory at the polls did not translate into lasting popularity however. The nation's economic division grew, as did other tensions.

One event highlighted the nation's economic inequality and racial divisions, as well as the Bush Administration's difficulty in addressing them effectively. On August 29, 2005, **Hurricane Katrina** came ashore and devastated coastal stretches of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The city of New Orleans, no stranger to hurricanes and floods, suffered heavy damage when the levees designed to protect against flooding failed during the storm surge, as the Army Corps of Engineers had warned they might. The flooding killed more than 1,500 people and so overwhelmed parts of the city that tens of thousands more were trapped and unable to evacuate. Thousands who were elderly, ill, or too poor to own a car followed the mayor's directions and sought refuge at the Superdome, which lacked adequate food, water, and sanitation. Public services collapsed under the weight of the crisis.

Although the Coast Guard managed to rescue more than 35,000 people from the stricken city, the response by other federal agencies was less effective. The **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**, which is charged with assisting state and local governments in times of natural disaster, proved inept at coordinating the rescue and relief effort. Critics argued that FEMA was to blame and that its director, Michael D. Brown, a Bush friend and appointee with no background in emergency management, was an example of cronyism at its worst. The failures of FEMA were particularly harmful for an administration that had made homeland security its top priority.

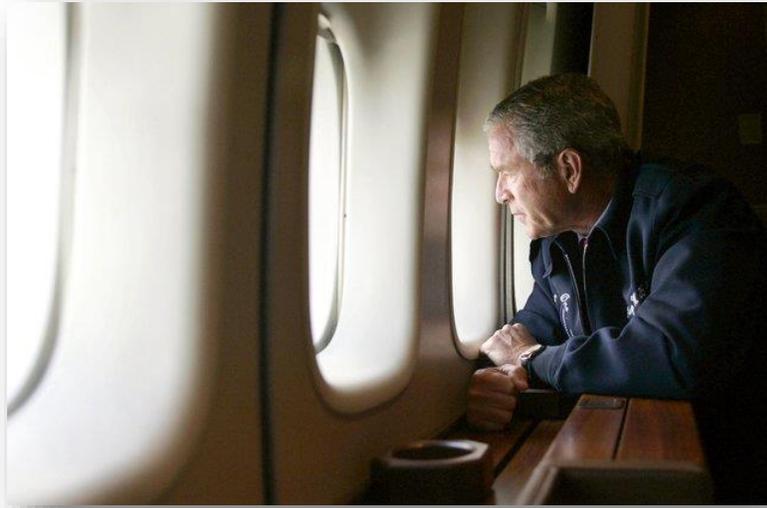
While there was plenty of blame to go around, FEMA and the Bush Administration got the lion's share. Even when the president attempted to demonstrate his concern with a personal appearance, the tactic largely backfired. Photographs of him looking down on the flooded city from the comfort of Air Force One only reinforced the impression that the president was detached from the problems of everyday people. On the eve of the 2006 midterm elections, President Bush's popularity had reached a new low, as a result of the war in Iraq and Hurricane Katrina, and a growing number of Americans who felt that his party's economic policy benefitted the wealthy first and foremost.



Hurricane Katrina: Major natural disaster in 2005. The federal government's response was widely criticized which hurt President George W. Bush's popularity.



Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): Government agency under the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for coordinating rescue and relief operations after disasters or terrorist attacks. Their response to Hurricane Katrina was widely criticized.



Primary Source: Photograph

In order to avoid interrupting the relief efforts on the ground, President George W. Bush chose to observe the devastation in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina from Air Force One. Photos of him looking out of the plane's windows backfired and gave people the impression that their president was disconnected from their problems and did not care about their suffering.

THE GREAT RECESSION

Normally when someone wants to buy a house or condominium, the prospective home buyer goes to a local bank for a mortgage loan. Because the bank expects to make a profit in the form of interest charged on the loan, it carefully vets buyers for their ability to repay. Deregulation of the banking industry in the 1990s and early 2000s, however, allowed lending institutions to securitize their mortgage loans and sell them as bonds. In other words, the home buyer made a promise to pay back their loan to the bank, but that bank put hundreds of these promises together and sold that as one unit to a larger bank. These collections of mortgages were called **mortgage backed securities**. Big Wall Street banks wanted them because they promised big rewards. Also, with more money in their pockets because of the Bush tax cuts, more people wanted to invest and the mortgage backed securities seemed like a sure payoff.

However, there was a terrible dark side. Banks started to make bad loans because they could sell them quickly and not suffer financial consequences if borrowers failed to repay in the long term. The large banks that were putting the securities together were pushing up demand for mortgages in general, so local banks started ignoring caution and encouraged people to take out loans for large houses that they would never be able to repay. These **subprime mortgages** were sure to fail eventually.

