

### **The History of the 2000s**

George Walker Bush, son of George H. Walker Bush (41<sup>st</sup> President) was elected in 2001 and became the U.S.s 43<sup>rd</sup> President. The greatest challenge of Bush's first year in office came on the heels of a massive terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, in which hijacked commercial airliners were employed as suicide bombs.

Two of the four hijacked planes leveled the twin towers of the World Trade Center and collapsed or damaged many of the surrounding buildings in New York City, another destroyed a large section of the Pentagon outside Washington D. C. and still another crashed in the southern Pennsylvania countryside.

Some 3,000 people were killed in this, the worst act of terrorism in U.S. history. Bush responded with a call for a global war on terrorism. Identifying exiled Saudi millionaire and terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden as the primary suspect in the acts, Bush built an international coalition against bin Laden (who later claimed responsibility for the attacks) and his network, al-Qaeda ("the Base"), and the Taliban government of Afghanistan, which had harboured bin Laden and his followers.

By mid-decade, after a brief economic downturn at the beginning of the decade, the economy showed strong signs of revival, based partly on the continuing upsurge of the housing market. The president's personal popularity and that of his party began to wane as it was beset with a series of ethics-related scandals.

Even more damaging to Bush's standing with many Americans was what was widely seen as the federal government's failure to deal promptly and effectively with the fallout from Hurricane Katrina, which devastated parts of Alabama, Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana; especially New Orleans, in late August 2005.

The election to succeed Bush in 2008, was between Sen. John McCain of Arizona, the Republican candidate, and Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, who had triumphed over the favourite, Senator Hillary Clinton of New York, in a long primary battle to win the Democratic nomination. At the height of the contest, the U.S. economy was thrown into turmoil by a financial crisis.

From September 19 to October 10, 2008, the Dow Jones Average dropped 26 percent. At the same time, there was a severe contraction of liquidity in credit markets worldwide, caused in part by a debacle related to subprime mortgages. While the housing market boomed, individuals lacking the credit ratings necessary for conventional mortgages had been able to obtain subprime mortgages, most of which

were adjustable-rate mortgages, (at low, so-called teaser, interest rates that ballooned after a few years.

The interest rates for many of those ARMs, sharply increased at the same time that overbuilding undercut the housing market; housing foreclosures mounted, and the investment banks that under recent deregulation had been allowed to overleverage their assets foundered, resulting in the bankruptcy or sale of several major financial institutions.

President Obama entered office in 2009 and put an end to the financial crisis by launching an economic stimulus package that cut taxes, extended unemployment benefits and funded public works projects. He also introduced the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that pumped \$179 billion into the American Economy. Despite this, protestors gathered in New York in 2011 to demand even more money and more measures to end wage inequality. They called themselves "Occupy Wall Street".

In 2010 Obama introduced the Affordable Care Act (which Biden has just re-introduced as Trump repealed it, without offering a replacement plan in his entire 4 years in office). This revolutionized healthcare, in part by creating a program that offered insurance to people with pre-existing conditions, who had previously been shut out of the insurance system. By 2014, the economy benefitted from having 88% of the population covered by some sort of health insurance.

In the November 6, 2012 election, Obama captured a second term, narrowly winning the national popular vote and triumphing in the Electoral College by holding off Republican Mitt Romney's challenge in nearly all the "battleground" states. The Republicans and Democrats held on to their majorities in the House and Senate, respectively.

At the beginning and, sadly, throughout President Obama's second term, gun violence was at the centre of the national conversation after 20 children and 6 adults were killed in a mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut on December 14, 2012. (The shooter also killed himself and his mother that day.)

Obama echoed the widespread public concern by asking Congress to enact new gun-control legislation that would mandate universal background checks for gun purchases, eliminate the sales of assault weapons and magazines containing more than 10 rounds of ammunition, provide for enhanced protection in schools, and put renewed focus on the treatment of mental illness. As Obama sought to marshal support for such legislation, the National Rifle Association and other gun-rights advocates actively fought

the legislation...and won. (President Biden has just enacted another gun-control piece of legislation...which will likely have the same fate.)

In the summer of 2014, accounts of unarmed African Americans who had died in the process of arrest by police began to fill the media. In July 2014 a man, Eric Garner, in New York City died as a result of a choke hold applied by an arresting officer. In August, protest demonstrations escalated into civil violence in Ferguson, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, after a policeman shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager, during Brown's arrest for robbery of a pack of cigarillos from a convenience store.

Protests against those actions and against court decisions not to indict the involved officers, continued into 2015, and in April of that year rioting erupted in Baltimore, Maryland, on the day of the funeral of Freddie Gray, a Black man who died a week after incurring a severe spinal-cord injury while in police custody.

