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Chapter 41 - America Confronts the Post-Cold War Era

I. Bill Clinton: the First Baby-Boomer President

1. In 1992, the Democrats chose Bill Clinton as their candidate (despite accusations of womanizing, drug use, and draft evasion) and Albert Gore, Jr. as his running mate.
2. The Democrats tried a new approach, promoting growth, strong defense, and anticrime policies while campaigning to stimulate the economy.
3. The Republicans dwelt on “family values” and selected Bush for another round and J. Danforth Quayle as his running mate. They claimed that “character matters” and so Clinton and his baggage should not be elected.
4. Third party candidate Ross Perot added color to the election by getting 19,742,267 votes in the election (no electoral votes, though), but Clinton won, 370 to 168 in the Electoral College.
 - Democrats also got control of both the House and the Senate.
5. Congress and the presidential cabinet were filled with minorities and more women, including the first female attorney general ever, Janet Reno, Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, and Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the Supreme Court

II. A False Start for Reform

1. Upon entering office, Clinton called for accepting homosexuals in the armed forces, but finally had to settle for a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that unofficially accepted gays and lesbians.
2. Clinton also appointed his wife, Hillary, to revamp the nation’s health and medical care system, and when it was revealed in October 1993, critics blasted it as cumbersome, confusing, and impractical, thus suddenly making Hillary Rodham Clinton a liability whereas before, she had been a full, equal political partner of her husband.
3. By 1996, Clinton had shrunk the federal deficit to its lowest level in a decade, and in 1993, he passed a gun-control law called the Brady Bill, named after presidential aide James Brady who had been wounded in President Reagan’s attempted assassination.
 - In July 1994, Clinton persuaded Congress to pass a \$30 billion anticrime bill.
4. During the decade, a radical Muslim group bombed the World Trade Center in New York, killing six. An American terrorist, Timothy McVeigh, bombed the federal building in Oklahoma in 1995, taking 169 lives. And a fiery standoff at Waco, Texas, between the government and the Branch Davidian religious cult ended in a huge fire that killed men, women, and children.
 - By this time, few Americans trusted the government, the reverse of the WWII generation.

III. The Politics of Distrust

1. In 1994, Newt Gingrich led Republicans on a sweeping attack of Clinton’s liberal failures with a conservative “Contract with America,” and that year, Republicans won all incumbent seats as well as eight more seats in the Senate and 53 more seats in the House. Gingrich became the new Speaker of the House.
2. However, the Republicans went too far, imposing federal laws that put new obligations on state

and local governments without providing new revenues and forcing Clinton to sign a welfare-reform bill that made deep cuts in welfare grants.

- Clinton tried to fight back, but gradually, the American public grew tired of Republican conservatism, such as Gingrich's suggestion of sending children of welfare families to orphanages, and of its incompetence, such as the 1995 shut down of Congress due to a lack of a sufficient budget package.
3. In 1996, Clinton ran against Republican Bob Dole and won, 379 to 159, and Ross Perot again finished a sorry third.

IV. Clinton Again

1. Clinton became the first Democrat to be re-elected since FDR.
2. He put conservatives on the defensive by claiming the middle ground.
 - He embraced the Welfare Reform Bill.
 - He balanced affirmative action (preferential treatment for minorities). When voters and courts began to move away from affirmative action, Clinton spoke against the direction away from affirmative action, but stopped short of any action.
3. Mostly, Clinton enjoyed the popularity of a president during an economic good-time.
 - He supported the controversial NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) which cut tariffs and trade barriers between Mexico—U.S.—Canada.
 - Similarly, he supported the start of the WTO (World Trade Agreement) to lower trade barriers internationally.
4. The issue of campaign finance reform rose to water level. Republicans and Clinton alike, gave the issue lip service, but did nothing.