Once they had purchased the loans, larger investment banks bundled them into huge packages known as collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) and sold them to investors around the world. Even though CDOs consisted of subprime mortgages, credit card debt, and other risky investments, credit ratings agencies had a financial incentive to rate them as very safe. Normally a **credit rating agency** gave an honest score to an investment, telling



Mortgage Backed Securities:

Investments that were made up of a collection of home loans bundled together and sold as a single unit.



Subprime Mortgage:

A home loan made to a lender that was unlikely to be able to repay it. They were sold in large numbers in the early 2000s in order to make mortgage backed securities and when they failed it caused the Great Recession.



Credit Rating Agency:

A company that gives a score to investment opportunities to rank them in terms of their risk. They are important in order to help investors manage risk.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?



prospective buyers about the potential risk involved in purchasing it. However, giving the CDOs low scores would mean losing business with the investment banks who were paying the rating agencies. Eventually, every CDO was rated A+ even though the subprime mortgages and credit card debt deep down at their core was unlikely to be paid back and anyone who bought them would surely lose their money in the end.

Making matters worse, financial institutions created **credit default swaps**, which were essentially a form of insurance on investments. The large investment banks bought insurance from one another thinking they would never have to use it. Each month, each bank paid a little to the other banks for a guarantee that they would bail them out if their investments failed. Eventually, all the large banks on Wall Street were so closely tied together that if one of them faltered, all of them would suffer. Instead of supporting the system, credit default swaps made the financial system far more susceptible to a sudden crash.

When the **real estate market** stalled after reaching a peak in 2007, the house of cards built by the country's financial institutions came tumbling down. People began to default on their loans. When they could not afford their housing payments they wanted to sell their oversized and overpriced homes. But there were no longer people who wanted to buy, and banks had stopped giving away easy loans. Many people found themselves underwater: unable to pay their mortgages and owning more on their homes than they could get if they sold them.

More than one hundred mortgage lenders went out of business. American International Group (AIG), a multinational insurance company that had insured many of the investments, faced collapse. Other large financial institutions found themselves in danger as they either were besieged by demands for payment or found that the companies they had bought credit default swaps from could not pay them. The prestigious investment firm Lehman Brothers was completely wiped out and closed its doors in September 2008, shocking the business and political world. Some endangered companies, like Wall Street giant Merrill Lynch, sold themselves to more stable financial institutions to survive.

Members of Congress met with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson to find a way to head off the crisis. They agreed to use \$700 billion in federal tax money to bail out the troubled institutions and Congress subsequently passed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act, creating the **Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP)**. Companies that were in trouble could apply for TARP money in order to stay open, but would have to pay it back over time once the crisis had passed.

The actions of the Federal Reserve, Congress, and presidents Bush and Obama prevented the complete disintegration of the nation's financial sector and prevented a repeat of the Great Depression.



Credit Default Swap: Insurance investment banks took out on their investments with other large banks.

Because all the large banks had these with all the other large banks in the early 2000s, the Great Recession had a domino effect within the financial markets.



Real Estate Market Crash: 2007 economic disaster in which investors and home buyers finally realized that

housing prices were inflated and stopped buying. People were left with mortgages they couldn't pay and homes they couldn't sell.



Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP): Government program designed to save banks during the

Great Recession. The government loaned banks enormous sums of money in order to help them survive as they dealt with all of the failed investments they had purchased during the housing boom.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

However, the bailouts could not prevent a tremendous decline in the world economy that has come to be known as the **Great Recession**. As people lost faith in the economy, stock prices fell by 45%. Unable to receive credit from banks that were suddenly more careful about who they loaned money to, smaller businesses found that they could not pay suppliers or employees and many people lost their jobs. With growing economic uncertainty, people stopped buying new homes. As the value of homes decreased, owners were unable to borrow against them to pay off other obligations such as credit card debt or car loans. More importantly, millions of homeowners who had expected to sell their houses at a profit and pay off their mortgages were forced to make mortgage payments they could no longer afford. The value of houses was falling so even if they sold their houses, they would not make back the money they spent to buy them. Without access to credit, consumer spending declined as well.

As the Great Recession deepened, the situation of ordinary citizens became worse. During the last four months of 2008, one million American workers lost their jobs, and during 2009, another three million found themselves out of work. Under such circumstances, many resented the expensive federal bailout of banks and investment firms. It seemed as if the wealthy people who had caused the problem in the first place were being rescued with taxpayer money from the consequences of their imprudent and even corrupt practices. Meanwhile, everyday Americans were suffering. The feelings of betrayal led to both protests against the rich and against the government that saved them.



Great Recession: Economic crash starting in 2007 caused by speculation in the housing market and lax oversight of the financial markets. It was the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and caused unemployment to peak at 10%.



