**Chapter 41**

**American Confronts the Post-Cold War Era**

**(1992-2009)**

**Bill Clinton: The First Baby-Boomer President**

For the **election of 1992**, the Democrats chose Bill Clinton as their candidate (despite accusations of womanizing and draft evasion) and Albert Gore, Jr. as his running mate. The Democrats tried a new approach, promoting growth, strong defense, and anticrime policies, while campaigning to stimulate the economy.

The Republicans dwelled on "family values" and selected Bush for the presidency and J. Danforth Quayle for the vice presidency.

Third party candidate, Ross Perot entered the race and ended up winning 19,237,247 votes, although he won no Electoral votes.

**Clinton** **won** the election of 1992, by a count of 370 to 168 in the Electoral College. Along with the presidency, Democrats also gained control of both the House and the Senate.

Presidency Clinton placed in Congress and his presidential cabinet **minorities** and more **women**, including the first female attorney general, Janet Reno, Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the Supreme Court

**A False Start for Reform**

Upon entering office, Clinton called for accepting homosexuals in the armed forces, but he had to settle for a "don't ask, don't tell" policy that unofficially accepted gays and lesbians.

Clinton appointed his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, to revamp the nation's health and medical care system. When the plan was revealed in October 1993, critics blasted it as cumbersome, confusing, and stupid. The previous image of Hillary as an equal political partner of her husband changed to a liability.

In **1993**, Clinton passed the **Brady Bill**, a gun-control law named after presidential aide James Brady, who had been wounded in President Reagan's attempted assassination.

By **1996**, Clinton had **shrunk** the **federal** **deficit** to its lowest levels in ten years.

In July 1994, Clinton convinced Congress to pass a $30 billion anticrime bill.

On February 26, 1993, a radical Muslim group bombed the **World Trade Center** in New York, killing six people. On April 19, 1993, a fiery standoff at **Waco, Texas** between the government and the **Branch Davidian cult** took place; it ended in a huge fire that killed 82 people. On April 19, 1995, Timothy McVeigh bombed a federal building in Oklahoma, killing 169 people. By the time all these events had taken place, few Americans trusted the government.

**The Politics of Distrust**

In 1994, Newt Gingrich led Republicans on a sweeping attack of Clinton's liberal failures with a conservative "**Contract with America**." That year, Republicans won eight more seats in the Senate and 53 more seats in the House, where Gingrich became the new Speaker of the House.

The Republicans, however, went too far, imposing federal laws that put new obligations on state and local governments without providing new revenues.

Clinton tried to fight back, but the American public gradually grew tired of Republican conservatism; Gingrich's suggestion of sending children of welfare families to orphanages, and the 1995 shut down of Congress due to a lack of a sufficient budget package aided to this public disliking.

In the **election of 1996**, Clinton beat Republican Bob Dole. Ross Perot, the third party candidate, again finished third.

**Problems Abroad**

Clinton sent troops to Somalia, but eventually withdrew them. He also got involved with the conflicts in Northern Ireland, but to no positive effect. Before serving as presidency, Clinton denounced China's abuses of human rights and threatened to punish China. However, as president, Clinton discovered that trade with China was far too important to "waste" over human rights.

Clinton committed American troops to NATO to keep the peace in the former **Yugoslavia** and sent 20,000 troops to return Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in **Haiti**. He fully supported the **North American Free Trade Agreement** (NAFTA) that made a free-trade zone surrounding Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. He then helped to form the **World Trade Organization**, the successor to the **General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade** (GATT). He also provided $20 billion to Mexico in 1995 to help its faltering economy.

Clinton presided over the 1993 reconciliation meeting between Israel's Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Yasir Arafat at the White House. Two years later, though, Rabin was assassinated, ending hopes for peace in the Middle East.

The end of the Cold War left the U.S. probing for a diplomatic formula to replace anti-Communism, revealing misconduct by the CIA and the FBI.

Political reporter Joe Klein wrote ***Primary Colors***, mirroring some of Clinton's personal life/womanizing. Clinton ran into trouble with his failed real estate investment in the **Whitewater Land Corporation**.