V. Problems Abroad

1. Clinton sent troops to Somalia (where some were killed), withdrew them, and also meddled in Northern Ireland to no good effect. But after denouncing China's abuses of human rights and threatening to punish China before he became president, Clinton as president discovered that trade with China was too important to throw away over human rights.
2. Clinton committed American troops to NATO to keep the peace in the former Yugoslavia, and he sent 20,000 troops to return Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power in Haiti.
3. He resolutely supported the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that made a free-trade zone surrounding Mexico, Canada, and the U.S., then helped form the World Trade Organization (WTO), the successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and also provided \$20 billion to Mexico in 1995 to help its faltering economy.
4. Clinton also presided over an historic reconciliation meeting in 1993 between Israel's Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Yasir Arafat at the White House, but two years later, Rabin was assassinated, thus ending hopes for peace in the Middle East.

VI. Scandal and Impeachment

1. The end of the Cold War left the U.S. groping for a diplomatic formula to replace anti-Communism and revealed misconduct by the CIA and the FBI.
2. Political reporter Joe Klein wrote *Primary Colors*, mirroring some of Clinton's personal life/womanizing. Meanwhile Clinton also ran into trouble with his failed real estate investment in the Whitewater Land Corporation.
 - In 1993, Vincent Foster, Jr. apparently committed suicide, perhaps overstressed at having to (perhaps immorally) manage Clinton's legal and financial affairs.
3. As Clinton began his second term, the first by a Democratic president since FDR, he had Republican majorities in both houses of Congress going against him.
4. Oddly for a president who seemed obsessed with making a place for himself in history, his place likely was made with the infamous Monica Lewinski sex scandal. In it, Clinton had oral sex in the White House Oval Office with the intern Lewinski. Then he denied, under oath, that he had done so, figuring that oral sex was not actually sex.
 - For his "little white lie," Clinton was impeached by the House (only the 2nd president to be impeached, behind Andrew Johnson right after the Civil War).

- However, Republicans were unable to get the necessary 2/3 super-majority vote in the Senate to kick Clinton from the White House. So, Clinton fulfilled his final years as president, but did so with a tarnished image and his place in history assured. His actions saw Americans lean toward the realization that character indeed must really matter after all.

VII. Clinton's Legacy

1. In his last several months as president, Clinton tried to secure a non-Monica legacy.
 - He named tracts of land as preservation.
 - He initiated a "patients' bill of rights."
 - He hired more teachers and police officers.
2. On the good side, Clinton proved to be a largely moderate Democrat. The economy was strong, the budget was balanced, and he cautioned people from expected big-government from being the do-all and give-all to everyone.
3. On the bad side, the Monica Lewinski situation created great cynicism in politics, he negotiated a deal with the Lewinski prosecutor where he'd gave immunity in exchange for a fine and law license suspension, and his last-minute executive pardons gave the appearance of rewarding political donors.

VIII. The Bush-Gore Presidential Battle

1. The 2000 election began to shape up as a colorful one.
 - Democrats chose Vice President Albert Gore. He had to balance aligned with Clinton's prosperity and against his scandals.
 - The Green Party (consisting mostly of liberals and environmentalists) chose consumer advocate Ralph Nader.
 - Republicans chose Texas governor George W. Bush (son of George H. W. Bush and known simply as "W" or, in Texas, as "Dub-ya").
2. A budget surplus beckoned the question, "What to do with the extra money?"
 - Bush said to make big cut taxes for all.
 - Gore said to make smaller tax cuts to the middle class only, then use the rest to shore up the debt, Social Security, and Medicare.
 - Nader, in reality, was little more than a side-show.

IX. The Controversial Election of 2000

1. A close finish was expected, but not to the degree to which it actually happened.
 - The confused finish was reminiscent of the Hayes-Tilden standoff of 1876.
2. Controversy surrounded Florida.
 - Having the nation's 4th most electoral votes, Florida was the swing-state.
 - Florida effectively had a tie, with Bush ahead by the slightest of margins.
 - State law required a recount.
 - The recount upheld Bush's narrow win.
 - Democrats charged there were irregularities in key counties (notably Palm Beach county that had a large Jewish populace and therefore would figure to be highly Democratic in support of Gore's V.P. candidate Joseph Lieberman, the 1st Jewish candidate for president or V.P.).
 - At heart of the matter was the infamous "butterfly ballot" which supposedly confused the easily-confounded elderly of Palm Beach county—supposedly to Bush's advantage.
 - As the confusion wore on and America needed a president A.S.A.P., Florida eventually validated the Bush vote. Additionally, George W.'s brother Jeb Bush was the Florida governor; and, the Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris, who officially validated the Bush-vote, had been appointed by Jeb.
 - For conspiracy theorists, it was like a field-day on Christmas morning.
 - One irony of the election was the role of Ralph Nader. He energized the liberalist liberals (and therefore those who disliked Bush the most). The irony: Green votes for Nader stole votes that would've gone to Gore and ostensibly gave the election to Bush.
 - Drama aside, Bush won. Gore actually got more popular votes (50,999,897 to Bush's

50,456,002), but lost the critical electoral vote (266 to Bush's 271).

