The United States is officially United States of America, republic (2015 est. pop. 319,929,000), 3,539,227 sq mi (9,166,598 sq km), North America. The United States is the world's third largest country in population and in area. It consists of 50 states and a federal district. The conterminous (excluding Alaska and Hawaii) United States stretches across central North America from the Atlantic Ocean on the east to the Pacific Ocean on the west, and from Canada on the north to Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico on the south. The state of Alaska is located in extreme NW North America between the Arctic and Pacific oceans and is bordered by Canada on the east. The state of Hawaii, an island chain, is situated in the E central Pacific Ocean c.2,100 mi (3,400 km) SW of San Francisco. Washington, D.C., is the capital of the United States, and New York is its largest city.

The outlying territories and areas of the United States include: in the Caribbean Basin, Puerto Rico (a commonwealth associated with the United States) and the Virgin Islands of the United States (purchased from Denmark in 1917); in the Pacific Ocean, Guam (ceded by Spain after the Spanish-American War), the Northern Mariana Islands (a commonwealth associated with the United States), American Samoa, Wake Island, and several other islands. The United States also has compacts of free association with the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Political Geography

The conterminous United States may be divided into several regions: the New England states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut), the Middle Atlantic states (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia), the Southeastern states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky), the states of the Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri), the Great Plains states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas), the Mountain states (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah), the Southwestern states (Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona), and the states of the Far West (Washington, Oregon, California, and Nevada).

Alaska is the largest state in area (656,424 sq mi/1,700,578 sq km), and Rhode Island is the smallest (1,545 sq mi/4,003 sq km). California has the largest population (2000 pop. 33,871,648), while Wyoming has the fewest people (2000 pop. 493,782). In the late 20th cent., Nevada, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, Utah, Georgia, and Texas experienced the fastest rates of population growth, while California, Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arizona, and North Carolina gained the greatest number of residents. West Virginia, North Dakota, and the District of Columbia experienced population decreases over the same period. The largest U.S. cities are New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia. Among the other major cities are Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Virginia Beach, Charlotte, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Tampa, Miami, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Saint Louis, Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Dallas–Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, El Paso, Albuquerque, Denver, Salt Lake City,

Physical Geography
The conterminous United States may be divided into seven broad physiographic divisions: from east to west, the Atlantic–Gulf Coastal Plain; the Appalachian Highlands; the Interior Plains; the Interior Highlands; the Rocky Mountain System; the Intermontane Region; and the Pacific Mountain System. An eighth division, the Laurentian Uplands, a part of the Canadian Shield, dips into the United States from Canada in the Great Lakes region. It is an area of little local relief, with an irregular drainage system and many lakes, as well as some of the oldest exposed rocks in the United States.

The terrain of the N United States was formed by the great continental ice sheets that covered N North America during the late Cenozoic Era. The southern edge of the ice sheet is roughly traced by a line of terminal moraines extending west from E Long Island and then along the course of the Ohio and Missouri rivers to the Rocky Mts.; land north of this line is covered by glacial material. Alaska and the mountains of NW United States had extensive mountain glaciers and were heavily eroded. Large glacial lakes (see Lake Bonneville under Bonneville Salt Flats; Lahontan, Lake) occupied sections of the Basin and Range province; the Great Salt Lake and the other lakes of this region are remnants of the glacial lakes.

The East and the Gulf Coast
The Atlantic–Gulf Coastal Plain extends along the east and southeast coasts of the United States from E Long Island to the Rio Grande; Cape Cod and the islands off SE Massachusetts are also part of this region. Although narrow in the north, the Atlantic Coastal Plain widens in the south, merging with the Gulf Coastal Plain in Florida. The Atlantic and Gulf coasts are essentially coastlines of submergence, with numerous estuaries, embayments, islands, sandspits, and barrier beaches backed by lagoons. The northeast coast has many fine natural harbors, such as those of New York Bay and Chesapeake Bay, but south of the great capes of the North Carolina coast (Fear, Lookout, and Hatteras) there are few large bays. A principal feature of the lagoon-lined Gulf Coast is the great delta of the Mississippi River.

The Atlantic Coastal Plain rises in the west to the rolling Piedmont (the falls along which were an early source of waterpower), a hilly transitional zone leading to the Appalachian Mountains. These ancient mountains, a once towering system now worn low by erosion, extend southwest from SE Canada to the Gulf Coastal Plain in Alabama. In E New England, the Appalachians extend in a few places to the Atlantic Ocean, contributing to a rocky, irregular coastline. The Appalachians and the Adirondack Mountains of New York (which are geologically related to the Canadian Shield) include all the chief highlands of E United States; Mt. Mitchell (6,684 ft/2,037 m high), in the Black Mts. of North Carolina, is the highest point of E North America.

The Plains and Highlands of the Interior
Extending more than 1,000 mi (1,610 km) from the Appalachians to the Rocky Mts. and lying between Canada (into which they extend) in the north and the Gulf Coastal Plain in the south are the undulating Interior Plains. Once covered by a great inland sea, the Interior Plains are underlain by sedimentary rock. Almost all of the region is drained by one of the world's greatest river systems—the Mississippi-Missouri. The Interior Plains may be divided into two sections: the fertile central lowlands, the agricultural heartland of the United States; and the Great Plains, a treeless plateau that gently rises

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from the central lowlands to the foothills of the Rocky Mts. The Black Hills of South Dakota form the region's only upland area.

The Interior Highlands are located just W of the Mississippi River between the Interior Plains and the Gulf Coastal Plain. This region consists of the rolling Ozark Plateau (see Ozarks) to the north and the Ouachita Mountains, which are similar in structure to the ridge and valley section of the Appalachians, to the east.

**The Western Mountains and Great Basin**

West of the Great Plains are the lofty Rocky Mountains. This geologically young and complex system extends into NW United States from Canada and runs S into New Mexico. There are numerous high peaks in the Rockies; the highest is Mt. Elbert (14,433 ft/4,399 m). The Rocky Mts. are divided into four sections—the Northern Rockies, the Middle Rockies, the Wyoming (Great Divide) Basin, and the Southern Rockies. Along the crest of the Rockies is the Continental Divide, separating Atlantic-bound drainage from that heading for the Pacific Ocean.

Between the Rocky Mts. and the ranges to the west is the Intermontane Region, an arid expanse of plateaus, basins, and ranges. The Columbia Plateau, in the north of the region, was formed by volcanic lava and is drained by the Columbia River and its tributary the Snake River, both of which have cut deep canyons into the plateau. The enormous Colorado Plateau, an area of sedimentary rock, is drained by the Colorado River and its tributaries; there the Colorado River has entrenched itself to form the Grand Canyon, one of the world's most impressive scenic wonders. West of the plateaus is the Basin and Range province, an area of extensive semidesert.

The lowest point in North America, in Death Valley (282 ft/86 m below sea level), is there. The largest basin in the region is the Great Basin, an area of interior drainage (the Humboldt River is the largest stream) and of numerous salt lakes, including the Great Salt Lake. Between the Intermontane Region and the Pacific Ocean is the Pacific Mountain System, a series of ranges generally paralleling the coast, formed by faulting and volcanism. The Cascade Range, with its numerous volcanic peaks extends S from SW Canada into N California, and from there is continued south by the Sierra Nevada, a great fault block. Mt. Whitney (14,495 ft/4,418 m), in the Sierra Nevada, is the highest peak in the conterminous United States.

**The Pacific Coast, Alaska, and Hawaii**

West of the Cascades and the Sierra Nevada and separated from them by a structural trough are the Coast Ranges, which extend along the length of the U.S. Pacific coast. The Central Valley in California, the Willamette Valley in Oregon, and the Puget Sound lowlands in Washington are part of the trough. The San Andreas Fault, a fracture in the earth's crust, parallels the trend of the Coast Ranges from San Francisco Bay SE to NW Mexico; earthquakes are common along its entire length. The Pacific Coastal Plain is narrow, and in many cases the mountains plunge directly into the sea. A coastline of emergence, it has few islands, except for California's Channel Islands and those in Puget Sound; there are few good harbors besides Puget Sound, San Francisco Bay, and San Diego Bay.

Alaska may be divided into four physiographic regions; they are, from north to south, the Arctic Lowlands, the coastal plain of the Arctic Ocean; the Rocky Mountain System, of which the Brooks Range is the northernmost section; the Central Basins and Highlands Region, which is dominated by the Yukon River basin; and the Pacific Mountain System, which parallels Alaska's southern coast and which
rises to 20,310 ft (6,190 m) at Denali (Mt. McKinley), the highest peak of North America. The islands of SE Alaska and those of the Aleutian Islands chain are partially submerged portions of the Pacific Mountain System and are frequently subjected to volcanic activity and earthquakes. These islands, like those of Hawaii, are the tops of volcanoes that rise from the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa on Hawaii are active volcanoes; the other Hawaiian islands are extinct volcanoes.

**Major Rivers and Lakes**

The United States has an extensive inland waterway system, much of which has been improved for navigation and flood control and developed to produce hydroelectricity and irrigation water by such agencies as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Some of the world's larger dams, artificial lakes, and hydroelectric power plants are on U.S. rivers. The Mississippi-Missouri river system (c.3,890 mi/6,300 km long), is the longest in the United States and the second longest in the world. With its hundreds of tributaries, chief among which are the Red River, the Ohio, and the Arkansas, the Mississippi basin drains more than half of the nation. The Yukon, Columbia, Colorado, and Rio Grande also have huge drainage basins. Other notable river systems include the Connecticut, Hudson, Delaware, Susquehanna, Potomac, James, Alabama, Trinity, San Joaquin, and Sacramento.

The Great Salt Lake and Alaska's Iliamna are the largest U.S. lakes outside the Great Lakes and Lake of the Woods, which are shared with Canada (Lake Michigan and Iliamna are the largest freshwater lakes entirely within the United States). The Illinois Waterway connects the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River, and the New York State Canal System links them with the Hudson. The Intracoastal Waterway provides sheltered passage for shallow draft vessels along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.

**Climate**

The United States has a broad range of climates, varying from the tropical rain-forest of Hawaii and the tropical savanna of S Florida (where the Everglades are found) to the subarctic and tundra climates of Alaska. East of the 100th meridian (the general dividing line between the dry and humid climates) are the humid subtropical climate of SE United States and the humid continental climate of NE United States. Extensive forests are found in both these regions. West of the 100th meridian are the steppe climate and the grasslands of the Great Plains; trees are found along the water courses.

In the SW United States are the deserts of the basin and range province, with the hottest and driest spots in the United States. Along the Pacific coast are the Mediterranean-type climate of S California and, extending north into SE Alaska, the marine West Coast climate. The Pacific Northwest is one of the wettest parts of the United States and is densely forested. The Rocky Mt.s., Cascades, and Sierra Nevada have typical highland climates and are also heavily forested. In addition to the Grand Canyon in Arizona and Great Salt Lake in Utah, widely publicized geographic marvels of the United States include Niagara Falls, on the New York–Canada border; the pink cliffs of Bryce Canyon National Park, in Utah; and the geysers of Yellowstone National Park, primarily in Wyoming (for others, see National Parks and Monuments, table).

**People**

More than 79% of the United States population are urban (and more than 50% are estimated to be suburban, a not strictly defined category that can be taken as a subset of urban), and the great majority of the inhabitants are of European descent. According to the U.S. census, as of 2000 the largest minority were Hispanics, who, at 35,305,818 people, accounted for 12.5% of the population; this figure
includes people of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and many other origins (who may be any race). The African-American population numbered 34,658,190, or 12.3% of the population, although an additional 0.6% of the population were of African-American descent in part. The Asian population totaled 10,242,998 in 2000, or 3.6%, and consisted predominantly of people of Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, or Japanese origin; an additional 0.6% of the population had a mixed-race background that was partially Asian. The Native American population of the United States, which included natives of Alaska such as Eskimos and Aleuts, was 2,475,956, or 0.9%, but an additional 0.6% were of partial Native American descent. Roughly a third of Native Americans lived on reservations, trust lands, territories, or other lands under Native American jurisdiction. Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders numbered 398,835 in 2000, or 0.1% of the population; an additional 0.2% were of partial Pacific Island descent. Persons who defined themselves as being of mixed racial background constituted 2.4% of the population in 2000, but the number of people with a mixed racial background, especially in the African-American and Hispanic populations, was in fact much higher. About 82% of the people speak English and about 11% speak Spanish as their first language. There are large numbers of speakers of many other Indo-European and Asian languages, and most languages of the world are spoken somewhere in the United States.

In addition to the original group of British settlers in the colonies of the Atlantic coast, numerous other national groups were introduced by immigration. Large numbers of Africans were transported in chains under abysmal conditions to work as slaves, chiefly on the plantations of the South. When the United States was developing rapidly with the settlement of the West (where some earlier groups of French and Spanish settlers were absorbed), immigrants from Europe poured into the land. An important early group was the Scotch-Irish. Just before the middle of the 19th cent., Irish and German immigrants were predominant. A little later the Scandinavian nations supplied many settlers.

After the Civil War, the immigrants came mainly from the nations of S and E Europe: from Italy, Greece, Russia, the part of Poland then in Russia, and from Austria-Hungary and the Balkans. During this period, there were also large numbers of immigrants from China. During the peak years of immigration between 1890 and 1924 more than 15 million immigrants arrived in the United States. After the immigration law of 1924 (see immigration), immigration was heavily restricted until the mid-1960s. Since the 1980s, large numbers of new immigrants have arrived. U.S. Census Bureau figures indicate that the proportion of foreign-born people in the U.S. population reached 11.1% in 2000, the highest it had been since the 1930 census; more than 40% of the more than 31 million foreign born had arrived since 1990. More than half of all foreign-born persons in the United States are from Latin America, and more than a quarter are from Asia.

