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Chapter 42 - The American People Face a New Century

I. Economic Revolutions

1. As heavy industry waned, the information age kicked into high gear.
 - Microsoft Corp. and the internet brought about the communications revolution.
 - Entrepreneurs led the way to making the Internet a 21st century mall, library, and shopping center.
 - Speed and efficiency of new communications tools threatened to wipe out other jobs.
2. White-collar jobs in financial services and high tech engineering were being outsourced to other countries like Ireland and India.
 - Employees could thus help keep the company's global circuits working 24 hrs. a day.
3. Many discovered that the new high tech economy was also prone to boom or bust, just like the old economy.
 - In the Spring of 2000, the stock market began its biggest slide since WWII.
 - By 2003, the market had lost \$6 trillion in value.
 - American's pension plans shrank to 1/3 or more.
 - Recent retirees scrambled to get jobs and offset their pension losses which were tied to the stock market.
 - This showed that Americans were still scarcely immune to risk, error, scandal, and the ups-and-downs of the business cycle.
4. Scientific research propelled the economy.
 - Researchers unlocked the secrets of molecular genetics (1950s).
 - They developed new strains of high yielding, pest/weather resistant crops.
 - They sought to cure hereditary diseases.
 - The movement started to fix genetic mutations.
 - The "Human Genome Project" established the DNA sequence of the 30 thousand human genes, helping create radical new medical therapies.
 - Breakthroughs in cloning animals raised questions about the legitimacy of cloning technology in human reproduction.
 - Stem Cell Research, where zygotes or fertilized human eggs, offered possible cures for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.
 - The Bush administration, and many religious groups, believed that this research was killing people in the form of a human fetus.
 - Bush said a fetus is still a human life, despite its small size, and experimenting and destroying it is therefore wrong. For this reason, he limited government funding for stem cell research.

II. Affluence and Inequality

1. U.S. standard of living was high compared to the rest of human kind
 - Median household income in 2002 = \$42,400
2. Americans, however, weren't the world's wealthiest people
3. Rich still got richer while the poor got poorer

- The richest 20% in 2001 raked in nearly half the nation's income while the poorest 20% got a mere 4%
- 4. The Welfare Reform Bill (1996) restricted access to social services and required able-bodied welfare recipients to find work.
 - This further weakened the financial footing of many impoverished families.
- 5. Widening inequality could be measured in different ways as well
 - Chief executives roughly earned 245 times as much as the average worker
 - In 2004, over 40 million people had no medical insurance
 - 34 million (12% of population) were impoverished
- 6. Causes of the widening income gap
 - The tax and fiscal policies of the Reagan and both Bush presidencies
 - Intensifying global economic competition
 - shrinkage of high-paying manufacturing jobs for semiskilled/unskilled workers
 - the decline of unions
 - the economic rewards to those of higher education
 - the growth of part time and temporary work
 - the increase of low-skilled immigrants
 - the tendency of educated, working men and woman marriages, creating households w/ high incomes
- 7. Educational opportunities also had a way of perpetuating inequality
 - under funding of many schools in poor urban areas

III. The Feminist Revolution

1. Women were greatly affected by the great economic changes of the late 20th Century
2. Over 5 decades, women steadily increased their presence in the work place
3. By 1990s, nearly half of all workers were women
4. Most surprising was the upsurge of employment in mothers
 - by 1990s, a majority of women with kids as young as one were working
5. Many universities opened their doors to women (1960s):
 - Yale
 - Princeton
 - West Point
 - The Citadel and Virginia Military Institute (VMI)
6. Despite these gains, many feminists remained frustrated
 - women still got lower wages
 - were concentrated in few low-prestige, low-paying occupations
 - For example, in 2002, on 29 % of women were lawyers or judges and 25% physicians
 - This is likely due to women would interrupt their careers to bear and raise kids and even took a less demanding job to fulfill the traditional family roles
7. Discrimination and a focus on kids also helped account for the "gender-gap" in elections
 - Women still voted for Democrats more than men
 - They seemed to be more willing to favor gov't support for health and child care, education, and job equality, as well as more vigilant in protecting abortion rights—thus, Democratic voters.
8. Mens' lives changed in the 2000s as well
 - Some employers gave maternity leave as well as paternity leave in recognition of shared obligations of the two worker household.
 - More men shared the traditional female responsibilities
 - cooking, laundry, and child care
9. In 1993, congress passed the Family Leave Bill, mandating job protection for working fathers as well as mothers who needed to take time off from work for family reasons

IV. New Families and Old

1. The nuclear family suffered heavy blows in modern America
 - by 1990s, one out of every two marriages ended in divorce
 - 7x more children were affected by divorce compared to the beginning of the decade