In 1993, White House councilman, Vincent Foster, Jr. apparently committed suicide, perhaps overstressed at having to (possibly immorally) manage Clinton's legal and financial affairs.

As Clinton began his second term, the first by a Democratic president since FDR, there were Republican majorities in both houses of Congress.

**Scandal and Impeachment**

Rumors and scandal seemed to follow Clinton, earning him the nickname "Slick Willy."

Womanizing rumors had followed Clinton since the campaign days.

He and wife Hillary were accused of shady business in their home state of Arkansas with investments in the Whitewater Land Corporation. A special federal prosecutor investigated the Whitewater deal, but nothing ever came out of it.

Eyebrows rose and conspiracy theories went wild when Vincent Foster, Jr. committed suicide. He was in charge of managing Clinton's legal and financial affairs. It seems apparent that his suicide was due to personal reasons.

All scandals became secondary to the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal in the White House.

Lewinsky was an intern. She and Clinton had a sexual affair.

Then, while under oath for a different woman's sexual harassment lawsuit, Clinton lied about the Lewinski affair.

Clinton was asked if he'd had "sexual relations", and whatever went on between he and "that woman" did not meet his definition of sex. Clinton felt he didn't lie.

The DNA in the stain on Lewinsky's infamous blue dress said otherwise.

For "obstruction of justice" and perjury, the House voted to impeach Clinton—the second president to be impeached after Andrew Johnson in the 1960s.

However, the Senate did *not* get the 2/3 vote necessary to kick Clinton from office.

**Clinton’s Legacy**

Clinton wanted a lasting legacy to his presidency, one that did not involve the words "scandal" or "impeach."

Clinton preserved lands, set up a "patients' bill of rights", and hired more teachers and police officers.

Clinton did make some good marks.

He truly did "govern to the middle"—this angered the far Left and Right, but appealed to *most* Americans.

The economy was strong and the budget was at surplus levels. Unemployment was a bare minimum, poverty rates went down, median income reached new highs.

History may in fact make the budget surplus Clinton's non-scandal legacy.

Clinton left on something on a sour note.

With a few days left, he negotiated a deal on the Lewinsky scandal. To got immunity from any future legal action in the case in return for paying a fine and suspension of his law license for 5 years.

Also, at the last moment, he gave pardons to political donors and backers which got them out of jail.

**The Bush-Gore Presidential Battle**

The 2000 presidential election was predicted to be a close one.

Vice President **Albert Gore** was nominated by the Democrats. Gore had a Clinton paradox—the good was that he could lay claim to the prosperity of the Clinton years, the bad was that aligning too close with Clinton also aligned with his scandals.

The Republicans chose Texas governor **George W. Bush**, (nicknamed "W" or Texas-style, "Dubya"). Bush spoke of being a "compassionate conservative." He chose **Dick Cheney** as his running-mate. Cheney had been a major player in Bush's father's presidency during the Persian Gulf War.

A third party, the "Green Party" nominated **Ralph Nader**. The party consisted mostly of environmentalists and extreme liberals.

With the government collecting a more money than it spent (a budget surplus), the question became, "What should be done with the extra money?"

Bush believed the money belonged to the taxpayers. Thus, he wanted to make a large tax cut to return the money "to the people."

Gore wanted to make a smaller tax cut then use the rest to pay down the debt, invest in Social Security, and perhaps expand Medicare.

Notably, this was age-old class warfare. Bush's plan would've helped the people who paid the taxes—generally the higher wage earners. However, some 45% of American do not pay income taxes. That group votes dominantly Democratic. Therefore, Gore's plan focused more on spending the tax money on social services.

Nader, was little more than a side-show.

The Controversial Election of 2000

Though predicted close, no one predicted it to be as close as it was.

Only the Hayes-Tilden standoff of 1876 was comparable.

The election boiled down a few states. Florida was the critical swing state because it had the nation's fourth most electoral votes. Florida was essentially a tie, but very slightly favored Bush. There were even more twists to the election…

**Jeb Bush** was governor of Florida, and the president's brother—perfect fuel for conspiracy theories.

A recount was made. Bush was still ahead, by a margin of around 500 votes out of 6 million.