Primary Source: Editorial Cartoon

This artist is poking fun at the bailout programs implemented to save the financial system after the financial crash in 2007. President Obama is seen coming to take more tax money to give away to financial institutions that had cause the Great Recession.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Born in Hawaii in 1961 to a Kenyan father and an American woman from Kansas, Barack Obama was elected on a platform of hope and change in 2008. With George W. Bush facing economic crisis, an ongoing war in Iraq, and the failed response to Hurricane Katrina, Americans wanted a change, and Obama's youth and excitement was just what they were looking for. As he entered office in 2009, Obama set out to deal with the Great Recession and to reform healthcare, a decades-old dream of the Democratic Party.

Taking charge of the TARP program instituted under George W. Bush to stabilize the country's financial institutions, Obama oversaw the distribution of some \$7.8 trillion designed to help shore up the nation's banking system. Recognizing that the economic downturn also threatened major auto manufacturers in the United States, he sought and received congressional authorization for \$80 billion to help Chrysler and General Motors. The action was controversial, and some characterized it as a government takeover of industry. The money did, however, help the automakers survive the recession. It also helped prevent layoffs and wage cuts. By 2013, the automakers had repaid over \$50 billion of bailout funds. Finally, Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, better known as **The Stimulus**. This set of programs pumped almost \$800 billion of taxpayer money into the economy to stimulate economic growth and job creation. The Stimulus worked like the New Deal had during the Great Depression. Priming the pump, Obama believed, would pay off in the end as people found jobs and started paying taxes again.

GROWING POLITICAL DIVISION

More important for Obama supporters than his attempts to restore the economy was that he fulfill his promise to enact comprehensive healthcare reform. Learning from Clinton's mistakes years before, the Democrats in 2009 worked with the insurance companies and doctors to draft the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The act, which has come to be known as **Obamacare**, represented the first significant overhaul of the American healthcare system since the passage of Medicaid in 1965. Its goals were to provide all Americans with access to affordable health. Normally young and healthy people who did not think they needed insurance did not pay for it. The people who paid for insurance usually needed more medical care. The law required all Americans to pay for insurance. This new system would work, Obama argued, because if everyone paid for insurance the costs would go down as insurance companies could use the money paid by healthy people to cover the medical costs of those Americans who needed care. Democrats believed this system would also make one law's most popular provisions possible: an end to insurance companies' ability to deny coverage to people with **preexisting conditions**. No longer could a health insurance company refuse to sell coverage to someone if they already knew about a person's health problems.

 **The Stimulus:** Economic program signed by Barack Obama to help boost the economy during the Great Recession. It included investing \$800 billion in infrastructure and green technologies.

 **Obamacare:** Nickname for the Affordable Care Act passed in 2009 by Democrats in Congress and Barack Obama. It included guarantees of coverage for patients with preexisting conditions, and expansion of Medicaid and a mandate that everyone purchase healthcare coverage.

 **Preexisting Conditions:** Medical problems that a patient has before applying for health insurance. Before the passage of Obamacare, insurers could deny coverage because they knew patients would need medical care.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

Although the plan implemented the market-based reforms that they had supported for years, Republicans refused to vote for it. Following its passage, they called numerous times for its repeal, and more than twenty-four states sued the federal government to stop its implementation. Discontent over the Affordable Care Act helped the Republicans capture the majority in the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm elections. Since then Republicans eliminated the unpopular mandate that all Americans purchase insurance, but kept the popular rule that insurance companies can not deny coverage for preexisting conditions.

As mentioned earlier, the Great Recession, the government bailout of the banks and auto industry, Obama's stimulus, and Obamacare produced waves of backlash from voters.

Those who felt like the economy was rigged by the wealthy to help themselves saw the government bailout of banks and the enormous money top executives were making as evidence of a corrupt system at the highest levels. Tone deaf business leaders made things worse for themselves. For example, when the Big Three auto executives first went to Washington to ask Congress to give them taxpayer money to save their companies, they arrived on private jets. After years of growing disparity between the very rich and the rest of Americans, it felt like they government had taken the side of the 1% of people who controlled most of the nation's wealth. Protesters gathered in New York and formed the **Occupy Wall Street** Movement. They uses the slogan "**We are the 99%**" and the #Occupy hashtag. Supporting protests sprang up in hundreds of other American cities and similar protests erupted around the world.



Other Americans saw things differently. They were angry at their government for taking their money in taxes. They concentrated their ire on politicians rather than business leaders. They borrowed a name for America's revolutionary past and formed the Tea Party. Not a political party

 **Occupy Wall Street:** Protest movement in 2011 focused on real and perceived inequality in the economy, especially on the influence of the wealthy in government and the growing wealth divide between the superrich and everyday Americans. They coined the phrase "We are the 99%."

 **The 99%:** Nickname coined by the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 to describe everyday Americans in contrast to the superrich who they believed controlled business and political decisions.

Primary Source: Photograph

A Tea Party protest rally. Events such as this were organized by voters who wanted to show their discontent with Obamacare and the economic recovery programs such as TARP and the Stimulus.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

exactly, the supporters of the **Tea Party** carried signs that read “Taxed Enough Already” and were especially angry that Obamacare used tax money to expand Medicaid. They helped elect a wave of anti-tax Republicans to Congress in 2010.

