**Guided Notes: Vietnam and Modern America**

**Vietnamese History - How the United States became involved:**

Throughout the twentieth century, the **fear of communism** heavily impacted foreign policy decisions. With the civil rights movement dominating domestic policy, anti-communist actions dominated foreign policy. Beginning in 1954, the U. S. began helping non-communist government of **South Vietnam** in their fight to resist being taken over by communist North Vietnam. North Vietnam had spent many decades fighting foreign rule. From the late 1800’s until WWII, **Vietnam**, along with **Laos and Cambodia**, were ruled by **France**. The three nations used to be part of a colony called **French Indochina**. The French became quite wealthy exporting rice and rubber from Vietnam, but the Vietnamese people remained exceedingly poor. The Vietnamese spent many years trying to break free of French rule. In 1930, **Ho chi Minh** formed the **Indochinese Communist Party**. They organized protests the French government. The French responded by arresting suspected communists and executing ICP party leaders. In 1940, during WWII, the Japanese took over Indochina. Ho Chi Minh returned to Vietnam. ICP leaders and other communist groups joined together to form the **Viet Minh. Their goal was to rid Vietnam of foreign rule.** Since Japan was an enemy of the United States **during WWII, we helped the Viet Minh** fight the Japanese. Once Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam’s independence. France tried to re-establish control of Vietnam. By 1946, with no peaceful solution found, The Viet Minh and the French go to war.

With WWII settled, the United States shifted focus towards the Soviets, and the impending Cold War. President **Truman** followed the policy of **containment:** working to prevent the spread of communism in Western Europe. In late **1949, China fell to communism**. This caused the United States to expand their containment policy to include Asia. We joined forces with the French. They would need our assistance in stopping the communist Viet Minh. (Remember, just a few years back, we were supporting the Viet Minh in their quest to break free from Japanese rule) In addition, we would need their support in standing up to the communist Soviet Union.

In 1950, we entered the conflict when President Truman offered **$15 million in military aid** to the French. Eisenhower continued this aid when he was elected. When explaining the expenditure to the American people, **Eisenhower used the domino theory**. This theory holds that if one country falls to communism, that those surrounding set country would also fall, like a set of dominos. Our efforts were to ensure that not only Vietnam, but all of Southeast Asia remained free of communist rule.

Despite $3 Billion in aid from the U.S., the French were unable to defeat the Viet Minh. In **May of 1954**, peace talks took place in Geneva, Switzerland. The agreement reached was called the **Geneva Accords**. It divided Vietnam into **North and South p**ortions along the **17th parallel**, with a DMZ (demilitarized zone) surrounding the dividing line. (Much like North and South Korea.) The truce was temporary. In 1956, **elections** were supposed to determine Vietnam’s **system of governance**. In the mean time, both the North and South developed their own systems of government. **Ho chi Minh** led the **communist North**. **Ngo Dinh Diem** became the leader of the **south.** Since Ngo Dinh Diem **was an unpopular leader**, he **refused to allow elections** in 1956. The United States backed this decision to ensure that communism didn’t spread to the whole of Vietnam. Despite increasing aid to South Vietnam, **Diem was unable to establish a democratic government.** As **his corrupt officials attempted to cling to power**, the dissatisfied **South Vietnamese communists and non-communists** joined together and **formed the Viet Cong**. Their goal was to overthrow the Diem government and **reunite Vietnam under communist rule**. **North Vietnam** supported the **Viet Cong** and sent them **military supplies** along a network of paths called the **Ho Chi Minh Trail**, which traversed not only Vietnam, but Laos and Cambodia.

By 1963, the United States had lost faith in Diem. They had increased aid and even sent 16,000 troops. American **officials told Diem to make political, social, economic, and military reforms** to his government, but **he continually refused**. Eventually U.S. officials shifted their support to towards **a military coup, which overthrew Diem on November 1, 1963**. Against U.S. wishes, the **coup leaders killed Diem**.

