

# America's most significant events



America's Most Significant Events Jennifer Blaxon 135 9/25/2011 Gary Grimm

America's Most Significant Events Introduction This paper will address each important event of a decade, starting from the 1950's throughout the 1990's. These are the events I feel were most significant to America at that time, and also helped to shape the America we live in today. Understanding each event and its purpose will lead to having a better view of this nation, and how it came to be. 950's Post World War II Prosperity After World War II ended, many expected the times of The Great Depression to return. Surprisingly the United States economy experienced a boom because of consumer demand. President Dwight Eisenhower encouraged Americans to take advantage of the country's new found wealth. Television became more popular with families along with the desire to own homes in suburbia and higher education. The American people became interested in new gadgets, electronics, and the most significant purchases of that time, homes and cars.

These purchases fueled the economy even more, and led to new opportunities for careers and wealth. The Americans relished in this new lifestyle. It became known as the " American Dream. " (The Post War Economy, n. d. ) The introduction of wealth to the American people brought on the desire to have children which is what led to what we know today as the Baby Boom. It was given that name because of the increased number of births throughout this time, and contributed to fueling the economy with more consumer demand. (United States Department of Labor, n. . ) While most Americans enjoyed the new-found wealth from their country, there were still some who did not reap the benefits of a wealthy nation due to their cultural differences. 1960's The Civil Rights Movement Even though

Americans found freedom financially due to the economic boom of the 1950's, there were still some Americans who felt as though they were not treated equally, nor had the ability to gain the success of the American Dream due to the government, particularly African Americans.

Although all minorities felt this way, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's was strongly dominated by Blacks. The election of 1960 put John F. Kennedy into office, a well-known liberal, and African Americans finally felt as though they had someone on their side to help change the laws of segregation and to be treated as equals. This fueled the movement more so. He appointed a large number of African Americans in administration to strengthen the civil rights movement.

Kennedy defined the civil rights crisis as, " Moral, as well as constitutional and legal. " (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, n. d. ) While he had great intentions on creating a more liberal and equal America, his intentions were cut short due to his assassination on November 22, 1963. Prior to his death he proposed a new bill to congress now known as The Civil Rights Act of 1964. This bill was put into law after his death with help from the newly elected President Lyndon B. Johnson and Martin Luther King Jr.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 states," The law's provisions created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to address race and sex discrimination in employment and a Community Relations Service to help local communities solve racial disputes; authorized federal intervention to ensure the desegregation of schools, parks, swimming pools, and other public facilities; and restricted the use of literacy tests as a requirement for voter registration. " (The Civil Rights Act of 1964, n. d. ) Even after this bill was put

into law, African Americans still felt as though they were not treated equally and continued to fight for racial equality.

This was done through marches and petitions. With the fight for equality from African Americans, and the Vietnam War that people found to be senseless, this led into a rebellious period, particularly from the Baby Boomer generation. They fought against racism and sexism, and challenged abortion, and gay rights. They started to question the antics of the government and wondered if America really existed by the standard of "liberty and justice for all." Then a few short years later there would be a political scandal that would rock the nation, and forever change the way the public views the American government for good.

1970's The Watergate Scandal

The Watergate Scandal is known as a series of political scandals that happened between 1972 and 1974. During this time, President Richard Nixon was serving his second term in office and was responsible for the end of the Vietnam War. On June 17th, 1972 the offices of the Democratic Party National committee was burglarized. The media became heavily involved with finding answers, particularly the work of two reporters from the Washington Post, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, along with their mysterious informant, Mark Felt, known under the alias of Deep Throat at the time. (Watergate Info, 2009) This influenced a political investigation which ultimately found President Nixon and more than 70 people, including cabinet members and White House assistants being involved in this complex web of crimes. This led to the resignation of the President, and the concerns the American people had about government became even more relevant now that there was proof that America was and could be subjected to corruption by its

leaders. (Watergate Revisited, 2004) This event forever changed the way we view and trust our government, and also influenced investigative reporting from the media.

Had it not been for the diligence of the media, this event could be something America would have never known. Watergate encouraged the type of investigative reporting we know today. President Nixon was succeeded by Gerald Ford, and then later Jimmy Carter. During this time the boom the economy experienced during the post-war era started to dwindle away, causing Americans to worry about the future of the next decade. Then on January 20, 1981, President Ronald Reagan took office and bowed to change the face of America's struggling economy. 980's The Reagan Era/ Decade of Corporate Greed While the newly elected President promised to make America's economy thrive again, some argue the promise only was for the benefit of conservative Americans. He did exactly what he said he would do for the economy make it thrive again by curbing inflation, increasing employment, and strengthening national defense. (The White House, 2011) Many wealthy Americans reaped the benefits of Reagans politics referred to as Reaganomics.

