

United states after civil war



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The 1960s are often looked at as a time of great change in American culture. Many issues were at play, Consumer advocacy, environmental reform, organic foods, the sexual revolution, personal growth groups, feminism, gay rights, the antiwar crusade, and dozens of other issues clamored urgently for attention (Cobbs, 378). While many persons were looking to make changes in their own lives, inspiration from leaders inspired many to work to improve the lives of large groups of people.

President Kennedy called for Americans to help others. He said, Ask not what your country can do for you ask what you can do for your country (Cobbs, 378).

Other leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy and Malcom X sought social changes so that the lives of many downtrodden people could be improved. Gay rights became a new hot topic. From out of the closet, their voices were being heard, We have pretended everything is OK, because we havent been able to see how to change it weve been afraid (Cobbs, 390). Now they were making headlines. The individual pursuit of fulfillment and happiness also occurred alongside social reform. Particularly in California, the Human Potential Movement asked Americans not what they could do for their country, but what they should do for themselves (Cobbs, 378). Both social responsibility and pursuit of individual happiness were occurring simultaneously in the 1960s. Demonstrations against racial bias, the Vietnam War, feminism, gay rights and other causes saw substantial support as thousands turned out in protest or support.

When President Johnson entered his presidency, American presence in South Vietnam had been long established by administrations preceding his. He was faced with a choice of either finding a way out of the South Vietnam conflict or to escalate the U. S. presence there in the hopes of victory and independence for South Vietnam. Many believe that Johnson could have chosen either path, he had the opportunity to make a choice, it seems undeniable that Johnson, fated to be president when the key Vietnam decisions had to be made, could have chosen differently. He could have avoided this war... (Cobbs, 403). In addition to stopping the domino effect of communism, some persons in the foreign service thought that the U. S. could improve Vietnam Or, as LBJ put it, I want to leave the footprints of America in Vietnam... (Cobbs, 405).

President Johnson had other reasons to escalate the conflict in Vietnam that may have been more compelling. Johnson worried about the harm that failure in Vietnam could do to his domestic agenda; even more, he feared the personal humiliation he imagined would inevitably accompany a defeat (and for him, a negotiated withdrawal constituted defeat) (Cobbs, 405).

Advisers closest to him also had their own reasons to support the war, Top aides, meanwhile, feared for their reputations and careers should they abandon their previous support for a staunch commitment to South Vietnams survival (Cobbs, 405). Johnsons approach was to quietly intensify the war efforts without involving Congress or the American people.

[Nevertheless, Johnson] ... opted, as George C. Herring has put it, to wage war in cold blood. There would be no national debate on Vietnam, no call- up of the reserves, no declared state of emergency. The United States would go

to war on the sly (Cobbs, 404). And Johnson did escalate the war, sending more troops and equipment to the region with the loss of tens of thousands of American lives, unfortunately he was not deterred, it was a war that he had committed to and he felt that he would be viewed as a failing leader if he accepted any outcome other than victory.

In the 1970s and into the 1980s, Americans went from trusting the government and embracing liberal reform to distrust of the government and a renewed interest in conservatism, the New Right. The liberalism that began with the New Deal ended following the Cold War. In modern America, liberalism was a consequence of the Cold War, a side effect of the national security state. The Cold War was now dead and buried, and Americans had reverted to their historic skepticism of big government.... (Cobbs, 432). The tragedies of the Vietnam War and the lies by President Richard Nixon furthered their distrust of big government. Americans who discovered that their leaders had been tragically wrong about Vietnam began to wonder whether those same leaders could have been right about anything (Cobbs, 425). With distrust of the government by Americans also came a disliking of the government and the bigger the government, the worse it was. Spending on New Deal programs such as Social Security for dependents had increased government spending on welfare programs and had now become a target of the New Right. Nearly everyone Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives shook their heads at the runaway deficits. Democrats blamed Republicans for bloating defense and coddling capital; Republicans blamed Democrats for winking at wasteful social programs (Cobbs, 430).

Each side blamed the other for the deficit but the American instinct was that it was big government that was to blame and so the conservatives appeared to be in the right. Ironically, while speaking against big government, Reagan greatly increased the spending on the military. Between 1981 and 1985, American spending on defense leaped a third, from \$179 billion in fiscal 1981 to \$229 billion in 1985 (in constant 1982 dollars) (Cobbs, 430). At the same time, Reagan helped pass tax cuts, particularly for those in the highest tax brackets. This resulted in the need to borrow money to pay for government expenditures. Even while the Reaganites ridiculed Keynesianism as liberal looniness, they practiced the Keynesian formula of deficit spending (Cobbs, 430). In a relatively short time, liberal reform died when distrust of the government began following the end of the Cold War a New Right developed, bringing in a conservative movement to reduce the size of government and usher in President Ronald Reagan. Reagans massive build-up of the military and tax reforms led to an ever larger government budget with a resultant deficit spending. Americans however, continued to support the New Right as their ire against the government ruled above all else.

When Ronald Reagan was elected president, conservatives rejoiced. The so-called Reagan Revolution heartened conservatives who had railed against big government for several generations (Cobbs, 408). While campaigning, Reagan complained repeatedly about the government being too large and wasteful. Yet there was a curious discontinuity in Reagans message. The country was as great as ever, he said, but its government was awful.

Government is not the solution to our problem he stated in his first inaugural. Government is the problem (Cobbs, 427). Americans, with their

distrust of the government, embraced his message. The conservatives were willing to accept Reagans massive spending on defense and the resulting deficits, in exchange for tax cuts and anti-government rhetoric. They preferred to blame the deficits on liberal reform expenditures, too many New Deal reforms, including Social Security and Aid to Families with Dependent Children (welfare) (Cobbs, 408). Republicans blamed Democrats for winking at wasteful social programs (Cobbs, 430). The conservatives had wanted a smaller government for a long time and were finally hearing their president repeatedly share their views.

Many Americans, resentful of government actions, came to believe that the government was too large, too generous and taking too much of their money in taxes. President Reagans deficit spending could easily be blamed on his inherited big government and its welfare state but it was also his own doing, due to tax cuts and exorbitant military budgets.