Then, in June, the country was shocked when nine African Americans were shot and killed, allegedly by a young white man in a hate crime, in a historic Black church in Charleston, South Carolina. The apparently white supremacist motivations of the accused killer sparked a discussion of the display of the Confederate flag on the grounds of the capitol of South Carolina and its perception by many as a symbol of oppression and racial subjugation. In July 2015, the South Carolina government legislated the flag's removal.

Meanwhile, the epidemic of gun violence in the United States persisted. Mass shootings at a community college in Oregon in October 2015 and a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado in November were followed by another in early December at a social services centre in San Bernardino, California, in which a husband and wife with militant Islamist sympathies, killed 14 people and injured 22.

On June 12, 2016, the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history, to this point, occurred at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. Forty-nine people were killed and 50 others wounded in the attack by a lone gunman.

In July 2016, more police shootings and the shooting of police officers took the Orlando event's place in the headlines. On the evening of July 7, a sniper shot and killed four police officers and a rapid transit officer and wounded several others in downtown Dallas at the close of a peaceful protest against the shootings earlier in the week of African American men by police in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and suburban Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Before being killed by a robot-detonated explosive, the shooter told negotiators that he was upset by recent police shootings. Later in July three law-enforcement officers were shot and killed and three more wounded in Baton Rouge in another retaliatory incident.

In the midst of this was the 2016 presidential general election campaign, which was among the most rancorous in recent history, with democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, accusing Republican Donald Trump of being devoid of the temperament and judgment required to serve as president, while Trump argued that Clinton lacked the “stamina” necessary for the office and that she should be jailed for what he claimed was criminal use of her private e-mail server while secretary of state. Together they were among the most unpopular major-party presidential candidates in U.S. history.

In his inaugural address on January 20, 2017, Trump echoed the populist criticism of the Washington establishment that had been a hallmark of his campaign and struck a strongly nationalist “America First” tone, promising that “America will start winning again, winning like never before.”

The day after Trump’s inauguration, “Women’s Marches” and supporting events were held in cities across the United States and abroad, in support of (among other issues) gender and racial equality and in defiance of the legislative and cultural challenges to them that the marchers expected from President Trump and a Republican congressional majority. Estimates varied, but many observers suggested that between 3.3 million and 4.6 million people had turned out to march in U.S. cities, making the action one of the largest mass protests in U.S. history.

Having appropriated the term “fake news” to insult mainstream media coverage of events that were unfavourable to his administration, he sought to go around the press and shape the country’s political narrative directly via social media; especially Twitter.

In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey, the most forceful storm to make landfall in the United States in more than a decade, inundated the Houston area. Already challenged by the events in Houston, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) responded to another natural disaster when Puerto Rico was hammered by Hurricane Maria, a nearly category 5 cyclone, in September.

That storm caused more than \$90 billion in property damage and left some 400,000 of the island’s electricity customers without power for nearly five months. Puerto Rico’s Department of Public Safety’s initial official death toll from the storm was 64 lives, but some later estimates put the figure in the thousands, and in August 2018 the Puerto Rican government upped the official estimate to nearly 3,000 deaths. In

response, Donald Trump threw paper towels into a crowd, at times even denying Puerto Rico was even part of the U.S. and thus ineligible for relief.

Mass shootings continued to afflict the country. In October 2017 in Las Vegas, 58 people were killed and hundreds more were wounded when a man used as many as 23 guns to rain fire on the audience of a country music festival from the window of a 32nd-floor hotel room. Sadly, this became the biggest mass shooting in the U.S. (to date 😞).

Four short months later, in February 2018, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, 14 students and three staff members were killed when a former student, who had been expelled for disciplinary reasons, went on a rampage. Some of the students who survived the shooting became outspoken advocates for tighter gun-control laws and played prominent roles in the March for Our Lives protest that drew hundreds of thousands of demonstrators to Washington, D.C. on March 24, 2018, as well as to some 800 other gun-control rallies across the country and around the globe. Nonetheless, fewer than two months later, on May 18 in Sante Fe, Texas, another 10 people were killed in yet another shooting at a high school.

A different kind of social movement began shaking American society in October 2017, after it was revealed that film mogul Harvey Weinstein had for years with impunity, sexually harassed and assaulted numerous women in the industry. After one of his victims, actress Alyssa Milano, made her story known, a multitude of others who had also been victims of sexual harassment or assault began sharing their experiences on social media.

The resulting movement, which took its name from the social media hashtag used to post the stories, #MeToo, grew over the coming months to bring condemnation to dozens of powerful men in politics, business, entertainment, and the news media.