Whenever we have divided government with one party in control in Congress and a different party holding the White House, it is hard to get things done. However, throughout our nation’s history there have been cases when leaders from different parties have found ways to work together. This has not been the case in the 2000s.

As Obama entered his second term in office, the country faced a wide variety for problems. The economy remained stagnant. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were ongoing, and another act of terrorism took place on American soil when bombs exploded at the 2013 Boston Marathon. President Obama was unable to get Republicans in Congress to support his proposals about immigration and the environment, so he used executive orders. He simply told federal agencies to enforce laws or change rules about how laws should be implemented.

In an effort to get their way and to undo Obamacare, Congressional Republicans, led by newly elected Tea Party champion Senator **Ted Cruz**, refused to allocate money for government operations. Without a law authorizing payments, the government shut down. National parks closed. People could no longer apply for Medicare or unemployment benefits since no one was there to take their applications. Some services remained open such as the military, TSA and air traffic controllers, but as the shutdown dragged on, even these workers started looking for other work. After all, even though they were deemed essential and told to come to work, there was no money to pay them. After 16 days Republicans relented and passed the appropriations bills needed to reopen the government. Americans mostly blamed Congress for the shutdown, but the experience drove Republicans and Democrats further apart, and made the parties’ supporters around the country even more convinced that the other side was ruining the nation.

With Congress no closer to agreeing with him than ever, Obama issued some of his most famous and controversial executive orders. First was the creation of the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** Program. Normally, people who come to the United States illegally are considered criminals for having broken immigration law and are subject to deportation. However, many young Americans are brought over the border as children by their parents. This group of people are known as **Dreamers**, and many Americans believe they should be exempt from deportation and should have a chance to become citizens in the only country they can remember. When Obama realized that the **DREAM Act** that would protect them would not pass the Republican-controlled Congress, he simply ordered the immigration officers to stop deporting them.



Tea Party: Political protest movement within the Republican Party in 2009 that formed in reaction to passage of Obamacare. They focused on lowering taxes and reducing government spending. Members of Congress with backing of these voters usually used extreme tactics including shutting down the government to try to achieve their goals.



Ted Cruz: Republican senator from Texas who has strong backing from the Tea Party movement and promoted a government shutdown during Obama’s presidency. He ran unsuccessfully for president in the Republican primary election in 2016.



Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): Government program that provides amnesty for illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.



Dreamers: Nickname for illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.



DREAM Act: Proposed law to allow illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children a chance to become legal residents and eventually become citizens. It has not passed Congress due to opposition from Republicans.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

He went a step further and decided that illegal immigrants who had not committed crimes (other than coming to America illegally) would have the lowest priority for law enforcement. Essentially, Obama promised that police and immigration officers would ignore law-abiding illegal immigrants in order to focus on stopping other crimes. His stance was that as the top law enforcement officer in the country, he had **prosecutorial discretion** on how to best use America's law enforcement officers. If, he claimed, Republicans in Congress were so intent on lowering taxes and saving money that they refused to raise taxes to fund the government, he would use what little money he had to go after serious criminals. For conservatives it was too much. Obama, they believed, was simply refusing to enforce the laws Congress had passed.



Prosecutorial Discretion: The idea that the president as chief law enforcement officer can choose which type of crimes to focus resource on. President Obama used this concept to announce that illegal immigrants who had not broken laws would not be subject to deportation.

Primary Source: Photograph

President Trump is seen here in a campaign rally during his presidency. Some of the signs mention coal, which is an industry the president promised to protect.



DONALD TRUMP

Donald Trump, a New York real estate investor and television celebrity won the presidency in 2016 by capitalizing on many of the political currents at work in the past few decades. Those who were alarmed by the nation's growing Hispanic population and Obama's DACA Program and prosecutorial discretion loved Trump's promise to build a wall along the border with Mexico. People in the Rust Belt states of the Midwest who had been the losers of globalization loved his promise to bring back manufacturing jobs. They also liked his promise to tear up NAFTA and negotiate better trade deals. Coal miners and people in states that relied on the oil industry liked his promise to ignore global warming and reduce regulation on greenhouse gasses. Tea Party supporters liked his talk of reducing taxes and repealing Obamacare. Just about any Republican conspiracy theorist who hated President Obama loved Trump for inventing birtherism, the lie that Obama



Donald Trump: New York real estate investor and television celebrity won the presidency in 2016 as a Republican.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?



had been born in Kenya instead of Hawaii. Those who had grown tired of the War on Terror liked Trump's promise to ban all Muslim immigrants and put "America first." Trump ran against Hillary Clinton and nicknamed her "Crooked Hillary," successfully reminding voters of Bill and Hillary's many scandals. Additionally, American men who felt uneasy about having a women president and about feminism in general, favored Trump. Despite having been married three times and not having any record of religious conviction, he won over conservative Christians by publishing a list of right-wing judges he would nominate to the Supreme Court who might overturn *Roe v. Wade* and end abortion.