Religion and Education
There is religious freedom in the United States, and the overwhelming majority of Americans are Christians. In turn, the majority of Christians are Protestants, but of many denominations. The largest single Christian group embraces members (some 61 million in 1999) of the Roman Catholic Church; the Orthodox Eastern Church is also represented. In addition, roughly 2.5% of Americans adhere to Judaism, and some 1%–2% are Muslims. Education in the United States is administered chiefly by the states. Each of the 50 states has a free and public primary and secondary school system. There are also in the United States more than 3,500 institutions of higher learning, both privately supported and state supported (see separate articles on individual colleges and universities).
Economy
The mineral and agricultural resources of the United States are tremendous. Although the country was virtually self-sufficient in the past, increasing consumption, especially of energy, continues to make it dependent on certain imports. It is, nevertheless, the world's largest producer of both electrical and nuclear energy. It leads all nations in the production of liquid natural gas, aluminum, sulfur, phosphates, and salt. It is also a leading producer of copper, gold, coal, crude oil, nitrogen, iron ore, silver, uranium, lead, zinc, mica, molybdenum, and magnesium. Although its output has declined, the United States is among the world leaders in the production of pig iron and ferroalloys, steel, motor vehicles, and synthetic rubber. Agriculturally, the United States is first in the production of cheese, corn, soybeans, and tobacco. The United States is also one of the largest producers of cattle, hogs, cow's milk, butter, cotton, oats, wheat, barley, and sugar; it is the world's leading exporter of wheat and corn and ranks third in rice exports. In 1995, U.S. fisheries ranked fifth in the world in total production.

Major U.S. exports include aircraft, motor vehicles and parts, food, iron and steel products, electric and electronic equipment, industrial and power-generating machinery, organic chemicals, transistors, telecommunications equipment, pharmaceuticals, and consumer goods. Leading imports include ores and metal scraps, petroleum and petroleum products, machinery, transportation equipment (especially automobiles), food, clothing, computers, and paper and paper products. The major U.S. trading partners are Canada (in the world's largest bilateral trade relationship), Mexico, China, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, and South Korea. Despite the steady growth in imports, the gross domestic product also has continued to rise, and in 2006 it was easily the largest in the world at about $13 trillion. The development of the economy has been spurred by the growth of a complex network of communications not only by railroad, highways, inland waterways, and air but also by telephone, radio, television, computer (including the Internet), and fax machine. This infrastructure has fostered not only agricultural and manufacturing growth but has also contributed to the leading position the United States holds in world tourism revenues and to the ongoing shift to a service-based economy. In 1996 some 74% of Americans worked in service industries, a proportion matched, among major economic powers, only by Canada.

Government
The government of the United States is that of a federal republic set up by the Constitution of the United States, adopted by the Constitutional Convention of 1787. There is a division of powers between the federal government and the state governments. The federal government consists of three branches: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. The executive power is vested in the President and, in the event of the President's incapacity, the Vice President. (For a chronological list of all the presidents and vice presidents of the United States, including their terms in office and political parties, see the table entitled Presidents of the United States.) The executive conducts the administrative business of the nation with the aid of a cabinet composed of the Attorney General and the Secretaries of the Departments of State; Treasury; Defense; Interior; Agriculture; Commerce; Labor; Health and Human Services; Education; Housing and Urban Development; Transportation; Energy; and Veterans' Affairs.

The Congress of the United States, the legislative branch, is bicameral and consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The judicial branch is formed by the federal courts and headed by the U.S. Supreme Court. The members of the Congress are elected by universal suffrage (see election) as are the members of the electoral college, which formally chooses the President and the Vice President.
History

European Exploration and Settlement

Exploration of the area now included in the United States was spurred after Christopher Columbus, sailing for the Spanish monarchy, made his voyage in 1492. John Cabot explored the North American coast for England in 1498. Men who were important explorers for Spain in what now constitutes the United States include Ponce de León, Cabeza de Vaca, Hernando De Soto, and Coronado; important explorers for France were Giovanni da Verrazzano, Samuel de Champlain, Louis Jolliet, Jacques Marquette, and La Salle. These three nations—England, Spain, and France—were the chief nations to establish colonies in the present United States, although others also took part, especially the Netherlands in the establishment of New Netherland (explored by Henry Hudson), which became New York, and Sweden in a colony on the Delaware River (see New Sweden).

The first permanent settlement in the present United States was Saint Augustine (Florida), founded in 1565 by the Spaniard Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. Spanish control came to be exercised over Florida, West Florida, Texas, and a large part of the Southwest, including California. For the purposes of finding precious metals and of converting heathens to Catholicism, the Spanish colonies in the present United States were relatively unfruitful and thus were never fully developed. The French established strongholds on the St. Lawrence River (Quebec and Montreal) and spread their influence over the Great Lakes country and along the Mississippi; the colony of Louisiana was a flourishing French settlement. The French government, like the Spanish, tolerated only the Catholic faith, and it implanted the rigid and feudalistic seignorial system of France in its North American possessions. Partly for these reasons, the French settlements attracted few colonists.

The English settlements, which were on the Atlantic seaboard, developed in patterns more suitable to the New World, with greater religious freedom and economic opportunity. The first permanent English settlement was made at Jamestown (Virginia) in 1607. The first English settlements in Virginia were managed by a chartered commercial company, the Virginia Company; economic motives were paramount to the company in founding the settlements. The Virginia colony early passed to control by the crown and became a characteristic type of English colony—the royal colony. Another type—the corporate colony—was initiated by the settlement of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony in 1620 and by the establishment of the more important Massachusetts Bay colony by the Puritans in 1630.

Religious motives were important in the founding of these colonies. The colonists of Massachusetts Bay brought with them from England the charter and the governing corporation of the colony, which thus became a corporate one, i.e., one controlled by its own resident corporation. The corporate status of the Plymouth Colony, evinced in the Mayflower Compact, was established by the purchase (1626) of company and charter from the holders in England. Connecticut and Rhode Island, which were offshoots of Massachusetts, owed allegiance to no English company; their corporate character was confirmed by royal charters, granted to Connecticut in 1662 and to Rhode Island in 1663. A third type of colony was the proprietary, founded by lords proprietors under quasi-feudal grants from the king; prime examples are Maryland (under the Calvert family) and Pennsylvania (under William Penn).

The religious and political turmoil of the Puritan Revolution in England, as well as the repression of the Huguenots in France, helped to stimulate emigration to the English colonies. Hopes of economic betterment brought thousands from England as well as a number from Germany and other continental countries. To obtain passage across the Atlantic, the poor often indentured themselves to masters in

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the colonies for a specified number of years. The colonial population was also swelled by criminals transported from England as a means of punishment. Once established as freedmen, former bondsmen and transportees were frequently allotted land with which to make their way in the New World.

Colonial America

The colonies were subject to English mercantilism in the form of Navigation Acts, begun under Cromwell and developed more fully after the Stuart Restoration. As shown by C. M. Andrews, G. L. Beer, and later historians, the colonies at first benefited by these acts, which established a monopoly of the English market for certain colonial products. Distinct colonial economies emerged, reflecting the regional differences of climate and topography. Agriculture was of primary importance in all the regions.

In New England many crops were grown, corn being the closest to a staple, and agricultural holdings were usually of moderate size. Fur trade was at first important, but it died out when the New England Confederation defeated Philip in King Philip's War and the Native Americans were dispersed. Fishing and commerce gained in importance, and the economic expansion of Massachusetts encouraged the founding of other New England colonies.

In the middle colonies small farms abounded, interspersed with occasional great estates, and diverse crops were grown, wheat being most important. Land was almost universally held through some form of feudal grant, as it was also in the South. Commerce grew quickly in the middle colonies, and large towns flourished, notably Philadelphia and New York.

By the late 17th cent. small farms in the coastal areas of the South were beginning to give way to large plantations; these were developed with the slave labor of Africans, who were imported in ever-increasing numbers. During the 18th cent. some 1.5 million African slaves were transported to the colonies, more than three times the number of free immigrants. Plantations were almost exclusively devoted to cultivation of the great Southern staples—tobacco, rice, and, later, indigo. Fur trade and lumbering were long important. Although some towns developed, the Southern economy remained the least diversified and the most rural in colonial America.

In religion, too, the colonies developed in varied patterns. In Massachusetts the religious theocracy of the Puritan oligarchy flourished. By contrast, Rhode Island allowed full religious freedom; there Baptists were in the majority, but other sects were soon in evidence. New Jersey and South Carolina also allowed complete religious liberty, and such colonies as Maryland and Pennsylvania established large measures of toleration. Maryland was at first a haven for Catholics, and Pennsylvania similarly a haven for Quakers, but within a few decades numerous Anglicans had settled in those colonies. Anglicans were also much in evidence further south, as were Presbyterians, most of them Scotch-Irish.

Politically, the colonies developed representative institutions, the most important being the vigorous colonial assemblies. Popular participation was somewhat limited by property qualifications. In the proprietary colonies, particularly, the settlers came into conflict with the executive authority. Important points of difference arose over the granting of large estates to a few, over the great power of the proprietors, over the failure of the proprietors (who generally lived in England) to cope with problems of defense, and over religious grievances, frequently stemming from a struggle for dominance between Anglicans and other groups. In corporate Massachusetts religious grievances were created by the zealous Puritan demand for conformity.

These conflicts, together with England's desire to coordinate empire defenses against France and to

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gain closer control of the colonies' thriving economic life, stimulated England to convert corporate and proprietary colonies into royal ones. In general, royal control brought more orderly government and greater religious toleration, but it also focused the colonists' grievances on the mother country. The policies of the governors, who were the chief instruments of English will in the colonies, frequently met serious opposition. The colonial assemblies clashed with the governors—notably with Edmund Andros and Francis Nicholson—especially over matters of taxation. The assemblies successfully resisted royal demands for permanent income to support royal policies and used their powers over finance to expand their own jurisdiction.

As the 18th cent. progressed, colonial grievances were exacerbated. The British mercantile regulations, beneficial to agriculture, impeded the colonies' commercial and industrial development. However, economic and social growth continued, and by the mid-18th cent. there had been created a greater sense of a separate, thriving, and distinctly American, albeit varied, civilization. In New England, Puritan values were modified by the impact of commerce and by the influence of the Enlightenment, while in the South the planter aristocracy developed a lavish mode of life. Enlightenment ideals also gained influential adherents in the South. Higher education flourished in such institutions as Harvard, William and Mary, and King's College (now Columbia Univ.). The varied accomplishments of Benjamin Franklin epitomized colonial common sense at its most enlightened and productive level.

A religious movement of importance emerged in the revivals of the Great Awakening, stimulated by Jonathan Edwards; the movement ultimately led to a strengthening of Methodism. Also inherent in this movement was egalitarian sentiment, which progressed but was not to triumph in the colonial era. One manifestation of egalitarianism was the long-continued conflict between the men of the frontiers and the wealthy Eastern oligarchs who dominated the assemblies, a conflict exemplified in the Regulator movement. Colonial particularism, still stronger than national feeling, caused the failure of the Albany Congress to achieve permanent union. However, internal strife and disunity remained a less urgent issue than the controversy with Great Britain.

The States in Union

After the British and colonial forces had combined to drive the French from Canada and the Great Lakes region in the French and Indian War (1754–60; see under French and Indian Wars), the colonists felt less need of British protection; but at this very time the British began colonial reorganization in an effort to impose on the colonists the costs of their own defense. Thus was set off the complex chain of events that united colonial sentiment against Great Britain and culminated in the American Revolution (1775–83; the events are described under that heading).

The Revolution resulted in the independence of the Thirteen Colonies: Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia; their territories were recognized as extending north to Canada and west to the Mississippi River. The Revolution also broadened representation in government, advanced the movement for separation of church and state in America, increased opportunities for westward expansion, and brought the abolition of the remnants of feudal land tenure. The view that the Revolution had been fought for local liberty against strong central control reinforced the particularism of the states and was reflected in the weak union established under the Articles of Confederation (see Confederation, Articles of).

Before ratification of the Articles (1781), conflicting claims of states to Western territories had been
settled by the cession of Western land rights to the federal government; the Ordinance of 1787 established a form of government for territories and a method of admitting them as states to the Union. But the national government floundered. It could not obtain commercial treaties or enforce its will in international relations, and, largely because it could not raise adequate revenue and had no executive authority, it was weak domestically. Local economic depressions bred discontent that erupted in Shays's Rebellion, further revealing the weakness of the federal government.

Advocates of strong central government bitterly attacked the Articles of Confederation; supported particularly by professional and propertied groups, they had a profound influence on the Constitution drawn up by the Constitutional Convention of 1787. The Constitution created a national government with ample powers for effective rule, which were limited by “checks and balances” to forestall tyranny or radicalism. Its concept of a strong, orderly Union was popularized by the Federalist papers (see Federalist, The) of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, which played an important part in winning ratification of the Constitution by the separate states.

**Washington, Adams, and Jefferson**

The first person to be elected President under the Constitution was the hero of the Revolution, George Washington. Washington introduced many government practices and institutions, including the cabinet. Jay's Treaty (1794) allayed friction with Great Britain. Hamilton, as Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, promulgated a strong state and attempted to advance the economic development of the young country by a neomercantilist program; this included the establishment of a protective tariff, a mint, and the first Bank of the United States as well as assumption of state and private Revolutionary debts. The controversy raised by these policies bred divisions along factional and, ultimately, party lines.

Hamilton and his followers, who eventually formed the Federalist party, favored wide activity by the federal government under a broad interpretation of the Constitution. Their opponents, who adhered to principles laid down by Thomas Jefferson and who became the Democratic Republican or Democratic party, favored narrow construction—limited federal jurisdiction and activities. To an extent these divisions were supported by economic differences, as the Democrats largely spoke for the agrarian point of view and the Federalists represented propertied and mercantile interests.

Extreme democrats like Thomas Paine had ebullient faith in popular government and popular mores; Joel Barlow, too, envisioned a great popular culture evolving in America. From such optimists came schemes for broad popular education and participation in government. Men like John Adams had mixed views on the good sense of the masses, and many more conservative thinkers associated the “people” with vulgarity and ineptitude. The Federalists generally represented a pessimistic and the Democrats an optimistic view of man's inherent capacity to govern and develop himself; in practice, however, the values held by these two groups were often mixed. That a long road to democracy was still to be traveled is seen in the fact that in the late 18th cent. few but the economically privileged took part in political affairs.

The Federalists were victorious in electing John Adams to the presidency in 1796. Federalist conservatism and anti-French sentiment were given vent in the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and in other acts. Deteriorating relations with France were seen in the XYZ Affair and the “half war” (1798–1800), in which U.S. warships engaged French vessels in the Caribbean. The so-called Revolution of 1800 swept the Federalists from power and brought Jefferson to the presidency. Jefferson did bring a plainer and more republican style to government, and under him the Alien and Sedition Acts and other
Federalist laws were allowed to lapse or were repealed.

Jefferson moved toward stronger use of federal powers, however, in negotiating the Louisiana Purchase (1803). In foreign policy he steered an officially neutral course between Great Britain and France, resisting the war sentiment roused by British impressment of American seamen and by both British and French violations of American shipping. He fostered the drastic Embargo Act of 1807 in an attempt to gain recognition of American rights through economic pressure, but the embargo struck hardest against the American economy, especially in New England.

**Madison, Monroe, and Adams**

Under Jefferson's successor, James Madison, the continued depredations of American shipping, combined with the clamor of American “war hawks” who coveted Canada and Florida, led to the War of 1812, which was, however, opposed in New England (see Hartford Convention). The Treaty of Ghent (see Ghent, Treaty of) settled no specific issues of the war, but did confirm the independent standing of the young republic. Politically, the period that followed was the so-called era of good feeling. The Federalists had disintegrated under the impact of the country's westward expansion and its new interests and ideals. Democrats of all sections had by now adopted a Federalist approach to national development and were temporarily in agreement on a nationalist, expansionist economic policy. This policy was implemented in 1816 by the introduction of internal improvements, a protective tariff, and the second Bank of the United States.

The same policies were continued under James Monroe. The Monroe Doctrine (1823), which proclaimed U.S. opposition to European intervention or colonization in the American hemisphere, introduced the long-continuing U.S. concern for the integrity of the Western Hemisphere. Domestically, the strength of the federal government was increased by the judicial decisions of John Marshall, who had already helped establish the power of the U.S. Supreme Court. By 1820, however, sectional differences were arousing political discord. The sections of the country had long been developing along independent lines.

In the North, merchants, manufacturers, inventors, farmers, and factory hands were busy with commerce, agricultural improvements, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. In the South, Eli Whitney's cotton gin had brought in its wake a new staple; cotton was king, and the new states of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi were the pride of the cotton kingdom. The accession of Florida (1819) further swelled the domain of the South. The American West was expanding as the frontier rapidly advanced. Around the turn of the century settlement of territory W of the Appalachians had given rise to the new states of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. Settlers continued to move farther west, and the frontier remained a molding force in American life.

The Missouri Compromise (1820) temporarily resolved the issue of slavery in new states, but under the presidency of John Quincy Adams sectional differences were aggravated. Particular friction, leading to the nullification movement, was created by the tariff of 1828, which was highly favorable to Northern manufacturing but a “Tariff of Abominations” to the agrarian South. In the 1820s and 30s the advance of democracy brought manhood suffrage to many states and virtual direct election of the President, and party nominating conventions replaced the caucus. Separation of church and state became virtually complete.

**Jackson to the Mexican War**

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An era of political vigor was begun with the election (1828) of Andrew Jackson to the presidency. If Jackson was not, as sometimes represented, the incarnation of frontier democracy, he nonetheless symbolized the advent of the common man to political power. He provided powerful executive leadership, attuned to popular support, committing himself to a strong foreign policy and to internal improvements for the West. His stand for economic individualism and his attacks on such bastions of the moneyed interests as the Bank of the United States won the approval of the growing middle class. Jackson acted firmly for the Union in the nullification controversy. But the South became increasingly dissident, and John C. Calhoun emerged as its chief spokesman with his states' rights doctrine.

Opponents of Jackson's policies, including both Northern and Southern conservative propertyed interests, amalgamated to form the Whig party, in which Henry Clay and Daniel Webster were long the dominant figures. Jackson's successor, Martin Van Buren, attempted to perpetuate Jacksonian policies, but his popularity was undermined by the panic of 1837. In 1840, in their “Log Cabin and Hard Cider” campaign, the conservative Whigs adopted and perfected the Democratic party's techniques of mass appeal and succeeded in electing William Henry Harrison as President. The West was winning greater attention in American life, and in the 1840s expansion to the Pacific was fervently proclaimed as the "manifest destiny" of the United States.

Annexation of the Republic of Texas (which had won its own independence from Mexico), long delayed primarily by controversy over its slave-holding status, was accomplished by Harrison's successor, John Tyler, three days before the expiration of his term. Tyler's action was prompted by the surprising victory of his Democratic successor, James K. Polk, who had campaigned on the planks of "reoccupation of Oregon" and "reannexation of Texas." The annexation of Texas precipitated the Mexican War; by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo the United States acquired two fifths of the territory then belonging to Mexico, including California and the present American Southwest. In 1853 these territories were rounded out by the Gadsden Purchase. Although in the dispute with Great Britain over the Columbia River country (see Oregon), Americans demanded “Fifty-four forty or fight,” under President Polk a peaceful if more modest settlement was reached. Thus the United States gained its Pacific Northwest, and “manifest destiny” was virtually fulfilled.

In California the discovery of gold in 1848 brought the rush of forty-niners, swelling population and making statehood for California a pressing question. The westward movement was also stimulated by many other factors. The great profits from open-range cattle ranching brought a stream of ranchers to the area (this influx was to reach fever pitch after the Civil War). The American farmer, with his abundant land, was often prodigal in its cultivation, and as the soil depleted he continued to move farther west, settling the virgin territory. Soil exhaustion was particularly rapid in the South, where a one-crop economy prevailed, but because cotton profits were frequently high the plantation system quickly spread as far west as Texas. Occupation of the West was also sped by European immigrants hungry for land.

Slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction

By the mid-19th cent. the territorial gains and westward movement of the United States were focusing legislative argument on the extension of slavery to the new territories and breaking down the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The Wilmot Proviso illustrated Northern antislavery demands, while Southerners, too, became increasingly intransigent. Only with great effort was the Compromise of 1850 achieved, and it was to be the last great compromise between the sections. The new Western states, linked in
outlook to the North, had long since caused the South to lose hold of the House of Representatives, and Southern parity in the Senate was threatened by the prospective addition of more free states than slaveholding ones. The South demanded stronger enforcement of fugitive slave laws and, dependent on sympathetic Presidents, obtained it from Millard Fillmore and especially from Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan.

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), which repealed the Missouri Compromise, led to violence between factions in “bleeding Kansas” and spurred the founding of the new Republican party. Although there was sentiment for moderation and compromise in both North and South, it became increasingly difficult to take a middle stand on the slavery issue, and extremists came to the fore on both sides. Southerners, unable to accept the end of slavery, upon which their entire system of life was based, and fearful of slave insurrection (especially after the revolt led by Nat Turner in 1831), felt threatened by the abolitionists, who regarded themselves as leaders in a moral crusade. Southerners attempted to uphold slavery as universally beneficial and biblically sanctioned, while Northerners were increasingly unable to countenance the institution.

Vigorous antislavery groups like the Free-Soil party had already arisen, and as the conflict became more embittered it rent the older parties. The Whig party was shattered, and its Northern wing was largely absorbed in the new antislavery Republican party. The Democrats were also torn, and the compromise policies of Stephen A. Douglas were of dwindling satisfaction to a divided nation. Moderation could not withstand the impact of the decision in the Dred Scott Case, which denied the right of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories, or the provocation of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry (1859). The climax came in 1860 when the Republican Abraham Lincoln defeated three opponents to win the presidency.

Southern leaders, feeling there was no possibility of fair treatment under a Republican administration, resorted to secession from the Union and formed the Confederacy. The attempts of the seceding states to take over federal property within their borders (notably Fort Sumter in Charleston, S.C.) precipitated the Civil War (1861–65), which resulted in a complete victory for the North and the end of all slavery. The ensuing problems of Reconstruction in the South were complicated by bitter struggles, including the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson in 1868. Military rule in parts of the South continued through the administrations of Ulysses S. Grant, which were also notable for their outrageous corruption. A result of the disputed election of 1876, in which the decision was given to Rutherford B. Hayes over Samuel J. Tilden, was the end of Reconstruction and the reentry of the South into national politics.

The Late Nineteenth Century

The remainder of the 19th cent. was marked by railroad building (assisted by generous federal land grants) and the disappearance of the American frontier. Great mineral wealth was discovered and exploited, and important technological innovations sped industrialization, which had already gained great impetus during the Civil War. Thus developed an economy based on steel, oil, railroads, and machines, an economy that a few decades after the Civil War ranked first in the world. Mammoth corporations such as the Standard Oil trust were formed, and “captains of industry” like John D. Rockefeller and financiers like J. P. Morgan (see under Morgan, family) controlled huge resources.

In the latter part of the 19th cent. rapid industrialization had made the United States the world's largest, most productive, and most technically advanced nation, and the era saw the rise of the modern
American city. These urban areas attracted huge numbers of people from foreign countries as well as rural America. The widespread use of steel and electricity allowed innovations that transformed the urban landscape. Electric lighting made cities viable at night as well as during the day. Electricity was also used to power streetcars, elevated railways, and subways. The growth of mass transit allowed people to live further away from work, and was therefore largely responsible for the demise of the “walking city.” With the advent of skyscrapers, which utilized steel construction technology, cities were able to grow vertically as well as horizontally.

Into the “land of promise” poured new waves of immigrants; some acquired dazzling riches, but many others suffered in a competitive and unregulated economic age. Behind the facade of the “Gilded Age,” with its aura of peace and general prosperity, a whole range of new problems was created, forcing varied groups to promulgate new solutions. In the 1870s the expanding Granger movement attempted to combat railroad and marketing abuses and to achieve an element of agrarian cooperation; this movement stimulated some regulation of utilities on the state level. Labor, too, began to combine against grueling factory conditions, but the opposition of business to unions was frequently overpowering, and the bulk of labor remained unorganized.

Some strike successes were won by the Knights of Labor, but this union, discredited by the Haymarket Square riot, was succeeded in prominence by the less divisive American Federation of Labor (see American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations). Massachusetts led the way (1874) with the first effective state legislation for an eight-hour day, but similar state and national legislation was sparse (see labor law), and the federal government descended harshly on labor in the bloody strike at Pullman, Ill., and in other disputes. Belief in laissez faire and the influence of big business in both national parties, especially in the Republican party, delayed any widespread reform.

The Presidents of the late 19th cent. were generally titular leaders of modest political distinction; however, they did institute a few reforms. Both Hayes and his successor, James A. Garfield, favored civil service reforms, and after Garfield's death Chester A. Arthur approved passage of a civil service act; thus the vast, troublesome presidential patronage system gave way to more regular, efficient administration. In 1884 a reform group, led by Carl Schurz, bolted from the Republicans and helped elect Grover Cleveland, the first Democratic President since before the Civil War. Under President Benjamin Harrison the Sherman Antitrust Act was passed (1890).

The attempt of the Greenback party to combine sponsorship of free coinage of silver (see free silver) and other aids to the debtor class with planks favorable to labor failed, but reform forces gathered strength, as witnessed by the rise of the Populist party. The reform movement was spurred by the economic panic of 1893, and in 1896 the Democrats nominated for President William Jennings Bryan, who had adopted the Populist platform. He orated eloquently for free silver, but was defeated by William McKinley, who gained ardent support from big business.

**Expansionists and Progressives**

By the 1890s a new wave of expansionist sentiment was affecting U.S. foreign policy. With the purchase of Alaska (1867) and the rapid settlement of the last Western territory, Oklahoma, American capital and attention were directed toward the Pacific and the Caribbean. The United States established commercial and then political hegemony in the Hawaiian Islands and annexed them in 1898. In that year expansionist energy found release in the Spanish-American War, which resulted in U.S. acquisition of Puerto Rico, the Philippine Islands, and Guam, and in a U.S. quasi-protectorate over Cuba.

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American ownership of the Philippines involved military subjugation of the people, who rose in revolt when they realized that they would not be granted their independence; the Philippine Insurrection (1899–1901) cost more American lives and dollars than the Spanish-American War. Widening its horizons, the United States formulated the Open Door policy (1900), which expressed its interest in China. Established as a world power with interests in two oceans, the United States intervened in the Panama revolution to facilitate construction of the Panama Canal; this was but one of its many involvements in Latin American affairs under Theodore Roosevelt and later Presidents.

By the time of Roosevelt's administration (1901–9), the progressive reform movement had taken definite shape in the country. Progressivism was partly a mode of thought, as witnessed by the progressive education program of John Dewey; as such it was a pragmatic attempt to mold modern institutions for the benefit of all. Progressives, too, were the muckrakers, who attacked abuse and waste in industry and in society. In its politics as shaped by R. M. La Follette and others, progressivism adopted many Populist planks but promoted them from a more urban and forward-looking viewpoint. Progressivism was dramatized by the magnetic Roosevelt, who denounced "malefactors of great wealth" and demanded a "square deal" for labor; however, in practice he was a rather cautious reformer. He did make some attacks on trusts, and he promoted regulation of interstate commerce as well as passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906) and legislation for the conservation of natural resources.

Roosevelt's hand-picked successor, William H. Taft, continued some reforms but in his foreign policy and in the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act, passed in his administration, favored big business. Taft's conservatism antagonized Roosevelt, who split with the Republican party in 1912 and ran for the presidency on the ticket of the Progressive party (see also Insurgents). But the presidency was won by the Democratic reform candidate, Woodrow Wilson. Wilson's "New Freedom" brought many progressive ideas to legislative fruition. The Federal Reserve System and the Federal Trade Commission were established, and the Adamson Act and the Clayton Antitrust Act were passed. Perhaps more than on the national level, progressivism triumphed in the states in legislation beneficial to labor, in the furthering of education, and in the democratization of electoral procedures. Wilson did not radically alter the aggressive Caribbean policy of his predecessors; U.S. marines were sent to Nicaragua, and difficulties with Mexico were capped by the landing of U.S. forces in the city of Veracruz and by the campaign against Francisco (Pancho) Villa.

World War I

The nation's interest in world peace had already been expressed through participation in the Hague Conferences, and when World War I burst upon Europe, Wilson made efforts to keep the United States neutral; in 1916 he was reelected on a peace platform. However, American sympathies and interests were actively with the Allies (especially with Great Britain and France), and although Britain and Germany both violated American neutral rights on the seas, German submarine attacks constituted the more dramatic provocation. On Apr. 6, 1917, the United States entered the war on the side of the Allies and provided crucial manpower and supplies for the Allied victory. Wilson's Fourteen Points to insure peace and democracy captured the popular imagination of Europe and were a factor in Germany's decision to seek an armistice; however, at the Paris Peace Conference after the war, Wilson was thwarted from fully implementing his program.

In the United States, isolationist sentiment against participation in the League of Nations, an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles (see Versailles, Treaty of), was led by Senator William E. Borah and

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other “irreconcilables.” The majority of Republican Senators, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, insisted upon amendments that would preserve U.S. sovereignty, and although Wilson fought for his original proposals, they were rejected. Isolationist sentiment prevailed during the 1920s, and while the United States played a major role in the naval conferences for disarmament and in the engineering of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which outlawed war, its general lack of interest in international concerns was seen in its highly nationalistic economic policies, notably its insistence (later modified) on collecting the war debts of foreign countries and the passage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act.

From Prosperity to Depression

The country voted for a return to “normalcy” when it elected Warren G. Harding President in 1920, but the ensuing period was a time of rapid change, and the old normalcy was not to be regained. The Republican governments of the decade, although basically committed to laissez faire, actively encouraged corporate mergers and subsidized aviation and the merchant marine. Harding’s administration, marred by the Teapot Dome scandal, gave way on his death to the presidency of Calvin Coolidge, and the nation embarked on a spectacular industrial and financial boom. In the 1920s the nation became increasingly urban, and everyday life was transformed as the “consumer revolution” brought the spreading use of automobiles, telephones, radios, and other appliances. The pace of living quickened, and mores became less restrained, while fortunes were rapidly accumulated on the skyrocketing stock market, in real estate speculation, and elsewhere. To some it seemed a golden age. But agriculture was not prosperous, and industry and finance became dangerously overextended.

In 1929 there began the Great Depression, which reached worldwide proportions. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover proposed a moratorium on foreign debts, but this and other measures failed to prevent economic collapse. In the 1932 election Hoover was overwhelmingly defeated by the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt. The new President immediately instituted his New Deal with vigorous measures. To meet the critical financial emergency he instituted a “bank holiday.” Congress, called into special session, enacted a succession of laws, some of them to meet the economic crisis with relief measures, others to put into operation long-range social and economic reforms. Some of the most important agencies created were the National Recovery Administration, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Public Works Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. This program was further broadened in later sessions with other agencies, notably the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Works Progress Administration (later the Work Projects Administration).

Laws also created a social security program. The program was dynamic and, in many areas, unprecedented. It created a vast machinery by which the state could promote economic recovery and social welfare. Opponents of these measures argued that they violated individual rights, besides being extravagant and wasteful. Adverse decisions on several of the measures by the U.S. Supreme Court tended to slow the pace of reform and caused Roosevelt to attempt unsuccessfully to revise the court. Although interest centered chiefly on domestic affairs during the 1930s, Roosevelt continued and expanded the policy of friendship toward the Latin American nations which Herbert Hoover had initiated; this full-blown “good-neighbor” policy proved generally fruitful for the United States (see Pan-Americanism). Roosevelt was reelected by an overwhelming majority in 1936 and won easily in 1940 even though he was breaking the no-third-term tradition.

World War II

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The ominous situation abroad was chiefly responsible for Roosevelt’s continuance at the national helm. By the late 1930s the Axis nations (Germany and Italy) in Europe as well as Japan in East Asia had already disrupted world peace. As wars began in China, Ethiopia, and Spain, the United States sought at first to bulwark its insular security by the Neutrality Act. As Axis aggression led to the outbreak of the European war in Sept., 1939, the United States still strove to stay out of it, despite increasing sympathy for the Allies. But after the fall of France in June, 1940, the support of the United States for beleaguered Britain became more overt. In Mar., 1941, lend-lease aid was extended to the British and, in November, to the Russians. The threat of war had already caused the adoption of selective service to build the armed strength of the nation. Hemisphere defense was enlarged, and the United States drew closer to Great Britain with the issuance of the Atlantic Charter.

In Asian affairs the Roosevelt government had vigorously protested Japan's career of conquest and its establishment of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” After the Japanese takeover of French Indochina (July, 1941), with its inherent threat to the Philippines, the U.S. government froze all Japanese assets in the United States. Diplomatic relations grew taut, but U.S.-Japanese discussions were still being carried on when, on Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. The United States promptly declared war, and four days later Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. (For an account of military and naval events, see World War II.)

The country efficiently mobilized its vast resources, transforming factories to war plants and building a mighty military force which included most able-bodied young men and many young women. The creation of a great number of government war agencies to control and coordinate materials, transportation, and manpower brought unprecedented government intervention into national life. Rationing, price controls, and other devices were instituted in an attempt to prevent serious inflation or dislocation in the civilian economy.

The war underscored the importance of U.S. resources and the prestige and power of the United States in world affairs. A series of important conferences outlined the policies for the war and the programs for the peace after victory; among these were the Moscow Conferences, the Casablanca Conference, the Cairo Conference, the Tehran Conference, and the Yalta Conference, at which Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin planned for postwar settlement. Roosevelt was also a key figure in the plans for the United Nations.

After Roosevelt’s sudden death in Apr., 1945, Harry S. Truman became President. A month later the European war ended when Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945. Truman went to the Potsdam Conference (July–August), where various questions of the peacetime administration of Europe were settled, many on an ad interim basis, pending the conclusion of peace treaties. Before the war ended with the defeat of Japan, the United States developed and used a fateful and revolutionary weapon of war, the atomic bomb. The Japanese surrender, announced Aug. 14, 1945, and signed Sept. 2, brought the war to a close.

Peacetime readjustment was successfully effected. The government’s “G.I. Bill” enabled many former servicemen to obtain free schooling, and millions of other veterans were absorbed by the economy, which boomed in fulfilling the demands for long-unobtainable consumer goods. The shortening of the postwar factory work week and the proportionate reduction of wages precipitated a rash of strikes, causing the government to pass the Taft-Hartley Labor Act (1947). Some inflation occurred by 1947 as wartime economic controls were abandoned. Congress passed a host of Truman's measures relating to
minimum wages, public housing, farm surpluses, and credit regulation; thus was instituted acceptance of comprehensive government intervention in times of prosperity. The nation's support of Truman's policies was signified when it returned him to the presidency in 1948 in an upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey.

**The United States in a Divided World**

The most striking postwar development was America's new peacetime involvement in international affairs. U.S. support for the United Nations symbolized its desire for peace and order in international relations. However, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union worsened during the late 1940s. In addition, a serious human problem was presented by Europe, prostrated and near starvation after years of war. The Truman Doctrine attempted to thwart Soviet expansion in Europe; massive loans, culminating in the Marshall Plan, were vital in reviving European economies and thus in diminishing the appeal of Communism.

As the cold war intensified, the United States took steps (1948) to nullify the Soviet blockade of Berlin and played the leading role in forming a new alliance of Western nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In the Korean War, U.S. forces played the chief part in combating the North Korean and Chinese attack on South Korea. Thus the United States cast off its traditional peacetime isolationism and accepted its position as a prime mover in world affairs.

International policy had significant repercussions at home. The fear of domestic Communism and subversion almost became a national obsession, culminating in such sensational events as the Alger Hiss case and the trial and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (see Rosenberg Case). Security measures and loyalty checks in the government and elsewhere were tightened, alleged Communists were prosecuted under the Smith Act of 1940, and employees in varied fields were dismissed for questionable political affiliations, past or present. The most notorious prosecutor of alleged Communists was Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose extreme methods were later recognized as threats to freedom of speech and democratic principles.

Two decades of Democratic control of the White House came to an end with the presidential election of 1952, when Dwight D. Eisenhower was swept into office over the Democratic candidate, Adlai E. Stevenson. Although it did not try to roll back the social legislation passed by its Democratic predecessors, the Eisenhower administration was committed to a laissez-faire domestic policy. By the mid-1950s, America was in the midst of a great industrial boom, and stock prices were skyrocketing. In foreign affairs the Eisenhower administration was internationalist in outlook, although it sternly opposed Communist power and threatened “massive retaliation” for Communist aggression. Some antagonism came from the neutral nations of Asia and Africa, partly because of the U.S. association with former colonial powers and partly because U.S. foreign aid more often than not had the effect of strengthening ruling oligarchies abroad.

In the race for technological superiority the United States exploded (1952) the first hydrogen bomb, but was second to the USSR in launching (Jan. 31, 1958) an artificial satellite and in testing an intercontinental guided missile. However, spurred by Soviet advances, the United States made rapid progress in space exploration and missile research. In the crucial domestic issue of racial integration, the U.S. Supreme Court in a series of decisions supported the efforts of African-American citizens to achieve full civil rights. In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th states of the Union. Despite hopes for “peaceful coexistence,” negotiations with the USSR for nuclear disarmament failed

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to achieve accord, and Berlin remained a serious source of conflict.

In 1961, the older Eisenhower gave way to the youngest President ever elected, John F. Kennedy, who defeated Republican candidate Richard M. Nixon. President Kennedy called for “new frontiers” of American endeavor, but had difficulty securing Congressional support for his domestic programs (integration, tax reform, medical benefits for the aged). Kennedy's foreign policy combined such humanitarian innovations as the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress with the traditional opposition to Communist aggrandizement.

After breaking relations with Cuba, which, under Fidel Castro, had clearly moved within the Communist orbit, the United States supported (1961) an ill-fated invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro forces. In 1962, in reaction to the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, the United States blockaded Soviet military shipments to Cuba and demanded the dismantling of Soviet bases there. The two great powers seemed on the brink of war, but within a week the USSR acceded to U.S. demands. In the meantime, the United States achieved an important gain in space exploration with the orbital flight around the earth in a manned satellite by Col. John H. Glenn. The tensions of the cold war eased when, in 1963, the United States and the Soviet Union reached an accord on a limited ban of nuclear testing.

### The Great Society and the Vietnam War

On Nov. 22, 1963, President Kennedy was assassinated while riding in a motorcade in Dallas, Tex. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, proclaimed a continuation of Kennedy's policies and was able to bring many Kennedy measures to legislative fruition. Significant progress toward racial equality was achieved with a momentous Civil Rights Act (1964), a Voting Rights Act (1965), and the 24th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished the poll tax. Other legislation, reflecting Johnson's declaration of a “war on poverty” and his stated aim of creating a “Great Society,” included a comprehensive Economic Opportunity Act (1964) and bills providing for tax reduction, medical care for the aged, an increased minimum wage, urban rehabilitation, and aid to education.

Public approval was given in the landslide victory won by Johnson over his Republican opponent, Senator Barry Goldwater, in the 1964 presidential election. The victory also represented voter reaction against Senator Goldwater's aggressive views on foreign policy. Ironically, international problems dominated Johnson's second term, and Johnson himself pursued an aggressive course, dispatching (Apr., 1965) troops to the Dominican Republic during disorders there and escalating American participation in the Vietnam War. Authorization for the latter was claimed by Johnson to have been given (Aug., 1964) by Congress in the Tonkin Gulf resolution, which was passed after two U.S. destroyers were allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. The federal military budget soared, and inflation became a pressing problem.

The Vietnam War provoked increasing opposition at home, manifested in marches and demonstrations in which casualties were sometimes incurred and thousands of people were arrested. An impression of general lawlessness and domestic disintegration was heightened by serious race riots that erupted in cities across the nation, most devastatingly in the Watts district of Los Angeles (1965) and in Detroit and Newark (1967), and by various racial and political assassinations, notably those of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1968). Other manifestations of social upheaval were the increase of drug use, especially among youths, and the rising rate of crime, most noticeable in the cities. Opposition to American involvement in the Vietnam War so eroded Johnson's popularity that he chose not to run again for President in 1968.

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The Nixon Years

Johnson's position as leader of the Democratic party had been seriously challenged by Senator Eugene McCarthy, who ran as a peace candidate in the primary elections. Antiwar forces in the Democratic party received a setback with the assassination of Senator Kennedy, also a peace candidate, and the way was opened for the nomination of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, a supporter of Johnson's policies, as the Democratic candidate for President. Violence broke out during the Democratic national convention in Chicago when police and national guardsmen battled some 3,000 demonstrators in what a national investigating committee later characterized as "a police riot." The Republican candidate, Richard M. Nixon, ran on a platform promising an end to the Vietnam War and stressing the need for domestic "law and order"; he won a narrow victory, receiving 43.4% of the popular vote to Humphrey's 42.7%. A third-party candidate, Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama, carried five Southern states. The Congress remained Democratic.