As Trump continued his bumpy ride through his Presidency he was accused of using excessive force during a telephone call with Ukrainian President Zelensky, asking him to find dirt on his likely opponent in the upcoming 2020 election, Joe Biden. After releasing a "rough transcript" of the phone conversation, Trump repeatedly claimed that the meeting had been "perfect" and denied that a quid pro quo had been involved.

In late 2019, as Trump's Ukraine scandal was escalating towards his first impeachment trial, events were unfolding in China that would turn life upside down in the United States and much of the world for many months to come. From its origin in the city of Wuhan, the virus that soon would be identified as the coronavirus began spreading rapidly.

Although the Trump administration imposed a ban on travel from China at the end of January 2020, it was slower to impose restrictions on travel from Europe, where the first country to suffer the devastating effects of the virus was Italy, which began a national lockdown on March 9. On March 11 the WHO declared COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, to be global pandemic.

The response of the Trump administration to the virus was widely criticized as slow, unfocused, and inconsistent. Although it issued suggested guidelines for the phased lockdown and opening up of local economies, the Trump administration left much of the decision-making and responsibility for dealing with the crisis to the state governments. Even after declaring a national emergency on March 13, Trump himself repeatedly downplayed the seriousness of the virus and potential longevity of the contagion, while he advocated for locked-down businesses and schools to soon reopen.

In May the “new normal” way of American life brought about by the pandemic was itself transformed by a prolonged period of nationwide street protests of racial injustice and police brutality against African Americans. The demonstrations came in response to the killing of George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black man, while he was in the custody of Minneapolis, Minnesota, police. The disturbing event was captured in a bystander video that went viral, graphically showing Floyd gradually expiring as a policeman knelt on his neck for some nine minutes even as Floyd pleaded, “I can’t breathe.” (The trial is now underway and the heartbreaking video re-shown with alarming regularity.)

Floyd’s murder unleashed a storm of protest across the country and throughout the world that was a result of indignation at the continuing epidemic of police violence against African Americans and that built upon the Black Lives Matter movement. For many weeks millions of Americans demanded police reform and equity in demonstrations in large cities and small towns that were mostly peaceful.

The campaign for the 2020 presidential election also was profoundly altered by the realities of the COVID pandemic. Trump faced some token opposition for the Republican nomination, but there was never any doubt that he would be the party’s candidate. On the Democratic side, the crowded field of potential nominees, with Joe Biden becoming the eventual winner of the nomination.

In early October Trump contracted Covid-19 and was forced to quarantine for some 10 days, spending three days in Walter Reed hospital, where was treated with therapeutics not yet generally available to the public. When he returned to the campaign trail, Trump boasted about his recovery, downplaying the severity of the disease and



falsely claiming that the country was turning the corner on the pandemic when in fact it had entered a new phase of spiking cases and deaths nationwide.

More than 100 million Americans voted early in the 2020 election, either by mail or in person, and in all a record total of more than 170 million cast their ballots. With the approach of January 6, the date of the joint session of Congress at which the Electoral College totals were to be ceremonially reported, scores of Republican members of the House of Representatives and about a dozen Republican senators made known their intention to challenge the Electoral College slates of several states that Trump had lost.

In the meantime, Trump supporters—including right-wing extremist groups such as the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, and the Three Percenters—responded to the president's plea that they come to Washington to participate in a "Save America March." On January 6, hundreds surrounded the Capitol. Thousands more attended a rally near the White House, at which Trump repeated his false claims regarding the election, maintaining his false claim that the election was rigged and that he had won. He exhorted his followers to "fight much harder" against "bad people" and dispatched them to the Capitol, saying

*"We're going to walk down to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and congressmen and women, and we're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them, because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong!" (Trump January 6, 2021)*

En masse the demonstrators then joined those already swarming the Capitol, becoming a violent insurrectionist mob that overwhelmed the underprepared Capitol Police. The insurrectionists stormed the Capitol, disrupted the joint session of Congress—sending lawmakers fleeing for safety—chased and battered police, and roamed and defiled the symbolic home of American democracy

Identifying Trump's provocation of the mob as "inciting violence against the Government of the United States," on January 13 the House of Representatives impeached the lame duck president, with all of the Democrats joined by 10 Republicans voting to make Trump the first president in U.S. history to be impeached twice. On February 13 all Senate Democrats and seven Republicans voted to convict Trump, but the 57–43 vote came up short of the two-thirds majority necessary for conviction.

Joe Biden took office on January 20, 2021 determined to unite the divided country and to "manage the hell out of" the federal response to the pandemic, which had claimed nearly 400,000 American lives just before he assumed the presidency.