- Kids who commuted between parents was common ground
- 2. Traditional families weren't just falling apart at an alarming rate, but were also increasingly slow to form in the first place.
 - The proportion of adults living alone tripled in the 4 decades after 1950s
 - In 1990s, 1/3 of women age 25 - 29 had never married
 - Every fourth child in US was growing up in a household that lacked two parents
- 3. The reason for this
 - the pauperization of many women and children (single parent income = HARD)
 - Single parent hood was the #1 cause for the reason behind poverty
- 4. Child raising, the reason behind a family, was being pawned off to day-care centers, school, or TV (electronic babysitter)
- 5. Viable families now assumed a variety of different forms
 - Kids in households were raised by a single parent, stepparent, or grandparent, and even kids with gay parents encountered a degree of acceptance that would have been unimaginable a century earlier.
 - Gay marriage and teenage pregnancy was on a decline after the mid-1900s
- 6. Families weren't evaporating, but were altering into much different forms

V. The Aging of America

- 1. Old age was expected, due to the fact that Americans were living longer than ever before
 - People born in 2000 could anticipate living to an average 70 years

Miraculous medical advances lengthened and strengthened lives

- 1. Longer lives = more older people
 - 1 American in 8 was over 65 years of age in 2000
- 2. This aging of population raised a slew of economic, social, and political questions
 - Old people formed a potent electoral bloc that aggressively lobbied for gov't favors and achieved real gains for senior citizens
 - The share of GNP spent on health care for people over 65 more than doubled
 - The more payments to healthcare, hurt education, thus making social and economic problems further down the road.
 - The old are getting helped, but the young are being punished for it
- 3. These triumphs for senior citizens brought fiscal strains, like on Social Security
 - At the beginning of the creation of Social Security, a small majority depended on it.
 - But by now, it has increased, and now workers' Social Security is actually being funded to the senior citizens. WHY?
 - The ratio of active workers to retirees had dropped so low, that drastic adjustments were necessary
 - Worsened further, when med care for seniors rose out of their price range
- 4. As WW2 baby boomers began to retire the Unfunded Liability (the difference between what the gov't promised to pay to the elderly and the taxes it expected to take in) was about \$7 trillion, a number that might destroy US if new reforms weren't adopted
 - Pressures mounted:
 - to persuade older Americans to work longer
 - invest the current Social Security surplus in equalities and bonds to meet future obligations
 - privatize a portion of the Social Security to younger people who wanted to invest some of their pay-roll taxes into individual retirement accounts

VI. The New Immigration

- 1. Newcomers continued to flow into Modern America
 - Nearly 1 million per year from 1980s up to 2000s
 - Contradicting history, Europe provided few compared to Asia/Latin America
- 2. What prompted new immigration to the US?
 - New immigrants came for many of the same reasons as the old...

- they left countries where population was increasing rapidly and...
 - where agricultural/industrial revolutions were shaking people loose of old habits of life
 - they came in search of jobs and economic opportunities
3. Some came with skills and even professional degrees and found their way into middle-class jobs
 - However, most came with fewer skills/less education, seeking work as janitors, nannies, farm laborers, lawn cutters, or restraint workers.
 4. The southwest felt immigration the hardest, since Mexican migrants came heavily from there
 - By the turn of the century, Latinos made up nearly 1/3 of the population in California, Arizona, and Texas, and nearly 40% in New Mexico
 - Latinos succeeded in making the south west a bi-cultural region by holding onto to their culture by strength in numbers, compared to most immigrants whom had to conform. Plus, it did help to have their 'mothering country' right next door.
 5. Some "old-stock" Americans feared about the modern America's capacity to absorb all these immigrants.
 - The Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986) attempted to choke off illegal entry by penalizing employers of the undocumented aliens and by granting amnesty of those already here.
 - Ant-immigrant sentiment flared (a lot in CA) in the wake of economic recession in the early 1990s
 - CA voters approved a ballot initiative that attempted to deny benefits, including education, to illegal immigrants (later struck down by courts)
 - State then passed another law in 1998 which put an end to bilingual teaching in state schools
 6. The fact was, that only 11.5% of foreign-born people accounted for the US population
 7. Evidence, nonetheless, still showed that US welcomed and needed immigrants
 8. The good side to it...
 - Immigrants took jobs that Americans didn't want
 - Infusion of young immigrants and their offspring counter-balanced the overwhelming rate of an aging population