Pronouncing the "Nixon doctrine"—that thenceforth other countries would have to carry more of the burden of fighting Communist domination, albeit with substantial American economic aid—Nixon began a slow withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Criticism that he was not moving fast enough in ending the war increased and massive antiwar demonstrations continued, and when Nixon in the spring of 1970 ordered U.S. troops into neutral Cambodia to destroy Communist bases and supply routes there, a wave of demonstrations, some of them violent, swept American campuses. Four students were killed by national guardsmen at Kent State Univ. in Ohio, and 448 colleges and universities temporarily closed down. Antiwar activity declined, however, when American troops were removed from Cambodia after 60 days.

The institution of draft reform, the continued withdrawal of U.S. soldiers from Vietnam, and a sharp decrease in U.S. casualties all contributed toward dampening antiwar sentiment and lessening the war as an issue of public debate. Racial flare-ups abated after the tumult of the 1960s (although the issue of the busing of children to achieve integration continued to arouse controversy). The growing movement of women demanding social, economic, and political equality with men also reflected the changing times. A dramatic milestone in the country's space program was reached in July, 1969, with the landing of two men on the moon, the first of several such manned flights. Significant unmanned probes of several of the planets followed, and in 1973 the first space station was orbited.

In domestic policy Nixon appeared to favor an end to the many reforms of the 1960s. He was accused by civil-rights proponents of wooing Southern support by seeking delays in the implementation of school integration. Such actions by his administration were overruled by the Supreme Court. Nixon twice attempted to appoint conservative Southern judges to the U.S. Supreme Court and was twice frustrated by the Senate, which rejected both nominations. In an attempt to control the spiraling inflation inherited from the previous administration, Nixon concentrated on reducing federal spending. He vetoed numerous appropriations bills passed by Congress, especially those in the social service and public works areas, although he continued to stress defense measures, such as the establishment of an antiballistic missiles (ABM) system, and foreign aid.

Federal budget cuts contributed to a general economic slowdown but failed to halt inflation, so that the country experienced the unprecedented misfortune of both rising prices and rising unemployment; the steady drain of gold reserves after almost three decades of enormous foreign aid programs, a new balance-of-trade deficit, and the instability of the dollar in the international market also affected the

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In Aug., 1971, Nixon resorted to the freezing of prices, wages, and rents; these controls were continued under an ensuing, more flexible but comprehensive program known as Phase II. Another significant move was the devaluation of the dollar in Dec., 1971; it was further devalued in 1973 and again in 1974.

In keeping with his announced intention of moving the United States from an era of confrontation to one of negotiation, Nixon made a dramatic visit to the People’s Republic of China in Feb., 1972, ending more than 20 years of hostility between the two countries and opening the way for a normalization of relations. A trip to Moscow followed in the spring, culminating in the signing of numerous agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, the most important being two strategic arms limitations accords, reached after lengthy talks begun in 1969. The attainment of a degree of friendly relations with China and the USSR was especially surprising in view of the provocative actions that the United States was taking at that time against North Vietnam. Although U.S. ground troops were being steadily withdrawn from Vietnam, U.S. bombing activity was increasing. Finally Congress halted the bombing and limited Nixon's power to commit troops. A cease-fire in Vietnam was not achieved until Jan., 1973.

In the presidential election of 1972, the Democratic party reforms that increased the power of women and minority groups in the convention resulted in the nomination of Senator George S. McGovern for President. Senator McGovern called for an immediate end to the Vietnam War and for a drastic cut in defense spending and a guaranteed minimum income for all citizens. His candidacy was damaged by the necessity to replace his original choice for Vice President and by the continuing perception of McGovern as a radical. Nixon was reelected (Nov., 1972) in a landslide, losing only Massachusetts and the District of Columbia.

But Nixon's second term was marred, and finally destroyed, by the Watergate affair, which began when five men (two of whom were later discovered to be direct employees of Nixon's reelection committee) were arrested after breaking into the Democratic party's national headquarters at the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C. Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, the first president in the history of the republic to be driven from office under the threat of impeachment.

Ford and Carter

Nixon was succeeded by Vice President Gerald R. Ford. (Nixon's first Vice President, Spiro T. Agnew, had resigned in Oct., 1973, after being charged with income tax evasion.) Ford promised to continue Nixon's foreign policy, particularly the improvement of relations with China and the USSR (in his last days in office, Nixon had made trips to the Middle East and the Soviet Union to promote peace).

In domestic affairs, the United States was hurt by skyrocketing fuel prices due to an Arab oil embargo. The embargo was imposed (1973) in retaliation for U.S. support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War (see Arab-Israeli Wars). Ford attempted to formulate new policies to stem the ever-increasing inflation rate, which by late 1974 had reached the most severe levels since the period following World War II. He was also confronted with mounting unemployment and with the threat of a devastating world food crisis. Ford's popularity suffered a sharp setback when he granted Nixon a complete and unconditional pardon for any crimes that Nixon may have committed during his term as President. The public disapproval of this decision, along with the deteriorating economy, contributed to a sharp reversal in Republican fortunes in the elections of 1974.

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In Dec., 1974, Nelson A. Rockefeller, a former governor of New York, was sworn in as Vice President
following extensive hearings before Congressional committees. Thus, neither the President nor the
Vice President had been popularly elected, both having been chosen under the terms of the Twenty-
fifth Amendment. Ford's tenure as President was hindered by difficult economic times and an inability
to work with the Democrat-controlled Congress. Ford vetoed dozens of bills, many of which were
 overridden by Congress to provide funding for social programs. Ford also lacked broad support within
his own party, as former California governor (and future President) Ronald Reagan made a strong
challenge for the Republican presidential nomination.

The Democratic contender in the 1976 presidential election, former Georgia governor James E.
"Jimmy" Carter, ran a brilliant and tireless campaign based on populist appeals to honesty and morality.
His position as a newcomer to national politics was considered an asset by an untrusting nation in the
wake of the Watergate scandal. In spite of a late surge by Ford, Carter narrowly won the election. The
day after being sworn in as President, Carter pardoned thousands of draft evaders from the Vietnam
War. In domestic affairs, Carter focused a great deal of attention on energy issues, creating the
Department of Energy in 1977 and insisting on the necessity of nuclear energy as an alternative to
fossil fuel consumption. However, nuclear energy in the United States suffered a severe setback in
1979 when an accident at the Three Mile Island power facility near Harrisburg, Penn. resulted in the
partial meltdown of the reactor core.

States with large energy industries such as Texas, Louisiana, Wyoming, and Colorado all benefited from
extremely high energy prices throughout the 1970s. Alaska's economy also boomed as the Alaska
pipeline began transporting oil in 1977. Soaring oil prices as well as increased foreign competition dealt
a severe blow to American industry, especially heavy industries such as automobile and steel
manufacturing located in America's Rust Belt. Central cities in the United States experienced great
hardship in the 1960s and 70s. Rising crime rates and racial unrest during the 1960s accelerated the
outmigration of people and businesses to the suburbs. By the late 1970s, many large cities had lost
their middle class core populations and suffered severe budgetary problems.

Inflation continued to rise dramatically as it had during Ford's administration and eventually reached a 30-
year high in 1979. Efforts to control inflation such as raising interest rates plunged the economy into
recession. In 1977 Carter signed the Panama Canal Treaty and a year later Congress voted to turn over
the canal to Panama in 1999. Carter's greatest achievement in foreign policy came in 1978 when he
mediated unprecedented negotiations between Egypt and Israel at Camp David, Md. The talks led to
the signing of a peace treaty (see Camp David accords) by Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat and
Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin in 1979. Also in that year the United States resumed official
diplomatic relations with China and Carter entered into a second round of Strategic Arms Limitation
Talks (SALT II) with the Soviet Union.

Carter's pledge to stand against nations that abused human rights resulted in a grain and high-
technology embargo of the Soviet Union in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Carter also
organized a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. His decision in 1979 to allow Muhammad Reza
Shah Pahlevi, the deposed leader of Iran, to receive medical treatment in the United States inflamed
the already passionate anti-American sentiment in that nation. On Nov. 4, 1979, a group of militants
seized the U.S. embassy in Iran, taking 66 hostages. The Iran hostage crisis destroyed Carter's
credibility as a leader and a failed rescue attempt (1980) that killed eight Americans only worsened the
situation. (The hostages were only released on Jan. 20, 1981, the day Carter left office.) With the

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The hostage crisis omnipresent in the media and the nation's economy sliding deeper into recession, Carter had little to run on in the 1980 presidential election. Republican nominee Ronald Reagan promised to restore American supremacy both politically and economically.

The Reagan Years

The nation enthusiastically responded to Ronald Reagan's neoconservative message as he soundly defeated Carter and third-party candidate John Anderson to become, at the age of 70, the oldest man to be elected president. Reagan's coattails proved to be long as the Republicans made large gains in the House of Representatives and won control of the Senate for the first time since 1954, ushering in a new wave of conservatism. His program of supply-side economics sought to increase economic growth through reduced taxes which would in turn create even greater tax revenue. Critics argued that his tax cuts only benefited corporations and wealthy individuals. Reagan drastically cut spending on social programs as part of his vow to balance the federal budget.

In labor disputes, Reagan was decidedly antiunion. This was never more evident than in 1981 when he fired 13,000 striking air traffic controllers. In Mar., 1981, Reagan was wounded in an assassination attempt but fully recovered, dispelling doubts regarding his age and health. The U.S. economy continued to worsen; in 1983 the unemployment rate reached its highest point since the Great Depression at almost 11%. By the end of that year, however, oil prices began to drop, slowing the inflation rate and helping the economy to begin a recovery. Reagan's deregulation of the banking, airline, and many other industries spurred enormous amounts of economic activity. In 1984 the unemployment rate fell and the dollar was strong in foreign markets. With the economy recovering, Reagan was unstoppable in the 1984 presidential election.

Democratic nominee Walter F. Mondale chose U.S. Representative Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate; she was the first woman to gain a major party's vice presidential nomination. Reagan scored an overwhelming victory, carrying 49 states and winning a record 525 electoral votes. Economic recovery did not last, however; while Reagan was cutting government funding for social programs the defense budget skyrocketed to levels not seen since World War II. The federal budget deficit also soared and in 1987, Reagan submitted the first trillion-dollar budget to Congress. In addition, the deregulated economy proved extremely volatile; financial scandals were prevalent and the trade imbalance grew. Finally in 1987 the stock market crashed, falling a record 508 points in a single day.

Reagan's foreign policy was aggressively anti-Communist as he discarded the policy of détente employed by Nixon, Ford, and Carter. He revived cold war rhetoric, referring to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" and used increased defense spending to enlarge the U.S. nuclear arsenal and fund the Strategic Defense Initiative, a plan popularly known as "Star Wars." In 1981, Reagan imposed sanctions against Poland after the establishment of a military government in that country. Reagan also sought aid for the Contras—counterrevolutionaries seeking to overthrow the Marxist-oriented Sandanista government in Nicaragua. At the same time the United States was secretly mining Nicaraguan harbors. In 1983 241 U.S. marines stationed in Beirut, Lebanon as part of a UN peacekeeping force were killed by terrorists driving a truck laden with explosives in a suicide mission. Later that year Reagan ordered the invasion of the tiny Caribbean nation of Grenada; the action was roundly criticized by the world community, but succeeded in toppling the pro-Cuban regime. In 1986 the space shuttle Challenger exploded shortly after liftoff, killing the entire seven-person crew, including six astronauts and a civilian schoolteacher. Reagan's aggressive policies in the Middle East worsened already bad relations with

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Arab nations; he ordered (1986) air strikes against Libya in retaliation for the Libyan-sponsored terrorist attack in West Berlin that killed two American servicemen.

Although the president had vowed never to negotiate with terrorists, members of his administration did just that in the Iran-contra affair. Against the wishes of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, Reagan officials arranged the illegal sale of arms to Iran in exchange for the release of American hostages in the Middle East. The profits from the sales were then diverted to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. Reagan improved his image before he left office, however, by agreeing to a series of arms reduction talks initiated by Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev. Reagan was also able leave a powerful legacy by appointing three conservative Supreme Court justices, including Sandra Day O’Connor, the first woman to serve on the high court.

Bush, Clinton, and Bush

Reagan had groomed his Vice President, George H. W. Bush, to succeed him. The presidential election of 1988 was characterized by negative campaigning, low voter turnout, and a general disapproval of both candidates. The mudslinging especially hurt the Democratic nominee, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, who rapidly lost his lead in the polls and eventually lost by a substantial margin. Bush vowed a continuation of Reagan's policies and in foreign affairs he was as aggressive as his predecessor. In 1989, after a U.S.-backed coup failed to oust Panamanian President Manuel Noriega, Bush ordered the invasion of Panama by U.S. troops. Noriega was eventually captured in early 1990 and sent to Miami, Fla. to stand trial for drug trafficking (see Panama).

Bush’s major military action, however, was the Persian Gulf War. After Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, Bush announced the commencement of Operation Desert Shield, which included a naval and air blockade and the steady deployment of U.S. military forces to Saudi Arabia. In November the United Nations Security Council approved the use of all necessary force to remove Iraq from Kuwait and set Jan. 15, 1991, as the deadline for Iraq to withdraw. A few days before the deadline Congress narrowly approved the use of force against Iraq. By this time the United States had amassed a force of over 500,000 military personnel as well as thousands of tanks, airplanes, and personnel carriers. Less than one day after the deadline, the U.S.-led coalition began Operation Desert Storm, beginning with massive air attacks on Baghdad. Iraqi troops were devastated by continual air and naval bombardment, to the point that it took only 100 hours for coalition ground forces to recapture Kuwait. On Feb. 27, with the Iraqi army routed, Bush declared a cease-fire.