X. Bush Begins

1. Bush took office talking up his Texas upbringing (true) and talking down his family's Back-East privilege (also true).
2. Bush took on hot topics and fired up both sides of the political spectrum.
 - He withdrew U.S. support from international programs that okayed abortion.
 - He advocated faith-based social 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 angered environmentalists with his policies.
 - He even worried conservatives by cutting taxes \$1.3 trillion. The budget surpluses of the 90s turned into a \$400 billion deficit by 2004.

XI. Terrorism Comes to America

1. On September 11, 2001, America's centuries-old enjoyment of being on "our side of the pond" ended when militant Muslim 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 afire, then came down.
 - A third plane slammed into the Pentagon.
 - A fourth plane was aiming for the White House, but heroic passengers took back the plane before it crashed in a Pennsylvania field.
2. America was stunned, to say the least.
3. President Bush's leadership after the attacks was solemn and many began to forget the disputed election of 2000.
 - He identified the culprits as Al Qaeda, a religious militant terrorist group, led by Osama Bin Laden.
 - Bin Laden's hatred toward America revolved around resentment of America's economic, military, and cultural power.
4. 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 and Bin Laden proved elusive.
5. At the same time, the American economy turned for the worse, and a few Americans died after receiving anthrax-laden letters. Coupled with fear of another attack, anxiety loomed.
6. 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. It's goal was to secure America.

XII. Bush Takes the Offensive Against Iraq

1. Saddam Hussein had been a long time menace to many people. With Bush, his time had run out. Bush stated he'd not tolerate Hussein's defiance of the U.N.'s weapons inspectors.
2. At heart of problems: intelligence at the time suggested that Hussein had and was actively making weapons of mass destruction ("WMDs"). Hussein continually thumbed his nose at the weapon's inspectors who tried to validate or disprove the threat.
3. Bush decided it was time for action.
 - Bush sought the U.N.'s approval for taking military action, but some nations, notably France with its 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.
- For Bush, time was up. He launched an attack and Baghdad fell within a month. Saddam went on the run, then was found nine months later hiding in a hole in the ground.
- Taking Iraq, though not easy, was swift and successful; securing and rebuilding Iraq would prove tougher.

XIII. Owning Iraq

1. Most Iraqi people welcomed the Americans, but certainly not all.
2. Factions broke out. Iraqi insurgents attacked American G.I.'s and casualties mounted to nearly 1,200 by 2004.
3. Americans soon began to wonder, "How long will we be there?"
4. The new goals were to (1) establish security in Iraq, hopefully by Iraqi troops, and (2) create and turn over control to a new democratically elected Iraqi government.
 - Training Iraqi troops proved pitifully slow.
 - A new government was created and limited power handed over on June 28, 2004.
5. 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.

XIV. A Country in Conflict

1. 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.
 - Big business (like Enron and WorldCom that monkeyed with their books) supposedly fattened the rich and gleaned the poor.
 - 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.

XV. Reelecting George W. Bush

1. Republicans put Bush up for reelection in 2004.
2. Democrats selected Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts.
3. 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 to "stay the course"; Kerry took an anti-war position. However, Kerry's position and image was somewhat confounding:
 - Kerry was a Vietnam war hero, but then a Vietnam war protestor.
 - Kerry voted for military action in Iraq, but then voted against a bill for military spending for the war.
4. 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.
5. In the election, and despite polls to the contrary, Bush won with a surprisingly strong showing (a popular vote of 60,639,281 to Kerry's 57,355,978) of 286 electoral votes to Kerry's 252.

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