

Power Notes: U.S. Since 1968

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the election of 1968.

- 1) Vietnam, civil unrest, and "law & order" were the major issues. President Johnson withdrew from the race, and after the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy, Vice President Hubert Humphrey received the Democratic nomination.
- 2) George Wallace, Governor of Alabama, ran as a segregationist candidate.
- 3) The Republican, Richard Nixon, won with only 43.4% of the popular vote.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the election of 1972 and the Watergate crisis.

- 1) During his first term Nixon reduced U.S. involvement in Vietnam, reduced tensions with the Soviet Union, opened up relations with Communist China, and "stabilized" social unrest.
- 2) In 1972 the Democrats nominated the liberal Senator George McGovern to run against Nixon. Nixon easily won.
- 3) In June 1972, five men who worked for Nixon's re-election committee were arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate Building. Nixon and his top aides tried to cover-up the scandal, but they were unable to. During the next two years Nixon was charged with: a) the break-in and cover-up; b) the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office by the Plumbers; c) accepting illegal campaign donations; d) "dirty tricks" during the 1972 campaign; e) misuse of the IRS; f) the refusal to release voice tapes of White House conversations; g) income tax evasion; and h) the illegal bombing of Cambodia.
- 3) In October 1973, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned rather than be prosecuted for taking bribes and income tax evasion. Nixon appointed Representative Gerald R. Ford as his new vice president.
- 4) Nixon resigned from the presidency in August, 1974 after the House Judiciary Committee recommended that the House of Representatives impeach him for obstruction of justice. In September, President Ford pardoned Nixon for any crimes that he may have committed during his presidency.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the presidencies of Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter.

- 1) The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 caused the price of gasoline to jump from 30 cents a gallon to around \$2.00 a gallon. Inflation jumped to 12% per annum and unemployment reached 9%. "Stagflation" [mild recession plus inflation] became the word that described the U.S. economy.
- 2) Democrat Jimmy Carter, ex-governor of Georgia, won the election of 1976 in a close contest with Ford.
- 3) Under Carter, inflation reached 20% in 1980. Relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated after the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. Carter's embargo of grain being shipped to the USSR angered and hurt U.S. farmers. The U.S. boycott of the 1980 Olympics (held in Moscow) had no impact on Soviet policy.
- 4) In January, 1979 the Iranian people overthrew the U.S. backed Shah, and Islamic fundamentalists under the Ayatollah Khomeini took over the country. In April, in response to the U.S. government admitting the Shah into the U.S. for medical treatment, Iranians seized the American embassy and took 50 Americans hostage. An April, 1980 attempt to rescue the hostages failed with 8 American soldiers dying.
- 5) Ronald Reagan, a conservative Republican, ex-movie and television actor, and ex-governor of California, easily defeated Carter in the 1980 election. The Iranian hostages were released on inauguration day, 1981.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the United States under the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

- 1) Reagan cut spending on social service programs by 20% between 1980 & 1986, and he increased defense spending by 100% between 1980 and 1988.
- 2) The Reagan administration did away with the progressive income tax with the "Tax Reform Act" of 1986. Wealth became more concentrated in the hands of the wealthy, and the cut back in social programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) caused more people to be classified as "poor."
- 3) The nation's national debt more than doubled, and the U.S. went from having a foreign trade surplus to a foreign trade deficit.
- 4) Reagan started the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"); sent troops to Lebanon in 1983 (241 killed); invaded Grenada; and supported anti-Communist rebels in Nicaragua. The Iran-Contra scandal, Costa Rican President Arias' peace plan, and the end of the Cold War ended direct U.S. involvement in Nicaragua.
- 5) The Iran-Contra scandal and evidence that Reagan often did not know what was going on in his administration has reduced Reagan's stature since he left office.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the U.S. during the presidency of George Bush.

- 1) Reagan's vice president, George Bush, easily defeated the Democratic candidate Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis in the election of 1988. Bush won by emphasizing traditional Republican themes: a) anti-Communism; b) conservative social issues; c) subtle racism; and d) low federal taxes.
- 2) The president of Panama, General Manuel Noriega, was on the CIA's payroll (he received an estimated \$1.2 million from the U.S. government during the 1980s). Noriega was also a major drug dealer. He stole the presidential elections of May, 1989 and he kept himself in power. On December 20, 1989, 24,000 Americans invaded Panama and arrested Noriega. The U.S. invasion was popular domestically, but the Organization of American States (OAS) censured the U.S. use of force & in the UN Security Council only a U.S. veto stopped a critical resolution from passing.
- 3) On August 2, 1990 Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, invaded Kuwait. With Kuwait, Iraq controlled 20% of the world's oil supply and threatened Saudi Arabia. A U.S. led coalition defeated Iraq in February, 1991.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Understand the U.S. during the presidency of Bill Clinton.

- 1) The end of the Cold War with the accompanying end of the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, the defeat of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, a relatively stable economy, and the victory in the Gulf War initially helped the Bush administration.
- 2) In late 1991, many problems put the Bush administration on the defensive: a severe recession; the growth of the national deficit at the rate of \$400 billion annually; a foreign trade imbalance; women's issues and abortion became major political issues; illegal drug use and crime increased; American public education was perceived as being in disarray; wealth became more maldistributed; concerns grew over environmental damage; and the savings & loan crisis cost taxpayers more than \$500 billion.
- 3) Democratic Arkansas governor Bill Clinton won the 1992 election against George Bush and independent candidate Ross Perot.
- 4) With the Democrats controlling Congress, Clinton got significant legislation passed during his first two years in office. In 1994 the Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress. In 1996 Clinton defeated the Republican candidate Bob Dole, and the Republicans maintained control of Congress.
- 5) In 1998 it was discovered that Clinton had improper sexual relations with a White House intern and that he lied about the relationship under oath. The House of Representatives impeached Clinton. The Senate did not convict him, but his reputation and his ability to get his programs implemented were severely damaged.