The quick, decisive U.S. victory, combined with an extremely small number of American casualties, gave President Bush the highest public approval rating in history. Mounting domestic problems, however, made his popularity short-lived. When Bush took office, he announced a plan to bail out the savings and loan industry, which had collapsed after deregulation during the Reagan administration. In 1996 it was determined that the savings and loan crisis had cost the U.S. government some $124 billion.

The United States went through a transitional period during the 1980s and early 90s, economically, demographically, and politically. The severe decline of traditional manufacturing which began in the 1970s forced a large-scale shift of the economy to services and other sectors. States with large service, trade, and high-technology industries (such as many Sun Belt states) grew in population and thrived economically. Meanwhile, states heavily dependent on manufacturing, including much of the Midwest, suffered severe unemployment and outmigration. Midwestern states grew less than 5% during the 1980s while Sun Belt states grew between 15% and 50%.
In addition, the end of the cold war, precipitated by the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of Soviet Communism, resulted in a reduction of the U.S. armed forces as well as the opening of new markets in an increasingly global economy. In Apr., 1992, after the severe police beating of an African American, one of the worst race riots in recent U.S. history erupted in Los Angeles, killing 58, injuring thousands, and causing approximately $1 billion in damage. Smaller disturbances broke out in many U.S. cities. After the Persian Gulf War the nation turned its attention to the domestic problems of recession and high unemployment. Bush's inability to institute a program for economic recovery made him vulnerable in the 1992 presidential election to the Democratic nominee, Arkansas governor Bill Clinton.

Clinton won the election, gaining 43% of the popular vote and 370 electoral votes. Incumbent Bush won 38% of the popular vote and 168 electoral votes. Although independent candidate H. Ross Perot did not win a single electoral vote, he made a strong showing with 19% of the popular vote, after a populist campaign in which he vowed to eliminate the $3.5 trillion federal deficit. Clinton, generally considered a political moderate, was particularly successful in appealing to voters (especially in the Midwest and West) who had previously abandoned the Democratic party to vote for Reagan. Bush, for his part, was unable to convince voters that he could transform his success in international affairs into domestic recovery. One of his last actions as president was to send (Dec., 1992) U.S. troops to Somalia as part of a multinational peacekeeping force administering famine relief.

The economy gradually improved during Clinton's first year in office, and this, along with a tax increase and spending cuts, caused some easing of the budget deficit. The North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by the United States, Canada, and Mexico in 1992 and designed to make its participants more competitive in the world marketplace, was ratified in 1993 and took effect Jan. 1, 1994.

During his first two years in office, Clinton withdrew U.S. troops from Somalia after they had suffered casualties in an ill-defined mission; he also sent troops to Haiti to help in reestablishing democratic rule there. The president proposed a major overhaul of the way American health care is financed, but it died in Congress. Clinton's problems with Congress were exacerbated in 1994 after the Republicans won control of both the Senate and the House and attempted, largely unsuccessfully, to enact a strongly conservative legislative program, dubbed the “Contract with America.” There were prolonged stalemates as the president and Congress clashed over the federal budget; in Apr., 1996, a fiscal 1995 budget was agreed upon after seven months of stopgap spending measures and temporary government shutdowns.

In Apr., 1995, in the worst act of terrorism ever on American soil, a bomb was exploded at the federal building in Oklahoma City, Okla., killing 169 people. Late in 1995, the antagonists in the Yugoslavian civil war (see Bosnia and Herzegovina; Croatia) accepted a U.S.-brokered peace plan, which U.S. troops were sent to help monitor. U.S. efforts also contributed to Arab-Israeli acceptance of agreements to establish limited Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza.

By 1996, President Clinton had improved his standing in the polls by confronting House Republicans over the federal budget, and he subsequently adopted a number of Republican proposals, such as welfare reform, as his own, while opposing the more conservative aspects of those proposals. Clinton won his party's renomination unopposed and then handily defeated Republican Bob Dole and Reform party candidate Ross Perot in the November election.
As his second term began, Clinton's foes in and out of Congress pursued investigation of Whitewater and other alleged improprieties or abuses by the president. By late 1997 independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr had been given information that led to the Lewinsky scandal, which burst on the national scene in early 1998. Battle lines formed and remained firm through Clinton's impeachment (Oct., 1998), trial (Jan., 1999), and acquittal (Feb., 1999), with a core of conservative Republicans on one side and almost all Democrats on the other. The American people seemed to regard the impeachment as largely partisan in intent. Lying behind their attitude, however, was probably the sustained economic boom, a period of record stock-market levels, relatively low unemployment, the reduction of the federal debt, and other signs of well-being (although critics noted that the disparity between America's rich and poor was now greater than ever). This, combined with the afterglow of “victory” in the cold war, continued through the end of the 1990s.

In foreign affairs, the United States (as the only true superpower) enjoyed unprecedented international influence in the late 1990s, and in some areas it was able to use this influence to accomplish much. There was steady, if sometimes fitful, progress toward peace in the Middle East, and George Mitchell, a U.S. envoy, brokered what many hoped was a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, America had little influence on Russian policy in Chechnya, and it remained locked in a contest of wills with Iraq's President Saddam Hussein nine years after the end of the Persian Gulf War. The reluctance of the Congress to pay the country's UN dues nearly led to the embarrassment of the loss of the American General Assembly vote in 1999 even as Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed a desire for greater American involvement in the organization.

Meanwhile, in Kosovo the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, led by the United States, was unable to prevent a Yugoslav campaign against Kosovar Albanians but ultimately forced the former Yugoslavia to cede control of the province; U.S. and other troops were sent into Kosovo as peacekeepers. That conflict showed that the United States was again reluctant to commit military forces, such as its army, that were likely to suffer significant casualties, although it would use its airpower, where its great technological advantages enabled it strike with less risk to its forces.

Negotiations in the Middle East, which continued in 2000, broke down, and there was renewed violence in Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank late in the year. The Clinton administration worked to restart the negotiations, but the issues proved difficult to resolve. In the United States, the NASDAQ Internet and technology stock bubble, which had begun its rise in 1999, completely deflated in the second half of 2000, as the so-called new economy associated with the Internet proved to be subject to the rules of the old economy. Signs of a contracting economy also appeared by year's end.

The George W. Bush Presidency, 9/11, and Iraq

The 2000 presidential election, in which the American public generally appeared uninspired by the either major-party candidate (Vice President Al Gore and the Republican governor of Texas, George W. Bush) ended amid confusion and contention not seen since the Hayes-Tilden election in 1876. On election night, the television networks called and then retracted the winner of Florida twice, first projecting Gore the winner there, then projecting Bush the winner there and in the race at large. The issue of who would win Florida and its electoral votes became the issue of who would win the presidency, and the determination of the election dragged on for weeks as Florida's votes were recounted. Gore, who trailed by several hundred votes (out of 6 million) in Florida but led by a few hundred thousand nationally, sought a manual recount of strongly Democratic counties in Florida, and the
issue ended up being fought in the courts and in the media. Ultimately the U.S. Supreme Court called a halt to the process, although its split decision along ideological lines was regarded by many as tarnishing the court. Florida's electoral votes, as certified by the state's Republican officials, were won by Bush, who secured a total of 271 electoral votes (one more than needed) and 48% of the popular vote (Gore had 49% of the popular vote). Bush thus became the first person since Benjamin Harrison in 1888 to win the presidency without achieving a plurality in the popular vote.

The slowing economy entered a recession in Mar., 2001, and unemployment rose, leading to continued interest rate reductions by the Federal Reserve Board. The Bush administration moved quickly to win Congressional approval of its tax-cut program, providing it with an early legislative victory, but other proposed legislation moved more slowly. The resignation of Senator Jeffords of Vermont from the Republican party cost it control of the Senate, a setback due in part to administration pressure on him to adhere to the party line. Internationally, the United States experienced some friction with its allies, who were unhappy with the Bush administration's desire to abandon both the Kyoto Protocol (designed to fight global warming) and the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty (in order to proceed with developing a ballistic missile defense system). Relations with China were briefly tense in Apr., 2001, after a Chinese fighter and U.S. surveillance plane collided in mid-air, killing the Chinese pilot.

The politics and concerns of the first eight months of 2001 abruptly became secondary on Sept. 11, when terrorists hijacked four planes, crashing two into the World Trade Center, which was destroyed, and one into the Pentagon; the fourth crashed near Shanksville, Pa. Some 3,000 persons were killed or missing as a result of the attacks. Insisting that no distinction would be made between terrorists and those who harbored them, Bush demanded that Afghanistan's Taliban government turn over Osama bin Laden, a Saudi-born Islamic militant whose Al Qaeda group was behind the attacks. The U.S. government sought to build an international coalition against Al Qaeda and the Taliban and, more broadly, against terrorism, working to influence other nations to cut off sources of financial support for terrorists.

In October, air strikes and then ground raids were launched against Afghanistan by the United States, with British aid. Oman, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan permitted the use of their airspace and of bases within their borders for various operations. The United States also provided support for opposition forces in Afghanistan, and by December the Taliban government had been ousted and its and Al Qaeda's fighters largely had been routed. Bin Laden, however, remained uncaptured, and a force of U.S. troops was based in Afghanistan to search for him and to help with mopping-up operations.

The terrorist attacks stunned Americans and amplified the effects of the recession in the fall. Events had a severe impact on the travel industry, particularly the airlines, whose flights were temporarily halted; the airlines subsequently suffered a significant decrease in passengers. Congress passed several bills designed to counter the economic effects of the attacks, including a $15 billion aid and loan package for the airline industry. A new crisis developed in October, when cases of anthrax and anthrax exposure resulted from spores that had been mailed to media and government offices in bioterror attacks.

Although consumer spending and the stock market rebounded by the end of the year from their low levels after September 11, unemployment reached 5.8% in Dec., 2001. Nonetheless, the economy was recovering, albeit slowly, aided in part by increased federal spending. In early 2002 the Bush administration announced plans for a significant military buildup; that and the 2001 tax cuts were
expected to result in budget deficits in 2002–4. Prompted by a number of prominent corporate scandals involving fraudulent or questionable accounting practices, some of which led to corporate bankruptcies, Congress passed legislation that overhauled securities and corporate laws in July, 2002.

The fighting in Afghanistan continued, with U.S. forces there devoted mainly to mopping up remnants of Taliban and Al Qaeda forces. U.S. troops were also based in Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to provide support for the forces in Afghanistan. In the Philippines, U.S. troops provided support and assistance to Philippine forces fighting guerrillas in the Sulu Archipelago that had been linked to Al Qaeda, and they also trained Georgian and Yemeni forces as part of the war on terrorism.

During 2002 the Bush administration became increasingly concerned by the alleged Iraqi development and possession of weapons of mass destruction, and was more forceful in its denunciations of Iraq for resisting UN arms inspections. In March, Arab nations publicly opposed possible U.S. military operations against Iraq, but U.S. officials continued to call for the removal of Saddam Hussein. President Bush called on the United Nations to act forcefully against Iraq or risk becoming “irrelevant.” In November the Security Council passed a resolution offering Iraq a “final opportunity” to cooperate on arms inspections, this time under strict guidelines, and inspections resumed late in the month, although not with full Iraqi cooperation. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress voted to authorize the use of the military force against Iraq, and the United States continued to build up its forces in the Middle East.

The November election resulted in unexpected, if small, gains for the Republicans, giving them control of both houses of Congress. After the election, Congress voted to establish a new Department of Homeland Security, effective Mar., 2003. The department regrouped most of the disparate agencies responsible for domestic security under one cabinet-level official; the resulting government reorganization was the largest since the Department of Defense was created in the late 1940s.

Dec., 2002, saw the negotiation of a free-trade agreement with Chile (signed in June, 2003), regarded by many as the first step in the expansion of NAFTA to include all the countries of the Americas. President Bush ordered the deployment of a ballistic missile defense system, to be effective in 2004; the system would be designed to prevent so-called rogue missile attacks. In advance of this move the United States had withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty with Russia in June. North Korea, often described as one of the nations most likely to launch a rogue attack, had admitted in October that it had a program for developing nuclear weapons, and the United States and other nations responded by ending fuel shipments and reducing food aid. In the subsequent weeks North Korea engaged in a series of well-publicized moves to enable it to resume the development of nuclear weapons, including withdrawing from the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. The United States, which had first responded by refusing to negotiate in any way with North Korea, adopted a somewhat less confrontational approach in 2003.

President Bush continued to press for Iraqi disarmament in 2003, and expressed impatience with what his administration regarded as the lack of Iraqi compliance. In Feb, 2003, however, the nation's attention was pulled away from the growing tension over Iraq by the breakup of the space shuttle Columbia as it returned to earth. Seven astronauts were killed in this second shuttle mishap, and focus was once again directed toward the issues of the safety of the space shuttle and the dynamics of the decision-making process at NASA.

Despite vocal opposition to military action from many nations, including sometimes rancorous objections from France, Germany, and Russia, the United States and Great Britain pressed forward in...
early 2003 with military preparations in areas near Iraq. Although Turkey, which the allies hoped to use as a base for opening a northern front in Iraq, refused to allow use of its territory as a staging area, the bulk of the forces were nonetheless in place by March. After failing to win the explicit UN Security Council approval desired by Britain (because the British public were otherwise largely opposed to war), President Bush issued an ultimatum to Iraqi president Saddam Hussein on March 17th, and two days later the war began with an air strike against Hussein and the Iraqi leadership. Ground forces invaded the following day, and by mid-April the allies were largely in control of the major Iraqi cities and had turned their attention to the rebuilding of Iraq and the establishment of a new Iraqi government. No weapons of mass destruction, however, were found by allied forces during the months after the war, and sporadic guerrilla attacks on the occupying forces occurred during the same time period, mainly in Sunni-dominated central Iraq.