**Fear of Communism Shapes Foreign Policy:**

Vietnam wasn’t the only hot spot where we were concerned about the spread of red. **Cuba** was also a communist country, and being only **90 miles from the U.S.** their proximity made their political choices all the more concerning. Hoping to take out Cuba’s communist leader **Fidel Castro**, **Kennedy ordered the Bay of Pigs Invasion**. In order to execute this mission, we took **Cuban exiles** to South America, provided them with **military training** and direction, and then had them invade Cuba in April 1961. **Exiles were quickly captured** by the Cuban government and it was an embarrassment for the United States.

There were also tensions in **Germany.** Many in communist East Berlin were fleeing in favor of non-communist West Berlin. This upset the Soviet Union, and they threatened to close western access to Berlin. Kennedy insisted on West Berlin’s independence. In **August of 1961, The Soviet Union and East Germany built the Berlin Wall, a heavily guarded barrier dividing East and West Berlin**. Since the wall made it harder for those fleeing communism to escape, it quickly **became a symbol of communist oppression**.

In 1962, there was another incident in Cuba. **Fidel Castro** and Soviet leader **Nikita Khrushchev** believe the United States was planning another attack similar to the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In preparation for this supposed attack, the **Soviets placed missiles on Cuba** that were well **within reach of causing destruction to U.S. Cities**. Through tense negotiations, the missiles were removed, we promised to not invade Cuba, and there were no shots fired. This was by far the most serious conflict Kennedy faced with the Soviets.

**Vietnam War Expands:**

The assassination of President Diem brought chaos to **South Vietnam. Several ineffective, corrupt** **leaders** tried to head the government. By 1964, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) controlled much of South Vietnam. Since the South was clearly unable to avoid a communist takeover on their own, **Lyndon Johnson** wanted to begin **bombing North Vietnam,** hoping to discourage Ho Chi Minh from supporting the Viet Cong. After the destroyer U.S.S. Maddox was fired on off the coast of North Vietnam, Congress passed the **Gulf of Tonkin Resolution**. This **allowed President Johnson to use military force in Vietnam**. In March 1965, Johnson began sustained bombing of North Vietnam. He also sent the first combat troops. The policy of escalation continued as general **William Westmoreland**, the commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, continually asked for **more boots on the ground**. By the end of 1968, there were more than **536,000** troops in Vietnam.

Many Americans thought that with their **superior weaponry**, they would defeat the Viet Cong very quickly. The Viet Cong could not match American firepower, so it resorted to **guerilla warfare, or surprise attacks by small bands of fighters**. Viet Cong would often emerge suddenly from **underground tunnels** to fight, then retreat back as quick as they came. They would set **booby traps throughout the jungle**, and **hide land mines** and grenades. When the United States first started sending ground troops, **we attempted to use traditional methods of fighting**. Guerilla tactics made the Viet Cong an elusive enemy. In addition**, we could only wage a limited war**, as the United States want to prevent **China** from becoming involved in the conflict.

In reality, the **United States had several disadvantages** in this conflict. Most soldiers were **young and inexperienced**. The average soldier was 19, and **tours of duty were only a year**. By the time they developed enough experience to be successful; it was time for them to leave. Another challenge for Americans was that the **Viet Cong mixed in with the general population and operated everywhere.** It was very hard to determine who was an enemy and who was a friend. Even the climate posed a challenge to American soldiers. **Triple digit temperatures and rain** were the norm. After wading through rice paddies, soldiers often had to pick leeches off of their legs and feet.

One of the strengths of the **Viet Cong** was their **knowledge of the land**, and therefore their ability to hide out. As previously stated, they relied on a network of **underground tunnels and bases hidden by foliage**. In addition, the VC were highly dedicated. They continually replenished troops and were willing to die for their cause. They saw the **Americans as invaders**, and set their sights on winning this **war of attrition.**

**American Strategies for Fighting in Vietnam:**

**To reveal and destroy Viet Cong hideouts American troops used chemicals that destroyed the landscape**. Over wide areas, U. S. Planes dropped bombs of **Napalm, jellied gasoline** that burns violently. Planes also sprayed **Agent Orange**, a chemical that kills plants, over the jungles. While these chemicals successfully **destroyed VC hideouts** and food supplies, **it also harmed the Vietnamese villagers**. In addition, many American soldiers who were exposed to agent orange later suffered from skin diseases and cancers.

In addition, Americans often used search and destroy missions as a means of seeking out Viet Cong. **They would bomb villages** that were thought to be **sheltering Viet Cong soldiers**. This tactic caused more harm than good. **Bombing villages doesn’t win the hearts and minds of the people,** and even if the VC were in the village that was destroyed, the fix was only temporary and they returned later.

**Tet Offensive:**

**Tet celebrates the Vietnamese lunar New Year.** In 1968, during the Tet holiday, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army launched a **surprise attack** on American forces. This **highly coordinated** attack encompassed more than **100 cities** in South Vietnam. They were able to sneak in by dressing in civilian clothing and **smuggling weapons in supply trucks that were bringing flowers and floats for the Tet Holiday parades.** During the attack, the communist forces **killed soldiers, government leaders, schoolteachers, and priests** in an attempt to take over South Vietnamese cities. This was a large **defeat** for the communist forces, as they **lost 45,000 men, and took over no cities**. The Tet Offensive caused a great deal of **doubt among Americans**. General Westmoreland had just indicated that **victory was in sight**, and such an attack clearly disproves that statement. A **credibility gap** developed between what military and political leaders were saying about Vietnam, and what was actually happening. Many Americans also began to **question our motives** for fighting in Vietnam.

**The Antiwar Movement:**

Opposition to the war came about for several reasons. Many felt we should not be involved in **another country’s civil war**. Still others felt the methods we were using to fight were **immoral**. Some felt that the **cost to society was too great**, and were upset that **funding was being shifted from social programs to the war effort**. Protests were staged across the country. One example of a protest gone wrong was the **Kent State Riot**. College students protesting were fired upon by officers**. Four were killed** and eight were injured in a matter of seconds.

Another issue that was often protested was **the draft,** which required young men to sign up for military service**. Initially, enrolling in college granted men a pass on the draft,** so many middle and upper class men enrolled in school to avoid military service. **Certain medical conditions and religious affiliations could also exempt you from the draft**, so many who could afford draft counselors to seek out such exemptions would do so. Upset by the **unfair system that favored the wealthy,** many **burned their draft cards** as a form of protest. Many were also dismayed by the **disproportionate number of African Americans called into service**. Indeed, even **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the unfair nature of the draft**. Starting in 1969, **draft lotteries** were implemented to help ensure fairness. The first lottery involved placing all **366 possible birthdays** (including February 29) into a bin and drawing one at a time. Everyone with the first birthday called would be drafted first, and so on. The second lottery was to settle disputes within set birthdays. Letters were drawn to determine the order of the draft based on initials.

One major facet of the antiwar movement was the **counterculture**. Also known as **hippies**, members of the counterculture, rejected **the middle-class lifestyle of consumerism and corporate influence** in favor of creating a **society governed by peace and love**. Many hippies joined **communes**, which are places where multiple families live together and share everything.

Clearly, the war was splitting the nation. Those who supported the war were called **hawks.** They had their own demonstrations, often stating that **antiwar protestors were unpatriotic.** Those who were against the war were called **doves.** **Families were often divided** between supporting and opposing the Vietnam war.

**Vietnam in American Politics:**

Although Westmoreland stated that victory was at hand, television news reporter **Walter Cronkite** went to Vietnam and reported that we were in a deadlock. Lyndon Johnson realized that he had lost popular support for the war, and did not grant General Westmoreland’s request for more troops following the Tet Offensive. Instead, he said that he would seek a **peaceable solution**. In the same speech, he shocked Americans by announcing that he **would not be seeking a second term** as president. While many of Lyndon Johnson’s **domestic policies were successful**, his shortcomings and **failures regarding Vietnam overshadowed his presidency.** He lost the support of many of his major political allies, civil rights leaders, and intellectuals over his role in Vietnam.

Richard Nixon, our new president, was determined to have a different political fate than his predecessor. **He made promises** to restore order, find an honorable end to the war, and to do so quickly. Unfortunately, **he did not follow through**, and the war dragged on. Morale of American troops really suffered during this time. At this point in the war, we had already **lost 35,000 men**, and many were losing faith that America could win the war. In addition, the **South Vietnamese were often deserting their battle stations**. American soldiers questioned why they were fighting a war that the **Vietnamese didn’t want to fight themselves**. Another blow to morale was the **Mai Lai massacre**, in which rogue American soldiers killed 500 unarmed civilians, mostly women, children, and old men. Mai Lai came to represent the **breakdown of morality and discipline** within the armed forces.

Hoping to recover, in 1969, Nixon announces his strategy of **Vietnamization, or a gradual drawdown of troops with an eventual transfer of power to the South Vietnamese**. While Nixon began bringing troops home in 1969, he did not retreat. He was still hoping to force the North Vietnamese to negotiate a peace agreement. **Detracting temporarily from his policy, Nixon authorized bombings in neighboring Cambodia** along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. This was **meant to destroy supply lines** to the North Vietnamese. Since this constituted a widening of the war, not a drawdown, it was **initially done in secret**. Many Americans were infuriated when they found out. This **fueled public distrust of the government**. In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg put salt in an open wound by **releasing the Pentagon Papers**. They showed that the previous four presidential administrations **had not been honest with the public** about the U.S. involvement and goals in Vietnam.

**The War Finally Ends:**

In 1972, Nixon **won re-election** in a landslide. Again he promised an end in Vietnam. On January 27, 1973, the **Paris Peace Accords** were signed. This agreement stipulated a **cease fire** between North Vietnam, the Viet Cong, and South Vietnam. In exchange, the United States would remove all of its troops. By the end of March, the last of the combat troops left Vietnam. The ceasefire, unfortunately, was only temporary. **In 1975, North Vietnam launched a massive attack on the South.** Without the money and manpower from the United States, the south was no match for the north. On April 30, 1975, **communists captured Saigon**, the capital of South Vietnam. They re-named it Ho Chi Minh City. After the fall of Saigon, the war finally ended. Many South Vietnamese who were not communists fled the region and successful re-settled in America.

**Impacts of the War:**

The Vietnam War left lasting scars around the world. Between the north and south, more than **1.5 million people were killed**. American bombing and chemical spraying caused **lasting damage to farmland** **and forests**. In addition, the war left Asia highly politically unstable, which led to more bloody conflict in the region.

American were also heavily impacted by this war. Indeed, **58,000 American lives were lost, and more than 300,000 were injured.** Returning **veterans faced a public that did not support the war**. Consequently, they were not given the hero’s welcome they deserved. Since Vietnam, the **United States has been more reluctant to get involved in wars overseas**. The **War Powers Act of 1973 limited the President’s powers to commit the U.S. to a war.** If he does send troops, he must inform Congress within 48 hours. In addition, unless there is a declaration of war made by Congress within 90 days, troops must be pulled.

Vietnam also heavily impacted American politics. During the war, the **Twenty-Sixth Amendment** was passed, lowering the voting age from 21-18. Many believed if an individual was old enough to be drafted, they were old enough to vote in elections. Speaking of the draft, it was suspended in 1973. Finally, the events that took place in Vietnam and the way the government handled it made many U.S. citizens distrust their government. This trust has never been fully re-gained.

**Domestic Turmoil in the 1970’s:**

When he was elected, Nixon promised to restore order. His grand plan was to crack down on protests and crime. He also appointed highly conservative justices to the Supreme Court, thinking their policies would bring an end to social unrest. He even **directed the CIA and the FBI to investigate some of his political enemies**. When the legality of this was questioned, Nixon claimed all investigations were done under the pretense of **national security**.