However many people felt as though his political tactics took money from the middle-class and poor, and transferred it to the wealthy, hence the title Decade of Corporate Greed. On the other side of the spectrum, middle-class and poor Americans found themselves experiencing drastically high numbers of unemployment, inflation and homelessness. This is why many argue about Reaganomics and how beneficial it was. Some say the President's approach

to stimulating the economy was genius, while others say it was a greedy plan to make the rich, richer.

Regardless of the argument, President Reagan was re-elected for another term making him the primary president of the 1980's. Many years after he left office, the wealthy still reaped the benefits of President Reagan's conservative approach. (American Experience, n. d. ) However after serving two terms, eight years in office, it was time for him to step down. No matter how people feel about President Reagan's antics, we can note the 1980's led to the fall of communism and the end of the Cold war that plagued America for decades.

Although the fall of communism was a monumental time in history for America, civil wars amongst other countries threatened to be more chaotic and unpredictable. President George Bush was more focused on the war between Iraq and Iran, feeling as though America's oil supply could be affected due to the ruthless antics of Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein. This led to the Gulf War, which America won, but Americans started to wonder, why is there more focus on foreign affairs than domestic? This was the beginning of the end to the conservative approach. 990's The Democrats Return to the White House Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's while Ronald Reagan and later, George Bush was president, there were huge budget deficits that neither president had a solution to. The wealthy became worried their riches were in jeopardy, and the middle-class and poor were still suffering from the conservative approach. Finally all Americans could agree it was time for a change. This marked the end of the Republicans 12 year run in the White House. Elected in 1992, was William J. Clinton a Democrat from Arkansas,

who dominated the presidency throughout the 1990's being elected two terms.

President Clinton's approach was quite possibly the best from any president mentioned in this paper, his presidency led to the lowest unemployment rate in modern times, the lowest inflation in 30 years, the highest home ownership in the country's history, dropping crime rates in many places, and reduced welfare rolls. He proposed the first balanced budget in decades and achieved a budget surplus. (Clinton Presidential Center, n. d. ) Unlike his predecessors, President Clinton was focused of domestic affairs versus foreign which I think was why Americans benefited so well from his presidency.

Although the president was no stranger to personal scandals, one scandal in particular led him to be impeached, I think we could all agree his presidential antics is what kept him in office. (Bill Clinton Biography, 2011) Conclusion All of the events I mentioned I feel were the most significant, and led to some of the changes we see today in society and politics, and quite possibly the future of America. I anticipate within the next ten years that America will be able to see economic times such as those of the 1950's during the Eisenhower administration and the 1990's during the Clinton administration.

Also I believe the division amongst different cultures and races will be less, hoping that we are able to stand together as Americans to fight for the prosperity and equality of our country, as we did in the 1960's. The events mentioned above are what made our country great, sometimes it was better for some than others, however I can say that everyone has seen a benefit in being an American citizen, and it is my hope that one day we can truly abide

under the Pledge of Allegiance, particularly the last statement, " With liberty, and justice for all. " References American Experience. n. d. ). The Presidents. Retrieved from [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/video/reagan\\_12.html#v140](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/video/reagan_12.html#v140) American Journalism Review. (2004, August). Watergate Revisted. Retrieved from <http://www.ajr.org> Watergate Info. (2009). Watergate Info. Retrieved from <http://watergate.info/> Bio True Story. (2011). Bill Clinton Biography. Retrieved from <http://www.biography.com/articles/bill-clinton-9251236> Clinton Presidential Center. (n. d. ). Clinton Presidential Center. Retrieved from <http://clintonpresidentialcenter.org> John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. n. d. ). The Civil Rights Movement. Retrieved from <http://jfklibrary.org> The Civil Rights Act of 1964. (n. d. ). Martin Luther King Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle. Retrieved from <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu> The Post War Economy. (n. d. ). The Post War Economy. Retrieved from [http://economics.about.com/od/useconomichistory/a/post\\_war.htm](http://economics.about.com/od/useconomichistory/a/post_war.htm) The White House. (2011). Ronald Reagan. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/ronaldreagan> United States Department of Labor. (n. d. ). Compensation from World War II. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov>