

Liberalism of the 1960s and Beyond

I. Introduction

- the 1950s was a Consensus Decade, in which everyone worked together to present a united front against the spread of communism-- as a result, critical issues such as poverty, racism, etc. were ignored because the most important issue was the Cold War

- JFK began his presidency as a conservative consensus president but over time, because of events, he evolved into a liberal president that helped to reshape American politics

II. The Kennedy Years (1961- 63)

- when JFK took office in 1961, the most important issue for him was not racism or poverty but rather the stopping of the spread of Communism to the Third World-- his focus was on foreign policy-- therefore, he was especially concerned about events in **Cuba-- Fidel Castro (1959)** overthrew the pro-US leadership and took over control of Cuba-- in the process, he seized over \$2 billion of American property-- this occurred late during the Eisenhower Administration-- Eisenhower established a tight embargo around Cuba but the more the US put pressure on Cuba the closer it grew to the USSR-- in addition, diplomatic relations were severed in January 1961-- Eisenhower had planned a military invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles living in the US but did not execute the plan because of the election of 1960-- he handed over this plan to JFK

- JFK analyzed the plan and gave the go-ahead-- this became the failed **Bay of Pigs Invasion (4/17/1961)**-- the Cuban exiles were supposed to invade the island and spark an uprising by Cubans upset with Castro and topple his communist government-- it was a complete failure but it was significant because it clearly showed that JFK was not willing to break with the old Cold War ideas of the Consensus Decade

- in addition, to protect the rest of the world from going communist, JFK established two agencies:

1. Alliance for Progress (8/1961)-- it was a program to help develop Latin American economies-- the US gave billions of dollars to reduce poverty and encourage strong democratic governments-- it was similar to the Marshall Plan at the beginning of the Cold War-- it was initially successful but failed and was ended in 1970s

2. Peace Corps (1961)-- this was not necessarily the liberal, altruistic organization of today-- volunteers (usually served 2 years) help developing countries in the areas of education, agriculture, and health care-- its goals are to help obtain everyday necessities, promote world peace, and improve relations between Americans and other countries-- it was a means by which the US could extend its influence to Third World countries and win their hearts and minds during the Cold War-- it was not a completely selfless act

- for the first two years of his presidency, JFK was concerned primarily with foreign affairs and his response to events illustrated his conservative consensus views-- however, events of 1962 and early 1963 made him change from a consensus conservative into a liberal president:

1. Cuban Missile Crisis (10/1962)-- after the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Castro asked the USSR for nuclear missiles to prevent another US invasion

- **Nikita Khrushchev** was the leader of the USSR and agreed to install missiles in Cuba-- these missiles were discovered by US spy planes on 10/14/1962-- JFK and his advisors then tried to figure out what our response should be-- JFK went on television on 10/22/1962-- he demanded that the Soviets withdraw the missiles-- he also established a **Quarantine (10/22/1962)** around Cuba-- no ships could go in or out of Cuba without being inspected by the US-- on 10/28/1962, Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles, if the US promised never to invade Cuba again-- in a secret part of the agreement, the US also agreed to withdraw our missiles from Turkey (it was approximately the same distance from Cuba to Washington, DC as from Turkey to Moscow)

- it was a great victory for JFK's prestige but it had severe consequences as the Russians felt humiliated and embarked on a naval and nuclear arms buildup-- also, a faction in the US now saw that the way to meet the communist threat in Vietnam was to escalate the military pressure because they would eventually back down just like in Cuba

- the most important positive result of the Cuban Missile Crisis was not the improvement in JFK's prestige but rather that it taught JFK a lesson-- US and USSR were on the brink of war in 1962 and one wrong move could have been disastrous-- this encouraged JFK to back away from his militant Cold Warrior rhetoric and to hope for **"détente"** (easing of relations or mutual coexistence)-- by mid 1963, it appeared as though JFK was moving away from the Riga Axiom (conservative) and toward the Yalta Axiom (liberal)-- as was mentioned in the Vietnam lecture, because of Cuban Missile Crisis, JFK might have withdrawn American advisors from Vietnam after the 1964 election

2. "Ole Miss" Crisis (1962)-- in the fall 1962, **James Meredith**, a black air force veteran, tried to become the first black to attend the University of Mississippi-- the Governor (**Ross Barnett**) personally refused to allow Meredith to register and a riot broke out-- JFK sent federal troops, which enabled Meredith to attend school-- this crisis, coupled with the Birmingham movement of 1963, allowed JFK to support civil rights legislation in 1963

3. Poverty-- Michael Harrington in **The Other America (1962)** argued that about 1/5 of the US population lived in poverty-- this portrayal was in sharp contrast to the very middle class 1950s depiction of life-- studies like this pushed JFK to support some kind of anti-poverty legislation, which was a liberal issue

- thus, by the summer of 1963, the conservative JFK of 1961 had evolved into a liberal president who favored civil rights, etc.-- JFK was assassinated in **Dallas, Texas (11/22/1963)**-- he came to be seen as a martyr to those liberal policies that he had begun-- his successor, LBJ, had to live with this martyrdom and prove to the US that he would be faithful to the Kennedy legacy-- as a result of JFK's assassination, LBJ was able to pass key liberal legislation that, if he had lived, JFK may not have been able to pass-- also, LBJ was a better politician who knew how to deal with Congress and get the legislation enacted into law-- in other words, it can be argued that JFK was more successful in death than he was in life

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III. LBJ and the Great Society (1963- 69)

- **Lyndon Baines Johnson** saw himself as another FDR and wanted to finish what the New Deals had begun-- these social reforms (most of which had been initiated by JFK before his death) became a part of what he called the “**Great Society**”-- he declared “We have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society. The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice... The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.”-- the “Great Society” program included his war on poverty, etc.:

1. War on Poverty-- in his 1964 State of the Union Address, LBJ declared that “unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope, some because of their poverty and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with unconditional war on poverty in America.”-- he initiated a series of anti-poverty programs such as the **Work Study** program, Upward Bound (tutoring for high school students), **Job Corps** (provided vocational training to disadvantaged youth from 16-21), etc.

2. Civil Rights-- the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were signed into law during LBJ’s presidency-- however, the push for civil rights was overshadowed by the war in Vietnam by the late 1960s

3. Medicare and Medicaid (1965)-- Medicare provided hospital insurance for those 65 and over-- Medicaid provided medical benefits for those of any age below a certain income level

- this Great Society program was the greatest period of reform since FDR’s New Deal-- it was a clear break with the Consensus policies of the 1950s and a return to the 1930s liberalism-- however, the liberalism of the 1960s was soon distracted from domestic reforms by the very controversial issue of Vietnam-- Vietnam divided everyone, liberal vs. conservative and liberal vs. liberal

- all of the major movements of the 1960s from liberalism to civil rights to Vietnam came to a head in 1968

IV. The Critical Year: 1968

- during 1968, America was rocked by a series of violent and disturbing events which shattered the perception of the people that the war was close to being won and that America was changing in the right direction-- people began to see that maybe the young people of the 1960s counterculture were correct

- **Counterculture of the 1960s**-- the basic foundation for the counterculture had been established when the **Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)** met in Port Huron, Michigan (1962) and issued their statement of purpose-- this came to be known as the **Port Huron Statement**-- they wanted nothing less than the revitalization of American democracy by

returning power to the people-- their statement called for: 1. Universal military disarmament with verification; 2. increased US aid to help the poor countries of the world; 3. the political party system should be revamped to give the people a real choice; 4. corporations should be restructured so they would be more responsive to the consumers and workers; 5. racial equality; 6. increased federal spending to aid the unemployed during recessions; 7. create poverty program for the US; 8. restore a more participatory democracy in all areas of life (people should have a greater say in how all institutions are run from business to schools)-- these were goals that they wanted to achieve but they differed on how to achieve them-- it was a rejection of the consensus thinking of the 1950s

- SDS began to protest the Vietnam War in 1965 with the escalation by LBJ-- in their first march they wore ties and skirts-- they were not hippies-- they held “Teach-ins” to educate students about the war-- as the war escalated, so did the protests

- **Events** that rocked the US included:

1. Tet Offensive (1/30)-- destroyed the American will to fight and created the credibility gap

2. Martin Luther King (4/4)-- he was assassinated in Memphis

3. Robert Kennedy (6/5-6)-- he was shot and killed by Sirhan Sirhan, after winning the California Democratic primary-- he was the favorite candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968

4. Democratic Convention (Chicago)-- the Democrats held their convention in Chicago and thousands of protestors tried to march against the war-- **Mayor Richard Daley** refused to grant them a parade permit but they marched anyway (taunting the police by saying “the world is watching”) and were attacked by the police-- this was televised live across the nation (and world) and contributed to the feelings that the US was out of control

- it really seemed as though the US was falling apart-- this set the stage for the resurgence of conservatism

V. Resurgence of Conservatism and Conservatism Checked

- by 1968, many people were very scared that the US was going to explode into mass anarchy-- **Kevin Phillips** wrote **The Emerging Republican Majority**-- he argued that the New Deal was crucial to the Democratic domination after 1940s-- however, by the mid-1960s, the American people had become disenchanted with liberalism because all it did was bring problems-- he argued that the time was ripe for a President to capture the growing middle class resentment against reform

- **Richard Nixon** was the Republican nominee for President in 1968-- he tried to appeal to what he called the “**Silent Majority**” of Americans-- those Americans who did not agree with the war but did not agree with the protesters either, those who believed that civil rights had gone far enough, etc.-- he wanted a quieter more conservative approach to politics

- as president, Nixon calculated his policies to build/solidify his conservative coalition:

1. Vietnam-- peace with honor, Vietnamization, etc.

2. Supreme Court-- Nixon saw a weakness in the Democratic party-- he realized that many southern Democrats were very frustrated with the civil rights movement-- his actions became known as his **“Southern strategy”**-- Nixon courted white southerners by twice appointing conservative anti-civil rights southern men to the US Supreme Court (Clement Haynsworth of SC and Harrold Carswell of FL) to balance the pro-civil rights court-- both nominees were rejected by the Senate but it sent a clear message to whites in the south: Nixon would be more balanced in his treatment of civil rights and it did gain him southern support

- he also attacked the court in the area of criminal law-- in **Miranda v. Arizona (1966)**, the Court required that police had to read suspects their rights-- many attacked the Court for this “victory” for criminals-- many stated that the Supreme Court by protecting the criminals, and not the people, was implicitly responsible for the lack of respect for the federal government and law and order, in general

3. Attacked liberal programs-- he claimed that the liberal programs of the 1960s were responsible for the problems of the late 1960s-- he dismantled LBJ’s Great Society-- he believed that the issue of poverty, etc. should be dealt with by the local and state governments-- this was popular with the middle class because they were tired of rising taxes to pay for all these reforms

- Nixon was very successful (like FDR) in building a coalition of the disaffected-- he built upon the conservative element within society and was able to easily defeat his Democratic challenger in the **election of 1972**-- Nixon defeated **George McGovern** by an electoral vote of 520 to 17-- he had greatly weakened the alignment of southern whites and blue collar workers to the Democratic party-- however, his election victory was short-lived

- Conservatism Checked: Watergate

- throughout his life, Nixon was his own worst enemy-- he was very obsessive in going after his political enemies and he took criticism personally-- the **Pentagon Papers (1971)** were the secret origins of our involvement in Vietnam and were leaked to the media-- it was very embarrassing for every President from Eisenhower to Nixon-- it showed that the Presidents were saying one thing but doing another-- Nixon had tried to stop the publication but failed

- after the leaking of the **Pentagon Papers**, Nixon established a group of men he called the **“Plumbers”** to fix the leaks within his administration-- in 1972, their job was expanded to investigating the Democratic Party-- Nixon did not approve of all aspects of their work but he did create them and then did cover up what they did on his behalf-- five Plumbers were arrested as they attempted to place bugs in the Democratic National Headquarters at the **Watergate (6/17/1972)**-- while this came out prior to the election, it was brushed aside as a Democratic plan to discredit Nixon-- Nixon called it a “left wing conspiracy” to discredit him-- however, from late 1972 to the summer of 1974, the tale unraveled

- eventually **Bob Woodward** and **Carl Bernstein** of the **Washington Post** and the **Senate Select Committee on Watergate** discovered the misdeeds committed by or in the name of Nixon-- for example, Nixon had an enemies list, paid hush money to Watergate defendants,

etc.-- it was revealed that Nixon had taped every conversation that had occurred in the Oval Office and Congress demanded the tapes-- Nixon resisted releasing the tapes citing executive privilege

- during the long legal battle to get the tapes released to the investigators, the **House Judiciary Committee** approved **3 articles of impeachment** against the President:

1. Obstruction of justice (withholding evidence, payment of hush money, etc.)

2. Abuse of power (misusing the IRS; maintaining an unlawful secret investigative unit, the plumbers, within the office of the president; interfering with the Watergate investigation; etc.)

3. Failure to comply with congressional subpoenas (disclosure of the tapes)

- the committee concluded that “In all of this Richard M. Nixon has acted in a manner contrary to his trust as President and subversive of constitutional government, to the great prejudice of the cause of law and justice and to the manifest injury of the people of the US. Wherefore, Richard M. Nixon by such conduct, warrants impeachment and trial, and removal from office.”

- he was not impeached by the full House because he resigned-- he **resigned on August 9, 1974** and **Gerald Ford** became the President-- Ford gave him a **pardon** for all crimes (9/1974)

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- Video-- Please watch the video segment about Watergate

- the resignation of Nixon brought the temporary halt to America's move to the right (conservatism) in the 1970s-- there was a resurgence of liberal idealism with Carter until Reagan ushered in a new conservatism in 1980

VI. Beyond Watergate

- Nixon's resignation halted the move to conservatism in the US-- liberalism again dominated for a few years in the late 1970s under Jimmy Carter-- in 1980, the “Reagan Revolution” moved America back to conservatism

- **James Earl Carter (1977-81)** won the election of 1976, narrowly defeating Gerald Ford (297 to 240 electoral votes)-- he was the first man elected from the Deep South since Zachary Taylor (1848)-- he answered the needs of America because he was an “outsider” and was not linked to the politics/scandals of the last several years

- he had success in the Middle East with the **Camp David Accords (1978)**, which was an agreement signed between **Anwar Sadat of Egypt** and **Menachem Begin of Israel**-- this ended the state of war which had existed between Egypt and Israel for 31 years and Israel agreed to return the occupied Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in stages by 1982

- Carter faced severe problems that were not his own doing but planted the seeds for a conservative comeback:

1. Economy-- America by the early 1970s was facing stiff competition from the rising Japanese and German economies-- while America was trying to adjust to the new competitive climate, the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** began an oil embargo of the US in 1973 because the US had supported Israel in the Yom Kippor War (against Syria and Egypt)-- the Arabs were outraged and began a boycott of oil exports to the US-- the embargo was lifted in 1974, but the price of oil continued to rise dramatically and hurt the already suffering American economy-- from 1973-79, the price of a barrel of oil rose from \$3 to \$30 and it caused virtual riots at the gas pump-- all prices continued to rise throughout the 1970s and caused something called **stagflation**-- this was the simultaneous existence of high unemployment and high inflation-- previously, one had been high and the other low-- many conservatives criticized the government for the economic problems, especially the New Deal and the Great Society programs

2. Foreign Policy setbacks-- Carter added a new criteria if nations were to be our allies: they had to be anti-Communist and respect human rights-- he faced several problems which many people charged he had brought on himself-- the greatest occurred with the Iranian Revolution of 1979-- it toppled the pro-US government by Muslim Fundamentalists-- it resulted in the taking and holding of 52 American hostages for over a year-- they were taken on 11/4/79 and finally released on 1/20/81-- this **Iranian Hostage Crisis (1979-81)** was a devastating blow to Carter's presidency-- the US appeared to be a pathetic powerless giant

- eventually these problems provided the foundation for a new conservative movement in the US

- **Ronald Reagan (1981-89)**-- in the campaign of 1980, Reagan pledged to restrict the growth of government, build a strong national defense, etc.-- he won the election easily over Carter (489 to 49 electoral votes)

- his economic program became known as **"Reaganomics"**-- he called for tax cuts to stimulate the economy but it had an unequal impact across America-- it was a resurrection of Mellon's tax policies as the taxes of the rich were cut while spending on social programs were cut by \$41 billion-- as a result, the rich got richer while the poor got poorer