The cost of the military campaign as well as of the ongoing U.S. occupation in Iraq substantially increased what already had been expected to be a record-breaking U.S. deficit in 2003 to around $374 billion. The size of the deficit, the unknown ultimate cost of the war, and the continued weak U.S. economy (the unemployment rate rose to 6.4% in June despite some improvement in other areas) were important factors that led to the scaling back of a tax cut, proposed by President Bush, by more than half to $350 billion.

In Aug., 2003, a massive electrical blackout affected the NE United States. Much of New York and portions of Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and neighboring Ontario, Canada, lost power, in many cases for a couple days. The widespread failure appeared to be due in part to strains placed on the transmission system, its safeguards, and its operators by the increased interconnectedness of electrical generation and transmission facilities and the longer-distance transmission of electricity. An investigation into the event, however, laid the primary blame on the Ohio utility where it began, both for inadequate system maintenance and for failing to take preventive measures when the crisis began.

The economy improved in the latter half of the 2003. Although the unemployment rate inched below 6% and job growth was modest, overall economic growth was robust, particularly in the last quarter. A major Medicare overhaul was enacted and signed in December, creating a prescription drug benefit for the first time. The same month the Central American Free Trade Agreement was finalized by the United States, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and in early 2004, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic agreed to become parties to the accord. The United States also reached free-trade agreements with Australia and Morocco.

U.S. weapons inspectors reported in Jan., 2004, that they had failed to find any evidence that Iraq had possessed biological or chemical weapons stockpiles prior to the U.S. invasion. The assertion that such stockpiles existed was a primary justification for the invasion, and the report led to pressure for an investigation of U.S. intelligence prior to the war. In February, President Bush appointed a bipartisan commission to review both U.S. intelligence failures in Iraq and other issues relating to foreign intelligence; the commission's 2005 report criticized intelligence agencies for failing to challenge the conventional wisdom about Iraq's weapon systems, and called for changes in how U.S. intelligence gathering is organized and managed. The Senate's intelligence committee, reviewing the situation separately, concluded in its 2004 report that much of the CIA's information on and assessment of Iraq prior to the war was faulty.
Also in February, U.S., French, and Canadian forces were sent into Haiti to preserve order. Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide had resigned under U.S.-French pressure after rebel forces had swept through most of the country and threatened to enter the capital. U.S. forces withdrew from Haiti in June when Brazil assumed command of a UN peacekeeping force there.

By March, John Kerry had all but secured the Democrat nomination for president. With both major party nominees clear, the focus of the political campaigns quickly shifted to the November election. Both Bush and Kerry had elected not to accept government funding, enabling them each to raise record amounts of campaign funding, and the post-primary advertising campaign began early. In July, Kerry chose North Carolina senator John Edwards, who had opposed him in the primaries, as his running mate.

U.S. forces engaged in intense fighting in Iraq in Apr., 2004, as they attempted to remove Sunni insurgents from the town of Falluja. The battling there was the fiercest since the end of the invasion, and ultimately U.S. forces broke off without clearing the fighters from the city, a goal that was not achieved until after similar fighting in November. Guerrilla attacks by Sunni insurgents continued throughout the year. Also in April a radical cleric attempted to spark a Shiite uprising, and there was unrest and fighting in a number of other Iraqi cities. By mid-April the Shiite militia was in control only in the region around An Najaf, but the militia did not abandon its hold there until after intense battling in August. At the end of June, Paul Bremer, the head of the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority, turned over sovereignty to an Iraqi interim government. Nonetheless, the unrest called into question the degree to which Iraq had been pacified, and the 160,000 U.S.-led troops still in Iraq were, for the time being, the true guarantor of Iraqi security. Meanwhile, the prestige of the U.S. military had been damaged by revelations, in May, that it had abused Iraqis held in the Abu Ghraib prison during 2003–4.

In July, 2004, the U.S. commission investigating the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, criticized especially U.S. intelligence agencies for failings that contributed to the success of the attacks, and called for a major reorganization of those agencies, leading to the passage of legislation late in the year. In the following months the country's focus turned largely toward the November presidential election, as the campaigns of President Bush and Senator Kerry and their surrogates escalated their often sharp political attacks. In a country divided over the threat of terrorism and the war in Iraq, over the state of the economy and the state of the nation's values, election spending reached a new peak despite recent campaign financing limitations, and fueled a divisive and sometimes bitter mood. Ultimately, the president appeared to benefit from a slowly recovering economy and the desire of many voters for continuity in leadership while the nation was at war. Amid greatly increased voter turnout, Bush secured a clear majority of the popular vote, in sharp contrast to the 2000 election that first made him president. Republicans also increased their margins of control in both houses of Congress, largely through victories in the more conservative South.

The very active 2005 hurricane season saw several significant storms make landfall on the U.S. coast. In August, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi and SE Louisiana coasts, flooded much of New Orleans for several weeks, and caused extensive destruction inland in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, making it the most expensive natural disaster in U.S. history. The following month, Hurricane Rita caused devastation along the SW Louisiana coast and widespread destruction in inland Louisiana and SE Texas.

Katrina displaced many Louisiana residents, some permanently, to other parts of the state and other states, particularly Texas. Some 200,000 persons were left at least temporarily unemployed,
reversing job gains that had been made in the preceding months. The storm had a noticeable effect on the economy, driving up the already higher prices of gasoline, heating oil, and natural gas (as a result of well and refinery damage) to levels not seen before, and causing inflation to rise and industrial output to drop by amounts not seen in more than two decades.

The striking ineffectiveness of federal, state, and local government in responding to Hurricane Katrina, particularly in flooded New Orleans but also in other areas affected by the storm, raised questions about the ability of the country to respond to major disasters of any kind. President Bush—and state and local officials—were criticized for responding, at least initially, inadequately to Katrina, but the Federal Emergency Management Agency in particular seemed overwhelmed by the disaster's scale and incapable of managing the federal response in subsequent weeks. Many Americans wondered if the lessons of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, and the changes in the federal government that followed had resulted in real improvements or if those very changes and their emphasis on terror attacks had hindered the ability of the United States to respond to natural disasters.

The perceived failings in the federal response to Katrina seemed to catalyze public dissatisfaction with President Bush, as Americans became increasingly unsettled by the ongoing war in Iraq, the state of the U.S. economy, and other issues less than a year after Bush had been solidly reelected. Congress, meanwhile, passed a $52 billion emergency spending bill to deal with the effects of Katrina, but did not make any significant spending cuts or reductions in tax cuts to compensate for the additional outlays until Feb., 2006, when Congress passed a bill cutting almost $40 billion from a variety of government benefit programs, including Medicare, Medicaid, and student loans.

Internationally and domestically, the United States government was the subject of condemnation from some quarters for aspects of its conduct of the “war on terror” in the second half of 2005. In Aug., 2005, Amnesty International (AI) denounced the United States for maintaining secret, underground CIA prisons abroad. Subsequent news reporting indicated that there were prisons in eight nations in Europe and Asia, and in December the United States acknowledged that the International Committee of the Red Cross had not been given access to all its detention facilities. (A year after the AI report the U.S. for the first time acknowledged that the CIA had maintained a group of secret prisons.) A Swiss investigator for the Council of Europe indicated (Dec., 2005) that reports that European nations and the United States had been involved in the abduction and extrajudicial transfer of individuals to other nations were credible, and he accused (Jan., 2006) the nations of “outsourcing” torture. In Jan., 2006, the New York–based Human Rights Watch accused the U.S. government of a deliberate policy of mistreating terror suspects. The U.S. policy toward terror suspects was subsequently denounced in 2006 by the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Committee on Torture, and the European Parliament.

In Dec., 2005, the National Security Agency was revealed to be wiretapping some international communications originating in the United States without obtaining the legally required warrants. The practice had begun in 2002, at the president's order. The administration justified it by asserting that the president's powers to defend the United States under the Constitution were not subject to Congressional legislation and that the legislation authorizing the president to respond to the Sept., 2001, terror attacks implicitly also authorized the wiretapping. Many politicians, former government officials, and legal scholars, however, criticized the practice as illegal or unconstitutional. The revelations and assertions did not derail the renewal of most nonpermanent parts of the USA PATRIOT Act, a sometimes criticized national security law originally enacted in 2001 after the Sept. 11th attacks; with only minor adjustments most of the law was made permanent in Mar., 2006. President Bush
subsequently agreed (July, 2006) to congressional legislation that would authorize the administration’s domestic eavesdropping program while placing a few limitations on it, but House and Senate Republicans disagreed over aspects of the proposed law, and it was not passed before the November elections. Meanwhile, in August, a federal judge declared the program illegal, a decision that the Justice Dept. appealed. In Jan., 2007, however, the Bush administration indicated the eavesdropping program would be overseen by the secret federal court responsible for issuing warrants for foreign intelligence surveillance.

The administration’s position on the president’s powers had been implicitly criticized by the Supreme Court when it ruled in June, 2006, that military commissions that had not been authorized by Congress could not be used to try the foreign terror suspects held at Guantánamo Bay. The Court also ruled that the Geneva Conventions applied to the suspects, who had been taken prisoner in Afghanistan; that ruling was a defeat for the administration, which had also come under increasing foreign government criticism for holding the suspects without trying them. As a result of the ruling, the Bush administration won the passage (Sept., 2006) of legislation that established special military tribunals to try foreign terror suspects, such as those held at Guantánamo, but the law was criticized by human rights advocates and others for stripping suspects of habeas corpus and other rights long enshrined as part of American law.

Illegal immigration also became a contentious political topic in 2006. While the House of Representatives, dominated by conservative Republicans, sought to require greater government efforts to restrict illegal immigration and greater penalties for illegally entering the United States, the Bush administration and the Senate emphasized developing a guest-worker program and allowing some long-term illegal immigrants the opportunity to become citizens as well as increasing border security. The differences between the houses of Congresses stalled legislative action on illegal immigration while maintaining it as a political issue as the 2006 congressional elections approached; ultimately the only legislation passed on the issue was a Oct., 2006, law that called for adding 700 mi (1,100 km) of fencing along the U.S.-Mexico border. A new attempt at passing an immigration overhaul in 2007 died in Congress in June.

In the 2006 congressional elections the Republicans suffered significant reversals, losing control of both the Senate and the House, although the some of the seats lost in the Senate were the result of very narrow Democratic wins. Congressional corruption and sex scandals during 2006 appeared to loom large with many voters, as did the ongoing lack of significant progress in the fighting in Iraq. The president had hoped to benefit from improvement in the economy—the national unemployment rate had gradually dropped during 2005–6 and high oil prices earlier in the year had fallen—but some polls indicated the economy was a significant issue mainly in areas where voters felt that they had not benefited from the broad national trends.

Iraq, where 3,000 U.S. military personnel had died by the end of 2006, remained the nation’s focus into early 2007. The congressionally commissioned Iraq Study Group, headed by James Baker and including prominent Republicans and Democrats, recommended a number of changes in U.S. efforts relating to Iraq, including greatly diminishing the role of U.S. combat forces and replacing them with Iraqi troops, making diplomatic overtures to Syria and Iran to gain their support for a resolution of the fighting in Iraq, and attempting to bring peace to Iraq as part of a broader Middle East peace initiative. Military aspects of the plan were received with skepticism by U.S. military experts, but the president ultimately choose to increase U.S. forces in Iraq temporarily, beginning in Jan., 2007, an attempt to control sectarian
strife and increase security, principally in Baghdad. The president’s decision was not well received in Congress, both by the newly empowered Democrats and some Republicans, but congressional opponents of the course pursued by the administration in Iraq lacked both the numbers and the unanimity necessary to confront the president effectively, as was demonstrated when a war funding bill was passed (May, 2007) without any binding troop withdrawal deadlines. By the mid-2008, when the “surge” in U.S. forces in Iraq had ended, it, along with a change in counterinsurgency tactics and other factors, appeared to have been successful in reducing violence and helping to establish control over some parts of Iraq.

The second half of 2007 saw the economy become a significant concern as problematic mortgage lending involving adjustable rate mortgages and, often, borrowers of marginal creditworthiness roiled U.S. and international financial markets and companies as a result of the securitization of mortgages, which both had hidden the risk involved in such mortgages and distributed that risk among many financial companies and investors. Concerns over creditworthiness issues led to a contraction in mortgage lending and housing construction and also led to some difficulties in commercial lendings. By the end of 2007, it was clear that a housing bubble that had contributed significantly to economic growth since 2001 had burst, and many banks and financial firms suffered significant losses as a result. That, dramatic increases in crude oil prices, and other worsening economic conditions contributed to the beginning of a recession by year’s end.

In early 2008 the economic slowdown led to job losses and increased unemployment, while credit uncertainties contributed to the near-collapse of a major Wall Street investment firm; mortgage delinquencies also rose. The deteriorating economy led to the passage of a federal economic stimulus package, government measures designed to increase the availability of federally insured mortgages, lower interest rates, and moves by the Federal Reserve Board to assure the availability of credit and shore up the financial markets. In July, 2008, the president also signed a housing bill designed to help shore up the U.S. corporations that guarantee most American mortgages and also to provide mortgage relief to some homeowners, but ongoing problems with mortgage defaults led to increasing losses at those corporations and resulted in a government takeover of the institutions in September.

The deterioration of financial and economic conditions in the country and the world accelerated in mid-September, forcing the government and the Federal Reserve to intervene still more actively. The government also took over insurance giant AIG, whose financial health been undermined by credit default swaps it had sold (credit default swaps are contracts that pay, in return for a fee, compensation if a bond, loan, or the like goes into default). The nation also experienced its largest bank failure ever as the FDIC took over and sold Washington Mutual. By the end of the month the four remaining major Wall Street investment banks had disappeared through bankruptcy, merger, or conversion to bank holding companies, and banks had become unusually reluctant to lend. The economic crisis, which was the most severe since the early 1980s, also became increasingly international in scope, with particularly dramatic consequences in such diverse nations as Iceland, Russia, and Argentina.