VII. Beyond the Melting Pot

1. Thanks to their increasing immigration and high birthrate Latinos were becoming an increasingly important minority
 - By 2003, the US was home to about 39 million of them
 - 26 million Chicanos, Mexican American
 - 3 million Puerto Ricans
 - 1 million Cubans
2. Flexing political powers, Latinos elected mayors of Miami, Denver, and San Antonio
3. After many years of struggle, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), headed by Cesar Chavez, succeeded in making working conditions better for Chicano "stoop laborers" who followed the planting cycle of the American West
4. Latino influence seemed likely to grow
 - Latinos, well organized, became the nation's largest ethnic minority
5. Asian Americans also made great strides.
 - By the 1980s, they were America's fastest-growing minority and their numbers reached about 12 million by 2003.
 - Citizens of Asian ancestry were now counted among the most prosperous
 - In 2003, the average Asian household was 25% better off than that of the average white household
6. Indians, the original Americans, numbered some 2.4 million in 2000 census.
 - Half had left their reservations to live in cities.
 - Unemployment and alcoholism had blighted reservation life
 - Many tribes took advantage of their special legal status of independence by opening up casinos on reservations to the public.
 - However, discrimination and poverty proved hard to break

VIII. Cities and Suburbs

1. Cities grew less safe, crime was the great scourge of urban life.
 - The rate of violent crimes raised to its peak in the drug infested 80s, but then leveled out in the 90s.
 - The number of violent crimes substantially dropped in many areas after 1995
 - None the less, murders, robberies and rapes remained common in cities and rural areas and the suburbs
2. In mid-1990s, a swift and massive transition took place from cities to suburbs, making jobs “suburbanized.”
 - The nation’s brief “urban age” lasted for only a little less than 7 decades and with it, Americans noticed a new form of isolationism
 - Some affluent suburban neighborhoods stayed secluded, by staying locked in “gated communities”
 - By the first decade of the 21st century, big suburban rings around cities like NY, Chicago, Houston, and Washington DC had become more racially and ethnically diverse
3. Suburbs grew faster in the West and Southwest
 - Builders of roads, water mains, and schools could barely keep up with the new towns sprouting up across the landscapes
 - Newcomers came from nearby cities and from across the nation
 - A huge shift of US population was underway from East to West
 - The Great Plains hurt from the 60% decline of all counties
4. However, some cities showed signs of renewal
 - Commercial redevelopment gained ground in cities like...
 - New York
 - Chicago
 - Los Angeles
 - Boston
 - San Francisco

IX. Minority America

1. Racial and ethnic tensions also exacerbated the problems of American Cities
 - This was specifically evident in LA (magnet for minorities)
 - It was a 1992 case wherein a mostly white jury exonerated white cops who had been videotaped ferociously beating a black suspect.
 - The minority neighborhoods of LA erupted in anger
 - Arson and looting laid waste on every block
 - Many people were killed
 - Many blacks vented their anger towards the police/judicial system by attacking Asian shopkeepers
 - In return, Asians set up patrols to protect themselves
 - The chaos still lingers decades later
 - LA riots vividly testified to black skepticism about the US system of justice
 - Three years later, in LA, a televised showing of OJ Simpson’s murder trial fed white disillusionment w/ the state of race relations
 - after months of testimony, it looked like OJ was guilty, but was acquitted due to the fact some white cops had been shown to harbor racist sentiments
 - In a later civil trial, another jury unanimously found Simpson liable for the “wrongful deaths” of his former wife and another victim
 - The Simpson verdicts revealed the huge gap between white and black America (whites = guilty, blacks = 1st verdict stands)
 - Blacks still felt that they were mistreated, especially in 2000 elections when they accused that they weren’t allowed to vote in Florida.
 - Said they were still facing the Jim Crow South of racial indifference
2. US cities have always held an astonishing variety of ethnic/racial groups, but by 20th century, minorities made up the majority, making whites flee to the suburbs
 - In 2002, 52% of blacks and only 21% of whites lived in central cities
3. The most desperate black ghettos were especially problematic
 - Blacks who benefited from the 60s Civil Rights Movement left to the suburbs with whites

- leaving the poorest of the poor in the old ghettos.
- Without a middle class to help the community, the cities became plagued by unemployment and drug addiction
- 4. Single women headed about 43% of black families in 2002, 3 times more than whites
 - Many single, black mothers depended on welfare to feed their kids
- 5. Social Scientists made clear that education excels if the child has warm, home environment
 - It seemed clear that many fatherless, impoverished Black kids seemed plagued by educational handicaps which were difficult to overcome
- 6. Some segments of Black communities did prosper after the Civil Rights Movement (50s, 60s), although they still had a long trek ahead until they got equality
 - by 2002, 33% of black families had a \$50,000 income (= middle class)
 - Blacks also improved in politics
 - Number of black officials elected had risen to the 9,000 mark
 - More than 3 dozen members of congress and mayors of some big cities
 - Voter tallies showed that black votes had risen
- 7. By the early 21st century, blacks had dramatically advanced into higher education
 - In 2002, 17% of Blacks over 25 had bachelor's degree
 - The courts still preserved affirmative action in the university admissions