The questions narrowed to Broward and Palm Beach counties. There was a large Jewish population there so it was figured it would go heavily Democratic (Gore's running-mate was **Joseph Lieberman**, himself Jewish).

In Palm Beach county, the infamous "butterfly ballot" had supposedly tricked seniors who wanted to vote for Gore into voting for Bush. Another excruciating recount was undertaken there.

The process dragged on for about a month and America still didn't know who the next president would be.

The recounted votes were finally made official and Bush won the election 271 to 266 in the electoral.

There were ironies in the election…

The American electoral system showed its quirkiness. Gore actually got more popular votes (50,999,897 to Bush’s 50,456,002), but he lost the critical electoral vote (266 to Bush’s 271).

Similar to how a third party candidate (Ross Perot) had helped the Democrats by hurting the first Bush an election in 1992, a third party candidate came back to bite the Democrats in 2000. Nader's Green Party got only 2.7% of the vote, however without him in the race, they would've almost certainly voted Democratic and Gore would've won.

Election maps from the 2000 election showed how Americans broke down in terms of voters.

Democrats drew from the cities, the west and east coasts, heavily Latino areas, and from African-Americans (viewing a blue-red Democrat-Republican map, the old "Cotton Belt" from the Mississippi River to Virginia is clearly seen as a blue arc).

Republicans drew from rural areas, mostly the South and the West.

**Bush Begins**

Like his father, Bush was an odd mix of good ol' boy from Texas and Ivy League. Bush took office talking up his Texas upbringing (true) and talking down his family’s privileged life "Back East" (also true).

Bush stepped into the culture wars, almost always siding conservative. Conservatives and Christians cheered, liberals were irate.

Bush removed support from international groups that were pro-abortion.

He supported federally funded faith-based welfare programs.

He opposed stem-cell research, which had great medical possibilities, on the grounds that the embryo in reality was a small person and doing tests on it was nothing other than abortion.

He frustrated environmentalists by questioning the legitimacy of global warming, shunning the Kyoto agreement that was to limit greenhouse emissions, and speaking of new oil exploration in Alaska. Businesses were happy by these positions.

Bush went ahead with his promised tax cut amounting to $1.3 trillion. By 2004, the cut combined with the economy yielding a $400 billion deficit.

**Terrorism Comes to America**

On **September 11**, 2001, America’s centuries-old enjoyment of being on “our side of the pond” ended when militant Islamic radicals attacked America. The radicals hijacked passenger planes and used the planes, and hostages, as guided missiles.

Two planes slammed into the World Trade Center towers in New York City. The towers caught fire, then came down. A third plane slammed into the Pentagon. A fourth plane was thought to be aiming for the White House or Capitol building, but heroic passengers took back the plane before it crashed in a Pennsylvania field.

President Bush's legacy would essentially be made for him—how he responded to the **9/11 attacks**. Bush proved a strong leader in the period after the attacks. The whole plan was the work of Al-Qaeda, headed by **Osama bin Laden**. In true Texas-style, Bush called for Bin Laden’s head. Afghanistan refused to hand him over so Bush ordered the military to go on the offensive and hunt him down. The hunt proved to be difficult in rugged Afghanistan and Bin Laden proved elusive.

With the jitters high, the American economy took a turn for the worse, and a few Americans died after receiving anthrax-laden letters. Coupled with fear of another attack, anxiety loomed.

Terrorism launched a “new kind of war” or a “war on terror” that required tactics beyond the conventional battlefield. Congress responded in turn.

The **Patriot Act** gave the government extended surveillance rights. Critics charged this was a Big Brother-like infringement of rights, a reversal of the freedoms that Americans were fighting for.

The **Department of Homeland Security** was established as the newest cabinet department with the goal of securing America.

**Bush Takes the Offensive Against Iraq**

Saddam Hussein had been a long time menace to long list of people. With Bush, Saddam's time had run out. Bush stated he’d not tolerate Hussein’s defiance of the U.N.’s weapons inspectors.