America’s economy was struggling in the 1970’s as well. **Lyndon Johnson spent large amounts of money on the Vietnam War and on social programs, but he didn’t raise taxes to replace that revenue**. What resulted is high levels of **deficit spending**. Deficit spending put a great deal of money into circulation in the 1960’s, but the economy slowed by 1970. When the economy slows, fewer goods are produced. The combination of the increased money supply and decreased production led to **inflation.** When Nixon took office**, both inflation and unemployment had doubled in the last decade**. (Inflation went from 2.5% to 5%, and unemployment went from 3% to 6%.) In 1973, the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries** (OPEC), decided to **increase oil prices** and reduce the number of shipments made to the United States. With our heavy dependence on oil, **gas prices quickly quadrupled**. This only added to the inflation and unemployment numbers.

**Nixon’s Foreign Policy:**

In addition to negotiating the Paris Peace Accords with Vietnam, **Nixon improved relations with China** and the Soviet Union. While Nixon did not support the communist government of China, he believed that **a nation with 1 billion people could not be ignored**. He asked his national security advisor, **Henry Kissinger**, to arrange a meeting with the Chinese. This **opened up diplomatic and trading ties** between the two nations. The Soviets didn’t get along with China, and definitely didn’t like us having a better relationship with them. Consequently, Nixon was invited to Moscow. This led to the signing of the **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty** (SALT) in 1972. This treaty placed **limits on the numbers of nuclear weapons** each country was able to have, which ultimately eased Cold War tensions.

**Watergate:**

While Nixon did help usher an end to the Vietnam war, he **did little to improve the public’s trust in their government.** Not long after being re-elected, reporters for the Washington Post uncovered evidence that many of **Nixon’s campaign workers had engaged in illegal activities.** Five men were caught **breaking into the Democratic Party headquarters** in the Watergate Office-Apartment Complex. They had cameras and bugs for the phones. **Within a week, Nixon ordered a cover-up** of any connection the White House may have had to the break-in. Nixon himself lied, his aides lied, people were paid to lie, and the **CIA was used to halt the FBI investigation into Watergate**. Once the Senate began investigating, the Watergate Scandal broke open. Under oath, **John Dean**, one of Nixon’s attorney’s, testified that the president had been involved in the cover-up. It was his word against Nixon’s until a White House aide revealed that **Nixon recorded phone conversations that took place in his office.** A battle then ensued over the transcripts of the tapes. In the spring of 1974, the Senate Judiciary Committee began an **impeachment inquiry**. Nixon released **edited transcripts** of his tapes, but would not release the tapes themselves. On August 5, 1974, a **federal judge ordered** the president to release full transcripts of the tapes. By this time, there was a bipartisan agreement on three articles of impeachment. The taped proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that **Nixon himself had abused his presidential power to stop the FBI investigation into Watergate**. On August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon became the first president to **resign his office**. Eventually, **40** members of Nixon’s administration were indicted or served prison terms for crimes connected to Watergate.

**Ford and Carter:**

In the wake of the Watergate Scandal, **Gerald Ford** and **Jimmy Carter** were left with the difficult job of restoring the public’s faith in the presidency. Ford blew his chance not long after he inherited the presidency by **pardoning Nixon of any crimes he committed in office**. While his intentions were to spare the country an impeachment trial, many felt Nixon should face justice for what he had done. Carter defeated Ford in the 1976 election, campaigning as a Washington outsider. While many hoped that would bring fresh ideas to D.C., **being an outsider made political life difficult for Carter**. He struggled with **domestic energy policy.** In 1977, **oil and natural gas shortages forced many schools and businesses to close**. Carter proposed an energy program to cut America’s dependence on oil, but American’s weren’t willing to make the sacrifice. OPEC’s continued price increases led to **inflation and unemployment** increases, making Carter increasingly unpopular. Carter did find success in his foreign policy initiatives. He worked to end a long-standing conflict with Panama over the **Panama Canal**. Under treaties signed in 1977, the **U.S. agreed to transfer control of the canal to Panama on December 31, 1999**. Carter also attempted to reduce tensions in the Middle East by brokering the **Camp David Accords**. These agreements include a **peace treaty signed by Israel and Egypt**, which not only ended 30 years of fighting, but became the first **treaty signed between an Arab and Israeli nation**.