X. E Pluribus Plures

1. Controversial issues of color and culture also pervaded the realm of ideas in the late 20th
2. Echoing early 20th Century "cultural pluralist" like Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, many people embraced the creed of "multiculturalism"
 - This stressed the need to preserve and primate, rather than squash racial minorities
3. In 1970s and 80s, the catchword of philosophy was ethnic pride.
 - People wanted to still keep their identity and culture (eg Latinos and Asians)
 - The old idea of a "melting pot" turned into a colorful "salad bowl"
4. Nation's classrooms became the heated area for debate
 - Multiculturalists attacked traditional curriculum and advocated a greater focus on achievements of blacks, Latinos, Asians, Indians
 - In defense, critics said that studies on ethnic differences would destroy American values
 - Census Bureau further advocated the debate when in 2000 it allowed respondents to identify themselves w/ more than one of the six categories:
 - black
 - white
 - Latino
 - American Indian
 - Asian
 - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

XI. The Life of the Mind

1. Despite the mind-sapping chatter of the "boob tube," Americans in the early 21st century read more, listened to more music, and were better educated than ever before
 - Colleges awarded some 2.5 million degrees in 2004
 - 1 in 4 25-34 year old age group was a 4 year college graduate
2. This spurt of educated people raised the economy
3. What Americans read said much about the state of US society
 - Some American authors, concerning the west
 - Larry McMurtry the small town West and recollected about the end of the cattle drive era in Lonesome Dove (1985)
 - Raymond Carver wrote powerful stories about the working class in the Pacific Northwest
 - Annie Dillard, Ivan Doig, and Jim Harrison re-created the frontier in the same region as Carver
 - David Guterson wrote a moving tale of interracial anxiety and affection in the WWII era in Pacific Northwest in Snow Falling on Cedars (1994)
 - Wallace Stagner produced many works that transcended their original themes like...

- Angle of Repose (1971)
 - Crossing to Safety (1987)
- Norman MacLean wrote two unforgettable events about his childhood in Montana, *A River Runs Through It* (1976) and *Young Men and Fire* (1992)
- African American Authors
 - August Wilson retold the history of the blacks in 20th century w/ emphasis on the psychic cost of the northward migration
 - George Wolf explored sobering questions of black identity in his *Jelly's Last Jam* (the life story of jazzman "Jelly Roll" Morton)
 - Alice Walker gave fictional voice to the experiences of black women in her hugely popular *The Color Purple*
 - Toni Morrison wrote a bewitching portrait of maternal affection in *Beloved*
 - Edward P. Jones inventively rendered the life of a slave-owning black family in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Known World*.
- Indians got recognition, too
 - N. Scott Momaday won a Pulitzer Prize for his portrayal of Indian life in *House Made of Dawn*
 - James Welch wrote movingly about his Blackfoot ancestors in *Fools Crow*
- Asian American authors flourished as well
 - Among them was playwright David Hwang, novelist Amy Tan, and essayist Maxine Hong Kingston
 - Gish Jen in *Mona in the Promise Land* guided her readers into the poignant comedy of suburban family relationships that wasn't uncommon to 2nd-generation Asian Americans
 - Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, explored the sometimes painful relationship between immigrant Indian parents and their American-born kids
- Latino writers included...
 - Sandra Cisneros drew her own life as a Mexican American kid to evoke Latino life in the working-class Chicago in *The House on Mango Street*

XII. The American Prospect

1. American spirit pulsed with vitality in the early 21st century, but big problems continued
 - Women still fell short of 1st class citizenship
 - US society also wanted to find ways to adapt back to the traditional family, but w/ the new realities of women's work outside the home
 - Full equality was still an elusive dream for some races
 - Powerful foreign competitors threatened the US economic status
 - The alarmingly unequal distribution of wealth and income threatened to turn America into a society of haves and have-nots, mocking the very ideals of democracy
2. Environmental worries clouded the country's future
 - Coal-fired electrical energy plants produced acid rain and helped greenhouse effect
 - Unsolved problem of radioactive waste disposal stopped the making of nuclear power plants
 - The planet was being drained of oil and oil spills showed the danger behind oil exploration/transportation
3. The public looks towards alternative fuel sources in the 21st Century:
 - Solar power and wind mills
 - methane fuel
 - electric "hybrid" cars
 - the pursuit of an affordable hydrogen fuel cell
 - Energy conservation remained another crucial, but elusive strategy
4. The task of cleansing the earth of abundant pollutants was one urgent mission confronting the US people
5. Another was seeking ways to resolve ethnic and cultural conflicts once erupted around the world's end of the Cold War
6. All at the same time more doors were opening for the US people
 - opportunities in outer space and inner-city streets
 - artist's easel and the musician's concert hall

- at the inventor's bench and the scientist's laboratory
- The unending quest for social justice, individual fulfillment, international peace

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