Also, Bush lumped Iraq and Saddam into an "axis of evil" that he believed helped and harbored terrorists. To Bush, attacking Saddam was just one part of the "war on terror."

The center of the problem was information and lack of action.

Intelligence at the time suggested that Hussein had and was actively making weapons of mass destruction (“**WMDs**”). When the U.N. tried to validate or disprove the WMD threat, Hussein continually thumbed his nose at the weapon’s inspectors.

WMD intelligence in hand, Bush decided it was time for action. Bush sought the U.N.'s approval for taking military action, but some nations, notably France, Russia, and Germany with their Security Council veto, had cold feet.

So, Bush decided to go it alone. Heavy majorities of Congress in October of 2002 approved armed force against Iraq.

The U.N. tried one last time to inspect, Hussein blocked the inspectors again. The U.N. and inspectors asked for more time still. The U.N. appeared to lack any muscle—they'd made a rule, but could not enforce it.

For Bush, time was up and it was time for action. In March of 2003, the U.S. launched an attack and Baghdad fell within a month. Saddam went on the run, then was found nine months later, literally hiding in a hole in the ground.

He would later be turned over to Iraq. The Iraqi court tried Saddam, convicted him of murder, and hanged him.

Taking Iraq, though not easy, was swift and successful, but *securing* and rebuilding Iraq would prove tougher.

**Owning Iraq**

Most Iraqi people welcomed the Americans, but certainly not all. Factions broke out. Iraqi insurgents attacked American G.I.’s and casualties mounted to nearly 1,200 by 2004. Although removing Saddam had been successful, it was feared that if the U.S. just came home and left a political void, whatever emerged to fill the void may be worse than Saddam. Americans soon began to wonder, “How long will we be there?”

The new goals were to (1) establish security in Iraq, eventually by Iraqi troops, and (2) create and turn over control to a new democratically elected Iraqi government.

Training Iraqi security troops proved pitifully slow. A new government was created and limited power handed over on June 28, 2004. Meanwhile, American casualties and deaths added up due to localized fighting and roadside bombs.

Iraq became a divisive issue in America. Conservatives generally supported the war and post-war efforts. Liberals charged that Bush was on some ego-tripping battle charge to hunt down phantom weapons of mass destruction.

**A Country in Conflict**

Other issues divided America:

Democrats continually grumbled about the “stolen” 2000 election.

Civil libertarians fumed over the Patriot Act.

Pacifists said the WMD reasoning was made up from the get-go to start a war in Iraq they felt unjust.

Big businesses, like Enron and WorldCom, monkeyed around with their accounting and supposedly fattened the rich and gleaned the poor. They went bankrupt and wiped out many people's retirement funds.

Social warfare continued over abortion and homosexuality.

Affirmative action still boiled, and the Supreme Court came up with mathematical formulae for minority admittance to undergrads. The Court also stated that in 25 years racial preferences would likely be unnecessary.

**Reelecting George W. Bush**

Republicans put Bush up for reelection in 2004. The Democrats selected Sen. **John Kerry** of Massachusetts.

Despite the usual litany of issues (education, health care, etc.) the key issue of the 2004 election was national security. At the heart of the security issue, was the question of the war in Iraq.

Bush said the U.S. was making progress and should thus “stay the course” in Iraq.

Kerry took an anti-war position. However, Kerry’s position on war and his image was somewhat confounding:

Kerry had been a Vietnam war hero, but then became a Vietnam war protester. This trend continued in 2004…

Kerry voted for military action in Iraq, but then voted against a bill for military spending for the war and said he was against the war. Kerry gained much support by criticizing Bush’s management (or mismanagement) of the Iraq situation. Kerry charged that Bush had no plan for Iraq after the initial take-over. However, Kerry focused only on Bush’s failure and failed to effectively present voters with his own alternative course of action.

Most pollsters predicted Kerry to win. But, Bush won with a surprisingly strong showing of 286 electoral votes to Kerry’s 252.