Congress passed a $700 billion financial institution rescue package in early October, giving the Treasury secretary broad leeway in using government funds to restore financial stability, but the unsettling economic situation led stock prices to erode daily in early October, compounding the nation’s financial difficulties and anxieties. The government subsequently moved to recapitalize the banking system in an attempt to restart lending, and the Federal Reserve began buying commercial paper (short-term debt with which companies finance their day-to-day operations), becoming the lender of
The effects of housing price drops, mortgage difficulties, the credit crunch, and other problems meanwhile slowed consumer spending, which contributed to a decrease in the GDP in the third and fourth quarters of 2008. By October unemployment had increased to 6.5% (and rose to 7.2% by the end of the year), and the economy had become a major factor in the presidential election campaign. Democrat Barack Obama handily defeated Republican John McCain in Nov., 2008, to become the first African American to be elected to the presidency, and Democrats also increased their majorities in the U.S. Congress. Although the inauguration of President Obama in Jan., 2009, was acknowledged by most Americans as a historic watershed, the economic difficulties and international conflicts confronting the United States were sobering and had all but forced Obama to name his cabinet and highest advisers as quickly as possible once he became president-elect.

The economy continued in recession in 2009, with unemployment reaching 9.8% in September. The Obama administration continued and expanded the previous administration's antirecessionary measures, winning passage of a $787 billion stimulus package and offering aid especially to the U.S. financial industry; the automobile industry, with Chrysler and General Motors forced into bankruptcy and reorganized by July, 2009; and (to a more limited extent) to homeowners. Those and other measures were expected to result in a series of budget deficits that, as a percentage of GDP, were the largest since World War II. By mid-2010 congressional anxiety about voter reaction to the deficit made it difficult to pass additional jobs measures.

In October, when the administration announced the 2009 deficit was $1.4 trillion (roughly triple that of the year before), it appeared clear that a depression had been avoided, and subsequently there were signs of a likely end to the recession, with the economy reported to have expanded moderately in the third quarter and significantly in the last quarter of 2009. Housing, however, remained in the doldrums at best at year's end and into 2010, and the unemployment rate increased to 10% in the last months of 2009 and diminished only a little by mid-2010. Also in 2009, Obama announced that U.S. forces in Afghanistan would increase in 2010 by 30,000 combat and training troops in an escalation designed to counteract Taliban gains.

In Mar., 2010, the Obama administration secured passage of health insurance legislation that was intended to increase the number of Americans covered by such insurance. The most significant piece of social welfare legislation since the 1960s, it called for a combination of expanding Medicaid, providing subsidies to low- and middle-income families, and tax increases on high-income families in addition to other measures to achieve that goal. Passage of the legislation proved the most difficult and divisive achievement of Obama's presidency to date, with Republicans in Congress strongly opposed and many conservatives participating in public protests against it. The law was challenged in the courts, but largely upheld (2012) by the U.S. Supreme Court. Russia and the United States signed the New START treaty in Apr., 2010. Replacing the START I nuclear disarmament treaty that had expired at the end of 2009, it established lower levels for deployed nuclear warheads. In August, U.S. combat operations in Iraq officially ended.

In July, 2010, Congress enacted legislation overhauling the U.S. financial regulatory system; the law gave expanded tools to regulators to respond to crises similar to the those that occurred in 2008 and also
provided for increased consumer protections. The second half of the year saw the Federal Reserve Board resume its measures to stimulate the economy, which remained in a lackluster recovery with persistent high unemployment, a situation that did not show much improvement until the end of 2011. Those economic conditions coupled with an invigorated conservative movement that at times was unhappy even with conservative Republicans contributed to a Republican resurgence in the 2010 midterm elections. The party won control of the U.S. House of Representatives and also made gains in the U.S. Senate and many statehouses. Obama nonetheless won passage of additional legislation, with varying degrees of Republican support, in the post-election lame-duck session of Congress.

In Jan., 2011, a Democratic congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords, and 13 others were injured and 6 persons killed in a shooting in Tucson, Ariz. Although the attack on Giffords and those at her constituent event did not appear politically motivated, it focused attention on the rancor that had marked the election year of 2010 and, for a time at least, subdued the political rhetoric and the nation's mood. Weeks later, however, partisan disagreements over cutting the budget threatened to stall the budget's passage and force a federal government shutdown, but that was avoided (Apr., 2011) with a last minute agreement on $38.5 billion in reductions. The normally routine approval of an increase in the national debt ceiling was delayed in mid-2011 by renewed partisan conflicts over the budget and debt; those conflicts subsequently affected bills concerned with disaster aid, jobs creation, and other issues into 2012. The last U.S. forces in Iraq were withdrawn in Dec., 2011, ending all U.S. military operations there.

Economic conditions in general gradually improved beginning in 2011, but by the fall of 2012 unemployment had only returned to level it was at when Obama had been elected in 2008. In the summer of 2012 the country experienced the worst drought it had seen in roughly 50 years; some two thirds of the country was affected, and in some areas the drought continued into 2013. Despite the economic situation, Obama won reelection in Nov., 2012, defeating Mitt Romney, his Republican challenger. With some attrition, the voters who had elected Obama in 2008—women, racial minorities, Hispanics, and younger voters—voted for him again. Democrats also made modest gains in the Congress and in the state houses, but Republicans retained control of the House.

In Dec., 2012, the country was horrified by the killings of 26 children and teachers at a Newtown, Conn., elementary school. The murders led President Obama to propose (Jan., 2013) an assault weapons ban and other gun-control measures, but passage of any measures in Congress proved impossible. In Mar., 2013, an across-the-board reduction in federal spending known as a sequester took effect under the debt ceiling legislation enacted in Aug., 2011; the failure to enact an alternative made the cuts automatic. The annual Boston Marathon, in April, was the target of a double bombing that killed three people and injured more than 260; it was the most serious terror attack against civilians in the United States since Sept., 2011.

June, 2013, saw the beginning of a series of revelations concerning the massive telecommunications data collection efforts of the National Security Agency, based on documents collected by a former agency employee, Edward Snowden. The details of the data collection (which in some cases was generally known prior to the revelations and in some cases occurred in cooperation with U.S. allies) caused international controversy and created public difficulties with some U.S. allies. The revelations ultimately led, in June, 2015, to passage of changes to the USA PATRIOT Act that placed some restrictions on the mass collection of telecommunications data.

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A chemical weapons attack in August that killed more than 1,400 in Damascus, Syria, was linked by Western governments to the Syrian government, and led to the threat of an attack from the United States, but it did not occur after President Obama decided to seek congressional approval first. Ultimately, however, the Syrian government agreed to the supervised destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile.

In the fall of 2013, conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives insisted on a defunding or delay of the 2010 health insurance legislation, which was begin to come into effect in Oct., 2013, as a condition for the passage of a new budget, a condition Democrats refused to agree to. The resulting failure to enact budget legislation led to a partial federal government shutdown in the first half of October, but the health-care legislation took effect unimpeded. (There were difficulties in late 2013 with the implementation of the law, but the situation appeared to have improved markedly by Apr., 2014.) In late 2013, the budget impasse grew into a threat to once again deny an increase in the national debt ceiling, potentially resulting in a more severe curtailment of government operations and debt payments as well as international financial difficulties (because of the role played by the dollar as a reserve currency). The threatened crisis was averted, but the agreement to continue federal funding and suspend the debt ceiling was temporary (until early 2014). In Dec., 2013, however, Congress agreed to a two-year budget deal, and a new, year-long debt limit suspension passed uneventfully in Feb., 2014.

The political crisis in Ukraine, which resulted in Feb., 2014, in the removal of President Yanukovych, led to the worst tensions with Russia since the cold war after Russia occupied and annexed Ukraine’s Crimea region in March and then actively supported pro-Russian rebels in E Ukraine. In response to the annexation and Russian support for the rebels, the United States (and some other Western nations) imposed sanctions on Russia. In the second half of 2014 the United States also launched air strikes in Iraq and Syria aimed at thwarting the Islamic State, Sunni Islamist militants who sought to create a a transnational Islamic fundamentalist regime.

Late 2014 also saw an increase in racial tensions in the United States, sparked by a number of cases in which young black men were shot and killed by police officers, with the most notable incidents of protest and violence occurring in Ferguson, Mo., during August. A similar incident sparked rioting in Baltimore, Md., in Apr., 2015, and in June, 2015, the nation was stunned by the murder of African-American worshipers in Savannah, Ga., by a white supremacist. Two police shootings in July, 2016, in which black men died, sparked revenge killings of police officers that same month. Mass shootings in San Bernandino, Calif. (Dec., 2015), and Orlando, Fla. (June, 2016), were Islamist-inpsired; the latter, in which 50 died, was the worst in U.S. history.

The Nov., 2014, elections resulted in gains for the Republican party, which won a majority in the U.S. Senate, retained control of the House, and made gains at the state level as well. Following the elections the Obama administration announced a change in immigration policy that would avoid deporting law-abiding illegal aliens who were long-term U.S. residents and also had children who were U.S. citizens; the policy change was subsequently challenged in the courts. It also reached an agreement with Cuba on restoring diplomatic relations and easing some travel and commerce restrictions (the embargo was unaffected, though Obama called for Congress to consider ending it). There were new tensions over the passage of a budget in Dec., 2014, but a government shutdown was avoided.

In July, 2015, the United States signed multinational agreement with Iran that placed limits on its nuclear
program in return for easing economic sanctions; Senate Democrats subsequently blocked Republican attempts to force a vote on the agreement. The agreement was implemented in Jan., 2016, and nuclear-related sanctions on Iran were lifted, but the same month the United States imposed new sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile program as a result of a test launch that was said to violate UN Security Council resolutions. In Oct., 2015, the president announced that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan would be slowed, and that several thousand troops would remain there into 2017. Also in October, the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim nations agreed to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would reduce or end trade tariffs on many goods. The agreement, which was formally signed in Feb., 2016, was criticized and denounced in the primary and general elections in 2016.

In the 2016 presidential election the gradual economic expansion was insufficient to secure Democrats a third presidential term. Republican businessman Donald Trump, who ran contentious and controversial primary and general election campaigns, defeated the first woman major party nominee, Democrat Hillary Clinton, after an often personal and socially divisive contest. Clinton was hurt by an FBI investigation into her use of a private server for official email while she was secretary of state; the FBI ultimately found no grounds for prosecution. Despite his electoral win, Trump lost the popular vote by the largest percentage since 1876, and the campaign aggravated race relations and provoked anxiety in many foreign allies. Although Republicans retained control of Congress, the party lost some seats in both houses.

Subsequently it was revealed that the CIA and FBI had concluded that Russia had used cyberwarfare and disinformation in support of Trump's campaign. The Russia election and campaign revelations continued to be an issue into 2018. The new administration's national security adviser was forced to resign after less than a month in office when it was learned that he had lied about post-election contacts with Russian official. The head of the FBI, James Comey, was dismissed in May, 2017, because of the Russia investigation, and later accused President Trump of seeking a halt to the investigation. The criminal investigation continued under a special counsel, former FBI head Robert Mueller, and a meeting between a Russian lawyer said to be offering information on Hillary Clinton from the Russian government and Trump's son, son-in-law, and campaign manager came to light in July. From late 2017 Mueller indicted a number of people associated with Trump campaign, as well as Russians and Russian companies, on charges arising from his investigation.

After taking office, Trump withdrew (2017) the United States from the TPP and moved to limit the impact of the 2010 health insurance legislation, which he had pledged to replace. The conflicting goals of elected Republican officials, however, then came into play, and Congress proved unable to pass a replacement for the Affordable Care Act. The administration then, among other moves to limit or undermine the law, ended (October) government subsidies to health insurance companies that reduced the cost of plans for lower-income enrollees.

An executive order in January that restricted travel from some Muslim majority nations on national security grounds (revised and reissued in March; revised and expanded to some other nations in September) was challenged in the courts in both its initial and later forms. Beginning in late August the country experienced a series of a domestic traumas, as hurricanes wreaked devastation in Texas, the Virgin Islands, Florida, and Puerto Rico (August–September), a shooter killed 58 and wounded more than 500 at a concert in Las Vegas (Oct. 1), and California experienced an outbreak of deadly, destructive wildfires (October and December).
The economy continued to experience the steady growth that had marked it in most of the 2010s, and in Dec., 2017, Trump and Congressional Republicans united to achieve their first major legislative victory, enactment of a tax overhaul that promised significant permanent tax reductions to many U.S. businesses. The passage of a budget (Mar., 2018) with greatly increased defense and domestic spending combined with the tax cuts led the Congressional Budget Office to predict trillion-dollar deficits by 2020.

Internationally, continued missile and nuclear weapons testing by North Korea in 2017 led to increased tensions with the United States that did not ease until 2018. In April a nerve gas attack in Syria by the Assad government provoked a retaliatory missile strike on the part of the United States and created tensions between the United States and Russia; a year later, another especially deadly poison gas attack also provoked U.S. retaliation. The Trump administration in June announced it would withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate accord, and in October stopped certifying Iran's compliance with the multinational nuclear agreement and threatened to withdraw from it, prompting the U.S. allies who were party to the accord to call for continued U.S. adherence to the agreement. The U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was broadly rejected at the United Nations and by many allies; at the same time the Trump administration moved to reduce its contributions to the United Nations and its agencies.

In early 2018, protective tariffs imposed or proposed by the Trump administration on a number of imported products, many of which were aimed at China, led to concerns about a possible trade war as China responded in kind. In February, a school shooting in Parkland, Fla., in which 17 died resulted in renewed public outrage concerning gun violence and led in March to large demonstrations across the nation in favor of gun control.

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