One dark mark for Carter in the foreign policy arena, is the **Iran Hostage Crisis.** The **U.S. backed Shah of Iran was overthrown** in 1979. The revolution, led by anti-American Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, involved the **seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, taking 66 Americans captive**. While some were quickly released, **53 were held captive for over a year**, including ambassador Bruce Laingen. **The Algiers Accords**, a deal brokered by the Algerians between the Americans and Iranians, officially ended the crisis in January of 1981. The conditions of the accords stipulated that the United States not interfere politically or militarily with Iran’s internal affairs, U.S. sanctions on Iran would be lifted, Iranian debt to the U.S. would be paid, and litigation regarding this incident on both sides would be suspended.

**Reagan:**

**Believing that Carter was a largely ineffective** president, the American people threw their support behind Ronald Reagan. He had a five point plan to solve the nation’s ills.

1. **Lower Taxes:** Reagan was a strong proponent of supply side economics. This theory holds that if taxes are lower, people save more money, banks could loan that money to businesses, which would then invest in ways to improve productivity. The supply of goods produced would increase, therefore driving down prices. Reagan’s belief in supply side economics led to the income tax rate being lowered by 25% in three years.
2. **De-regulation**: Reagan wanted to **ease restrictions** placed on many **business industries**. He thought businesses would grow more rapidly if the government stayed out of their affairs. This includes affirmative action and environmental protections.
3. **Smaller Government:** Reagan wanted to significantly **reduce the size of government bureaucracy**. He believed they were both **ineffective and inefficient**. He tried to shrink the government by utilizing private contractors to perform government business.
4. **A Conservative Supreme Court:** **Appointing justices to the supreme court whose belief systems match your own helps ensure the continuation of your agenda’s initiatives**. Reagan was no exception. He appointed three conservative justices to the Supreme Court, including Sandra Day O’Conner, the first female supreme court justice.
5. **Cutting Entitlements:** Reagan and other conservatives believe in cutting entitlements, or **programs that guarantee benefits to recipients**. Reagan believed these programs **promoted dependence on the government and a culture of people who are unwilling to help themselves**. By his standard, cutting welfare was not only practical, it was a moral obligation.

Reagan’s program had mixed results. At first, unemployment and inflation remained high, but they both dropped significantly by 1983. However, the **decrease in tax revenue led to high levels of deficit spending.** The **national debt doubled** from 1981 to 1986.

Although Reagan believed in a small government, this did not apply to the military. Indeed, Reagan believed that military force was an essential protection against communists taking over the world. Indeed, he devoted **$2 trillion in military spending** to complete with the Soviet Union’s military buildup. When Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union in 1985, Reagan met with him several times hoping to improve U.S.-Soviet relations. The **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Treaty** (INF), signed in 1987, resulted from these meetings. Under this agreement, both countries would destroy all of their medium range missiles.

However, taking an anti-communist stand created some problems for Reagan. The Reagan administration decided to support the anti-communist side in several conflicts, including two civil wars in Central America. A scandal emerged surrounding the **aid secretly provided to an anti-communist group known as the Contras in Nicaragua**. Known as the **Iran-Contra Affair**, in 1986 Americans learned that the **U.S. government had sold weapons to Iran in exchange for help freeing American hostages** in the Middle East. The money from these sales went to the Contras. This **violated a law that barred the U.S. government from funding the rebels**. While Reagan claimed he never knew about the deal, many concluded that he should have kept better track of the deals made by his administration.

Despite the Iran-Contra Scandal and increasing national debt, Reagan remained **quite popular**. He was known as the “great communicator,” and even as the “Teflon president,” since scandals seem to slide right off of him.