In the end, he won the presidency by winning just the right combination of states, especially the Rust Belt states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin. Although Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by winning overwhelming majorities in New York, California and other blue states, Trump's narrow victories in the Midwest gave him the White House. For the fifth time in American history the winner of the popular vote did not win the presidency.

Donald Trump had a turbulent presidency. He was only partially successful in delivering on many of his campaign promises. Like previous Republican presidents, he was able to deliver tax cuts. He implemented a ban on immigration from some majority-Muslim countries. He mostly stayed out of foreign conflicts, including the ongoing civil war in Syria. He cancelled Obama's deal with Iran that reduced sanctions in exchange for a freeze on Iran's nuclear weapons program. He pulled America out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and renegotiated NAFTA. He eliminated many of Obama's environmental regulations. He appointed three conservative justices to the Supreme Court. However, he had a difficult time filling government jobs with experienced candidates and his administration was plagued with inefficiencies and many of his initiatives were poorly implemented or easily challenged by Democrats in court for violating basic government procedures.

One of Trump's most important campaign promises was to build a wall along the southern border with Mexico and to make Mexico pay for it. In this case he largely was unsuccessful. The longest government shutdown in the nation's history when Trump refused to extend government funding unless Congress allocated funds for his promised **border wall**. About half of Americans blamed Trump for the shutdown, and Trump's approval ratings dropped. Trump agreed to reopen the government without getting funding for the wall. Instead, he shifted money that Congress had allocated for the military to construction of the wall arguing that it was essential for national security. In total, 49 miles of new wall were built during his four years as president.

President Trump was successful in reducing overall immigration, not because of better security but by making the United States seem less welcoming. The primary strategy was **family separation**. Under this policy, children and

 **Border Wall:** A barrier along the southern border with Mexico. Expanding the wall was one of President Trump's key campaign promises and an ongoing political issue during his presidency.

 **Family Separation:** The policy of separating parents and children of illegal immigrants in an effort to discourage immigration.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

parents were separated when caught crossing the border illegally. This policy was criticized by many Americans, both liberal and conservative as inhumane. Visitors to detention centers along the border were angered to see children be kept in buildings where they were held in chain link fence enclosures. Stories of children being locked in “cages” reduced support for the president’s immigration strategy. Furthermore, family separation was challenged in court. In 2018, a federal judge concluded that the Trump administration had “no system in place to keep track of” the separated children, ordered for the families to be reunited, and family separations stopped. Despite the federal court order, the Trump administration continued to practice family separations, with more than a thousand migrant children separated.



Primary Source: Photograph

A detention center for minors along the border with Mexico. Facilities like this one led many Americans to accuse the Trump Administration of inhumanely holding children in “cages.”

In response to Trump’s widely reported sexism and multiple sexual abuse allegations, as well Hillary Clinton’s electoral defeat, American women have become more politically active than ever before and more willing to step up and take charge of their future. One area is in politics. For example, the 2018 congressional elections saw the highest number of female candidates ever. However, the thing that may have the greatest impact in American life is that women have decided to step up and address sexism and sexual abuse. After brave women came out in 2017 to expose Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein’s sexual abuse, the hashtag **#MeToo** was popularized as a way of sharing stories and encouraging other women to stand up against abusers. Superstars Alyssa Milano, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ashley Judd, Jennifer Lawrence, and Uma Thurman have all told their stories using #MeToo. In addition to Weinstein, comedian Bill Cosby and Senator Al Franken, Olympic gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar, and musician R. Kelly have all been exposed as abusers. Many more are sure to follow as more women decide to confront men who have abused them.



#MeToo: Movement to expose perpetrators of sexual abuse. It was started in 2017 by women in the entertainment industry who using social media to tell their stories.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

As a candidate, Trump had promised to “drain the swamp.” His efforts to remake the style of government and reduce the influence of business was mixed. In the end, little changed in the way government worked. However, his use of Twitter to communicate directly to the people, his willingness to exaggerate and lie and his refusal to use politically correct language or follow many of the traditions of the presidency made his time in the White House feel different from the past.

President Trump was hounded by Democratic in Congress and political opponents in courts throughout his term. He was criticized for what many felt was not a clear enough separation between his public policies and his personal business dealings. He brought his daughter and son-in-law into the White House as close advisors and was criticized for perceived nepotism.