- in terms of foreign policy, Reagan took a very hard line against the **Soviet Union**-- he called them the "Evil Empire" and their system as "the focus of evil in the modern world"-- in 1985, relations improved with the ascension of **Mikhail Gorbachev** in the USSR and the new spirit of **glasnost** (or "openness")-- with the Russian economy in shambles, Gorbachev recognized that he needed to reach an accommodation with the West-- his reforms (greater freedom of expression, withdrawal of troops from Eastern Europe, etc.) eventually led to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR between 1989-91

- Reagan was able to shake America out of the pathetic giant image which had been created during the Iranian hostage crisis, the OPEC crisis, etc.-- America had lost its sense of self but, through Reagan's persona and optimistic rhetoric, we were able to create a new sense of power and purpose-- he provided the discourse within which the American people could regain their pride in the American way of life in the 1980s

- since the semester began with the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson and the controversial election of 1876, it would be fitting to conclude with the impeachment proceedings against Bill Clinton and the Election of 2000

- **Impeachment of Bill Clinton (1993-2001)**-- Clinton was accused by a former Arkansas state employee of sexual misconduct while he was governor-- **Paula Jones** charged in her **sexual misconduct lawsuit (1994)** that, when she did not give into his sexual advances, she was punished in the workplace by not receiving promotions, etc.-- eventually, this lawsuit was **settled** when Clinton agreed to pay **\$850,000 (11/1998)**

- in the course of investigating charges in a sexual misconduct lawsuit, the courts have held that it is appropriate to investigate the sexual history (especially in the workplace) of the person accused-- this is when the name **Monica Lewinsky** first appeared-- she was a paid intern in the White House who Clinton repeatedly denied having a sexual relationship with, even under oath

- after evidence revealed that he had lied under oath, the **House (12/19/1998)** approved two articles of **impeachment** against Clinton-- he was impeached for **perjury** (lying under oath) and **obstruction of justice** (tried to coach witnesses, etc.)

- the **Senate Trial** was presided over by **Chief Justice William Rehnquist**-- after 21 days, the trial ended with the vote to convict and remove in the Senate (2/12/1999)-- the final vote on the perjury count was 45 to convict and 55 to acquit and on the obstruction of justice count it was 50 to 50-- in other words, the Senate voted to **acquit (2/1999)**

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- **Election of 2000**-- with 538 electoral votes, the magic number for victory was 270

- **November 7, 2000 was election day**-- that evening the media reported that Gore had won Florida and then reversed themselves and said Bush won-- Bush's margin of victory was **1784 popular votes** but, after a mandatory machine recount, his lead was reduced to only **300+ popular votes**-- Gore then asked for a manual recount in four mostly Democratic counties-- the deadline for hand recounts was November 14th, and **Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris** refused to extend it-- the **Florida Supreme Court (11/21)** ruled that Harris must accept the results of the manual recounts as long as they were submitted by 11/26-- however, the court set **no clear standard** on how to count the "dimpled" or partially punched ballots-- the officials argued amongst themselves over which would be counted and which would not-- finally, **Bush was certified the winner in Florida on 11/26 with a 537 vote margin** by Harris

- there were more calls for more recounts until the **US Supreme Court** weighed in on the issue-- in **Bush v. Gore (12/12/2000)**, the Supreme Court ruled that the recounts could not be resumed because the procedures were so arbitrary that they violated the equal protection of the laws clause of the 14th amendment-- **Gore conceded the election on 12/13**-- the **final results were: Bush 271 electoral votes to Gore 266 electoral votes** (one elector refused to vote in protest) and Gore won the popular vote by a little more than 500,000 popular votes-- the great irony for Gore is that he did not need to win Florida to win the presidency, if he had just won the electoral votes from his home state of Tennessee (11) or Clinton's home state of

Arkansas (6)-- the election brought up a lot of questions regarding the role of the media, polls, voting procedures, ballot design, etc.

VII. Conclusion

- the semester began with the emergence of the US from the Civil War as a nation on the verge of world power status and ends with the conclusion of the Cold War

- what has been created is not a new world order but rather a new world disorder-- no longer are the issues as clear cut-- how well we deal with our foreign policy challenges and, more importantly, how we deal with our major domestic issues (economy, budget deficit, AIDS, education reforms, violence, environmental protection, health care, etc.) will determine whether or not we truly deserve to be an example for the world-- whether we deserve to be called, as John Winthrop stated in 1630, "a City upon a Hill"