**George H.W. Bush:**

After serving two terms, Reagan’s Vice President, George H.W. Bush, ran for president and won. His presidency was marked by many foreign policy events:

**The End of the Cold War:** **In 1989, several Eastern European nations stopped having a communist government**. As communism fell, so did a structure that came to symbolize the oppression of communism: **the Berlin Wall.** This cleanse from communism angered those who strongly believed in the communist system of government. In 1991, they tried to arrange a coup of the Soviet Union. **Boris Yeltsin** was successfully able to thwart the attempt. **Unlike Gorbachev, who wanted to reform communism, Yeltsin wanted to get rid of it.** One by one, the **republics that made up the Soviet Union declared their independence**. In December 1991, Yeltsin and the newly independent republics joined a loose alliance called the **Commonwealth of Independent States** (CIS). **The breakup of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War**.

**The Persian Gulf War:** In August of 1990**, Iraq invaded Kuwait**. The United States and the United Nations lead a force composed of **39 different nations** to free Kuwait. In 1991, this coalition force began bombing Iraq, then troops were sent in to push the Iraqi’s out of Kuwait.

Bush’s success in stopping Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf war made him extremely popular, but then **the economy stalled**. With unemployment reaching nearly **7%**, many Americans started to believe that **Bush was good at foreign policy, but ineffective at home**. He lost to Bill Clinton in the 1992 election.

**Clinton:**

When he first arrived in office, his **goal was to tackle universal health care**. His legislation was criticized by republicans for being too costly and going too far, and by democrats for not going far enough. **After an extensive battle with Congress, no health care plan was passed**, but there was a law passed that allows workers to keep their insurance when they change jobs.

In 1993, the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** passed. NAFTA lifted tariffs between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to allow for increased trade. While it won wide support from both sides of the isle, critics feared America would lose jobs to Mexico, where wages were lower and there were fewer safety regulations**. Newt Gingrich’s** outspoken opposition to the bill helped him to rise among his conservative colleagues, who made him speaker of the House after the 1994 mid-term elections. Since republicans won control of both houses of Congress in the 1994 elections, Clinton’s political arguments with them intensified. In 1995, **when Clinton and Congress couldn’t agree on a budget, the government was forced to shut down… twice.** Eventually they were able to compromise with the pressure to act mounting from the American people. They were also able to compromise on a Welfare Reform Bill, which was huge on the conservative agenda. Under the welfare reform bill, there was no longer a guarantee of service for needy families, and there was a time **limit to the length of time people could receive service.**

**Impeachment:**

Clinton was re-elected in 1996, but a scandal marred most of his second term. Information emerged that Clinton **had an affair with a White House intern, and lied about it under oath.** When the charges became public, he denied the affair with Monica Lewinski. Later, he admitted to the affair, but said that he didn’t lie under oath. In December 1998, the House of Representatives **impeached** president Clinton. He went through a trial, and was acquitted.

After his trial, Clinton worked to make gains in both foreign and domestic policy. Abroad, he led a group of nations dealing with the **independence of Kosovo from Serbia**. NATO forces began bombing Serbia in 1999, and three months later, the Serbians withdrew. Back at home, Clinton finished his second term with **three consecutive years of budget surpluses**, but partisan divisions continued to hold up needed legislation.

**2000 Election**:

The 2000 election was quite controversial. While **Al Gore** won the popular vote, **George W. Bush** won the electoral vote. The point of contention was the state of **Florida**. Many in that state said confusing ballots caused them to vote for the wrong person. In addition, many more said that they were turned away at their polling location: that they were not on the list of registered voters. The controversy led to a request for a hand re-count, a lawsuit, a countersuit, and finally a decision by the Supreme Court that the original vote count stands, and therefore Bush was the new president. Adding depth to the controversy, **George Bush’s brother, Jeb, was the governor of Florida at the time** of the election.

**9/11:**

On the Morning of September 11, 2001**, terrorists hijacked multiple planes** departing from the East Coast and heading for California. The hijackers crashed two of the jets into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. A third plane plowed into the Pentagon. A fourth jet crashed in an empty field after passengers courageously fought the hijackers. Everyone on all four planes died, in addition to several others. **More than 3,000 people lost their lives on 9/11**.