Donald Trump became a one-term president when he lost his bid for reelection to Joe Biden in 2020. Perhaps the most important factor in his loss was his handling of the **coronavirus pandemic**. Caused by a virus that led to a disease scientists call COVID-19, the pandemic began in China in late 2019 and by 2020 had swept around the world. Primarily an airborne virus like the flu, but much more deadly and easily spread, COVID-10 is especially dangerous for the elderly and people with other medical problems. Spread of the virus can be limited through social distancing, hand washing and mask wearing. However, responses to the growing pandemic in the United States often had more to do with political outlook than common sense. In liberal states like New York or California, shutdowns and mask wearing were common. In conservative states, governors were more hesitant to implement mandates that scientists recommended. Individual Americans responded differently also. Posts on social media by liberals celebrated mask wearing as a sacrifice they were making for the benefit of others. On the other hand, many conservatives chafed at what they viewed as elites in government and the scientific community infringing on their personal liberty by telling them what to wear, where to go, or how to run their businesses. President Trump himself downplayed the danger of the virus early in the pandemic. He refused to wear a mask and ended up contracting the virus himself, needing hospitalization. As infections skyrocketed in the fall, Americans blamed him for failing to provide effective leadership through the crisis and denied him a second term.

Also important to voters were accusations that the president had abused his power. In the end, Trump became the first president ever to be impeached twice. The first time was in 2019 when Democrats in the House of Representatives accused him of abuse of power and obstruction of justice related to his dealings with the president of the nation of Ukraine. In a recorded phone conversation, Trump had urged him to investigate the son of Joe Biden, the former vice president who Trump believed would run against him in the upcoming election. Furthermore, he had refused to send money to Ukraine that Congress had allocated to help the Ukrainian



Coronavirus Pandemic: Global outbreak during 2020 and 2021 that killed more than 500,000 people in the United States.



First Impeachment of Donald Trump: First attempt by Democrats to remove President Trump from office. It was a response to his effort to get Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden's son.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?

How will historians
remember the past
30 years?

government defend against Russian aggression. Many people felt that the president essentially blackmailed a foreign nation to interfere in an American election. Democrats in the House of Representatives voted to **impeach the president**, but Republicans in Senate held together and voted 52-48 to acquit.

The second impeachment came in 2021 as Trump was leaving office. After losing his bid for reelection to Joe Biden, Trump told his supporters that the election had been stolen and **refused to concede defeat**. A variety of efforts to undermine confidence in the outcome, including lawsuits, threats against election officials, and accusations fueled the lie. When it came time for Congress to certify the vote of the Electoral College on January 6, 2021, an event that normally is hardly noticed because it is a formality, Trump held a rally outside the White House encouraging his supporters to march to the Capitol. Many of them did where they **violently stormed and breached the Capitol Building**, eventually entering the Senate and House chambers as well as numerous offices. The Congressional proceedings were suspended as legislators were taken to secure locations. Both Capitol police officers and protesters died during the melee. When security was finally restored, Congress reconvened and in the early hours of the following morning finished certifying the election of President Biden. Outraged, Democrats in the House **charged Trump with inciting an insurrection** against the United States for encouraging his supporters to try to stop Congress from doing its job.



This time the Senate did not have the option of removing the President from power because Joe Biden took the oath of office and became president before they had a chance to hold the trial, but they still had the option of finding Trump guilty and preventing him from running for office again in the



The Big Lie: Donald Trump's refusal to concede defeat in the 2020 election and effort to convince Americans, without evidence, that the election was somehow stolen from him.



2021 Storming of the Capitol: Attack by supporters of President Trump on the Capitol Building in an effort to prevent Congress from certifying the results of his electoral loss to Joe Biden. It led to Trump's second impeachment.



Second Impeachment of Donald Trump: Attempt by Democrats to hold President Trump accountable for his role in the 2021 Storming of the Capitol.

Primary Source: Photograph

Trump supporters breaking into the Capitol Building on January 6, 2021 in a failed attempt to stop Congress from certifying the results of the 2020 presidential election. The attack led to multiple deaths, hundreds of arrests, and the second impeachment of President Trump.

6 IS OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM BROKEN?



future. In this second impeachment, more Republicans turned against their former president and voted against him, but because conviction requires a 2/3 majority, there were still enough Republicans to protect him, and impeachment failed.

Trump continues to have a strong grip on both Republican voters and politicians. In a poll in March of 2021, 66% of Republicans responded that they believed the “election was stolen from President Trump” despite there being no evidence to support this lie. In May, Liz Cheney, the daughter of a former vice president lost her leadership position in the House of Representatives when her fellow Republicans voted her out for publicly challenging Trump’s lie.

CONCLUSION

By any objective measure, our political system is not functioning well. Our two parties rarely agree. Social media and cable news fan the flames. Voters have grown more tribal, rallying around flawed leaders rather than considering voting for someone from the other side. Those who read William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* would find parallels in modern American politics. Our leaders encourage us to think that the other side is criminal, hates America and is out to ruin the nation.

But having said that, it is worth noting that our elections have always been held on time, even during wars and pandemics. Twice in the past 20 years the majority of voters did not get their way but respected the institutions of government anyway and power was transferred peacefully. Even when a losing president tried to convince Americans that he had really won, the courts and election officials around the nation upheld the integrity of the vote.