**Fighting Terrorism:**

This fateful day was a wake-up call to the American people. No longer could we pretend that terrorism was something that was only faced in other countries. With Congressional approval, Bush set out to fight terrorism**. A month after 9/11 the U.S. led forces on an attack in Afghanistan**. It was **believed that Afghanistan was harboring Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda**, the terrorist group believed responsible for 9/11. By 2002, the U.S. led coalition forces broke up the Al Qaeda strong hold in Afghanistan, but their leader Osama bin Laden was still at large.

At home, Bush signed into law a bill allowing our **government to detain suspected terrorists for up to seven days without charging them with a crime**. He also created the **Department of Homeland Security**, a government agency whose sole purpose is to coordinate anti-terrorism efforts. In addition, the federal government became more involved in aviation security.

In 2003, the U.S. expands the war on terror to Iraq. **Bush claimed that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was supporting Al Qaeda** with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, also known as **weapons of mass destruction**. The UN conducted weapons inspections in Iraq, but Hussein did not fully cooperate. Britain and the U.S. broke off diplomatic ties with Iraq and ordered Saddam to leave the country. They began **air strikes** on the Iraqi military. Coalition forces soon had boots on the ground and within a matter of months, the Iraqi army was defeated. The Iraqi people were **happy to be rid of Saddam Hussein’s dictatorial rule.** By 2006, Iraq had a new republican constitution and new government. Hussein was convicted of the murder of 148 of his own people, and sentenced to death. The U**.S. continued to occupy the country to help with nation building**, and training of police and military troops. The challenge came from daily attacks from insurgents, or rebels. Although we achieved our objective of getting Saddam out of Iraq, there were several costs involved in this endeavor. By the end of 2006, more than **2,900 US soldiers** had been killed, and more than **50,000 Iraqis.** It's interesting to note that **no weapons of mass destruction were ever recovered in Iraq.** This has caused some to question the motives behind the Iraqi invasion.

**Facing New Challenges:**

As we move forward into the 21st century, there are many challenges we will face as a nation. First, the composition of our population is changing. The **baby boomers,** those born after WWII, are now starting to retire. With the increased percentage of the population reaching retirement age, and the increased life expectancy due to modern medicine, has **strong implications for social security and health care policy**.

In addition to our aging population, the **immigrants** coming to our country are now from **Asia and Latin America, not from Europe as in the past**. One of our domestic policy issues is how to fairly handle those who come into our country illegally. Immigration will likely be a hot topic well into the future.

Another challenge that many joyfully face is implementing ever changing technologies that come our way every day. The **popularization of the internet in 1993** led to huge advances in information technology. Computer usage exploded in businesses, at home, and in schools. Now, many use smart phones or tablets for their internet needs.

With the advent of technology, we have become more interconnected. We live in a world where companies are linked through business. The unfortunate part of globalization is that **many businesses have outsourced unskilled labor jobs to places where the cost of labor is much lower. This puts a strain for American workers to find employment.**

**Obama:**

In 2008, we broke a large barrier as a nation, electing **Barack Obama**, as our nation’s first African American president. President Obama**, unlike president Reagan, favors demand side economics.** Demand side economics is a theory that advocates **use of government spending and growth in the money supply to stimulate the demand for goods and services and therefore expand economic activity.** As such he produced a significant stimulus package in an attempt to counteract the great recession that arrived in 2008. While unemployment has declined and the deficit has shrunk under his watch, it remains to be seen how Obama will be rated on his handling of the economy.

Another of his big ticket items was an overhaul of healthcare. In March, 2010, Obama signed the **Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act** into Law. This is also known as **Obamacare.** In addition, The Obama administration also **captured the elusive leader of al-Qaeda. Osama Bin Laden was discovered and killed in Pakistan by U.S. special forces** on May 1, 2011. For many who lost friends in family on 9/11, this served as a moment of justice.

While there are some successes, no presidency is perfect. Much like president **Clinton**, Obama has had a difficult **time passing necessary laws** because **partisan bickering** between himself and Congress remains unresolved. It remains to be seen if and how Washington regains the trust of the American people, and build their efficiency by working together. *We face great challenges as a nation, but we also have great promise. As a future history maker, I hope you never forget that. ~Ms. P.*