Perhaps, the framers of our government had more foresight than we give them credit for. 219 years before Twitter they wrote a Constitution that has endured civil war, imperialism, global conflict, civil rights unrest, scandal, depression, recession, and lies. Maybe our system is not as damaged as it feels.

What do you think? Is our political system broken?



KEY CONCEPTS

Perjury: Lying under oath. It is a crime.

Impeachment: The Constitutional process of removing an elected official or judge. In the case of a president, the House of Representatives serves as the prosecutors and the Senate as the jury.

Charter Schools: Independently run schools that operate with public funding. They are seen by many as opportunities for educators to innovate and provide options for families who live in neighborhoods with failing schools.

School Vouchers: A system in which parents can receive public tax dollars to pay for private school tuition. Proponents believe it gives parents choice and students a chance at a better education. Opponents believe it robs public schools of needed funding.

Preexisting Conditions: Medical problems that a patient has before applying for health insurance. Before the passage of Obamacare, insurers could deny coverage because they knew patients would need medical care.

The 99%: Nickname coined by the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 to describe everyday Americans in contrast to the superrich who they believed controlled business and political decisions.

Prosecutorial Discretion: The idea that the president as chief law enforcement officer can choose which type of crimes to focus resource on. President Obama used this concept to announce that illegal immigrants who had not broken laws would not be subject to deportation.



ECONOMIC CONCEPTS

Mortgage Backed Securities: Investments that were made up of a collection of home loans bundled together and sold as a single unit.

Subprime Mortgage: A home loan made to a lender that was unlikely to be able to repay it. They were sold in large numbers in the early 2000s in order to make mortgage backed securities and when they failed it caused the Great Recession.

Credit Rating Agency: A company that gives a score to investment opportunities to rank them in terms of their risk. They are important in order to help investors manage risk.

Credit Default Swap: Insurance investment banks took out on their investments with other large banks. Because all the large banks had these with all the other large banks in the early 2000s, the Great Recession had a domino effect within the financial markets.



LAWS, POLICIES & PROGRAMS

Contract with America: Set of eight proposals set out by Republicans in 1994 which helped propel them to retake the House of Representatives.

Welfare Reform: Efforts in the 1990s to change welfare laws by including a requirement that people receiving welfare begin working within two years.

Bush Tax Cuts: Reductions in taxes for all Americans, but especially for the wealthy, implemented by George W. Bush in 2001.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): Education reform law passed by George W. Bush in 2002 which introduced a system of high-stakes testing and the possibility of restructuring for low performing schools.

Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP): Government program designed to save banks during the Great Recession. The government loaned banks enormous sums of money in order to help them survive as they dealt with all of the failed investments they had purchased during the housing boom.

The Stimulus: Economic program signed by Barack Obama to help boost the economy during the Great Recession. It included investing \$800 billion in infrastructure and green technologies.

Obamacare: Nickname for the Affordable Care Act passed in 2009 by Democrats in Congress and Barack Obama. It included guarantees of coverage for patients with preexisting conditions, and expansion of Medicaid and a mandate that everyone purchase healthcare coverage.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA): Government program that provides amnesty for illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.

DREAM Act: Proposed law to allow illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children a chance to become legal residents and eventually become citizens. It has not passed Congress due to opposition from Republicans.

Border Wall: A barrier along the southern border with Mexico. Expanding the wall was one of President Trump's key campaign promises and an ongoing political issue during his presidency.

Family Separation: The policy of separating parents and children of illegal immigrants in an effort to discourage immigration.



GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): Government agency under the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for coordinating rescue and relief operations after disasters or terrorist attacks. Their response to Hurricane Katrina was widely criticized.



PEOPLE AND GROUPS

Bill Clinton: Former governor of Arkansas who won the presidency in 1992 as a Democrat and served eight years. His second term was rocked by scandal and impeachment.

New Democrats: Democrats in the early 1990s who found ways to be elected after the Conservative Revolution by promoting free trade and welfare reform. Bill Clinton used this term to describe himself.

Hillary Clinton: First lady to Bill Clinton. She led a task force during his presidency to prepare for healthcare reform. Later she served as senator from New York, Secretary of State, and ran for president.

Newt Gingrich: Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives who proposed the Contract with America in 1994, led the Republican Revolution, and was Bill Clinton's leading political opponent.

Kenneth Starr: Independent prosecutor appointed to investigate Bill Clinton's wrongdoing. He investigated both the Whitewater real estate deal and Clinton's affair with Monika Lewinsky.

Monica Lewinsky: White House intern who had an affair with President Bill Clinton.

George W. Bush: Republican president elected in 2000 and reelected in 2004. He is remembered mostly for prosecuting the War on Terror, but also instituted education reforms and oversaw the beginning of the Great Recession.

Ted Cruz: Republican senator from Texas who has strong backing from the Tea Party movement and promoted a government shutdown during Obama's presidency. He ran unsuccessfully for president in the Republican primary election in 2016.

Dreamers: Nickname for illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as children.

Donald Trump: New York real estate investor and television celebrity won the presidency in 2016 as a Republican.



EVENTS

Republican Revolution: Nickname for the electoral gains made by congressional Republicans in 1994. For the first time in decades Republicans took control of the House of Representatives.

Hurricane Katrina: Major natural disaster in 2005. The federal government's response was widely criticized which hurt President George W. Bush's popularity.

Real Estate Market Crash: 2007 economic disaster in which investors and home buyers finally realized that housing prices were inflated and stopped buying. People were left with mortgages they couldn't pay and homes they couldn't sell.

Great Recession: Economic crash starting in 2007 caused by speculation in the housing market and lax oversight of the financial markets. It was the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and caused unemployment to peak at 10%.

Occupy Wall Street: Protest movement in 2011 focused on real and perceived inequality in the economy, especially on the influence of the wealthy in government and the growing wealth divide between the superrich and everyday Americans. They coined the phrase "We are the 99%."

Tea Party: Political protest movement within the Republican Party in 2009 that formed in reaction to passage of Obamacare. They focused on lowering taxes and reducing government spending. Members of Congress with backing of these voters usually used extreme tactics including shutting down the government to try to achieve their goals.

#MeToo: Movement to expose perpetrators of sexual abuse. It was started in 2017 by women in the entertainment industry who using social media to tell their stories.

Coronavirus Pandemic: Global outbreak during 2020 and 2021 that killed more than 500,000 people in the United States.

First Impeachment of Donald Trump: First attempt by Democrats to remove President Trump from office. It was a response to his effort to get Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden's son.

The Big Lie: Donald Trump's refusal to concede defeat in the 2020 election and effort to convince Americans, without evidence, that the election was somehow stolen from him.

2021 Storming of the Capitol: Attack by supporters of President Trump on the Capitol Building in an effort to prevent Congress from certifying the results of his electoral loss to Joe Biden. It led to Trump's second impeachment.

Second Impeachment of Donald Trump: Attempt by Democrats to hold President Trump accountable for his role in the 2021 Storming of the Capitol.



QUOTES

"Read my lips: no new taxes": Campaign promise by George H. W. Bush in 1988 that cost him support when he had to break it later as president.

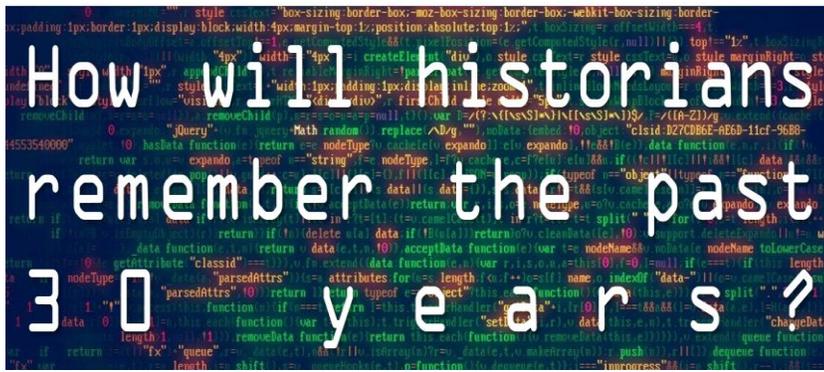
"I did not have sexual relations with that woman": Famous quote by President Bill Clinton when he denied his affair with Monica Lewinsky on television.



COURT CASES

Bush v. Gore: 2000 Supreme Court case in which the Court ruled to end a recount of votes in Florida, thus handing the presidential election victory to George W. Bush. It marked an important turning point in the politicization of the Supreme Court.

QUESTION NINETEEN



This final unit of our study of American history has asked you to do something historians usually avoid: judge the present like a historian, even though we do not yet know how the story ends. Still, the past 30 years have raised a set of big questions that we will have to answer when we decide what this era meant.

When we look back, will we describe these years as a time of American influence and power? If so, will we decide that American power made the world safer and more just? Or will we decide that intervention created new problems the United States could not control?

Perhaps, we will define this era primarily through the lens of fear and security. Will we remember the War on Terror as a necessary defense of democracy? Or will we remember it as a period when Americans paid an enormous price in lives, money, and civil liberties without getting the safety we were promised?

Looking back years from now, will the biggest story be the transformation of the American people? Will demographic change, immigration, and generational turnover be what reshaped American culture and politics more than any single election or war?

Will these decades be remembered as the next chapter in a longer struggle over race, justice, and belonging? Perhaps they will end up being the final chapter in that struggle!

What will we say about our government and politics in this era? Is our current situation unique, or just more of the same division we've seen before?

Perhaps the greatest change will be the shift to the Information Era and the way the internet and our devices have revolutionized our way of life.

So, when the details blur and today's headlines are forgotten, what will remain as the central story? What do you think: How will historians remember the past 30 years?



www.inquiryhistory.com