Chapter 42

The American People Face a New Century

Chapter Introduction

As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

***Abraham Lincoln**, 1862*

Well beyond its two-hundredth birthday as the twenty-first century entered its second decade, the United States was both an old and a new nation. It boasted one of the longest uninterrupted traditions of democratic government of any country on earth. Indeed, it had pioneered the techniques of mass democracy and was, in that sense, the oldest modern polity. As one of the earliest countries to industrialize, America had also dwelt in the modern economic era longer than most nations. But the Republic was in many ways still youthful as well. Innovation, entrepreneurship, and risk-taking—all characteristics of youth—were honored national values.

America's twenty-first century began much like the twentieth, as society continued to be rejuvenated by fresh waves of immigrants, full of energy and ambition. The U.S. economy, despite the impact of the "Great Recession," remained an important engine of world economic growth. American inventions—especially computer and communications technologies—continued to transform the face of global society. Consumers from Berlin to Beijing seemed to worship the icons of American culture—downing soft drinks and donning blue jeans, watching Hollywood films and television series, listening to rock or country music, even adopting indigenous American sports like baseball and basketball. In the realm of consumerism, American products appeared to have Coca-Colonized the globe.

The history of American society also seemed to have increased global significance as the third millennium of the Christian era opened. Americans were a pluralistic people who had struggled for centuries to offer opportunity, tolerance, and justice to many different religious, ethnic, and racial groups. Their historical trials and triumphs could offer valuable lessons to the rapidly internationalizing planetary society that was emerging at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Much history remained to be made as the country entered its third century of nationhood. The great social experiment of American democracy was far from completed as the United States faced its future. Astonishing breakthroughs in science and technology, especially in genetics, bioengineering, and communications, presented Americans with stunning opportunities as well as wrenching ethical choices. Global climate change made the responsible stewardship of a fragile planet more urgent than ever. Inequality and prejudice continued to challenge Americans to close the gap between their most hallowed values and the stark realities of modern life. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, violently heralded a new era of fear and anxiety. And the severe economic crisis that convulsed the nation and the world in 2008 demonstrated that free-market capitalism could still produce abundant misery as well as material abundance.

But men and women make history only within the framework bequeathed to them by earlier generations. For better or worse, they march forward along time's path bearing the burdens of the past. Knowing when they have come to a truly new turn in the road, when they can lay part of their burden down and when they cannot, or should not—all this constitutes the sort of wisdom that only historical study can engender.

42-1 Economic Revolutions

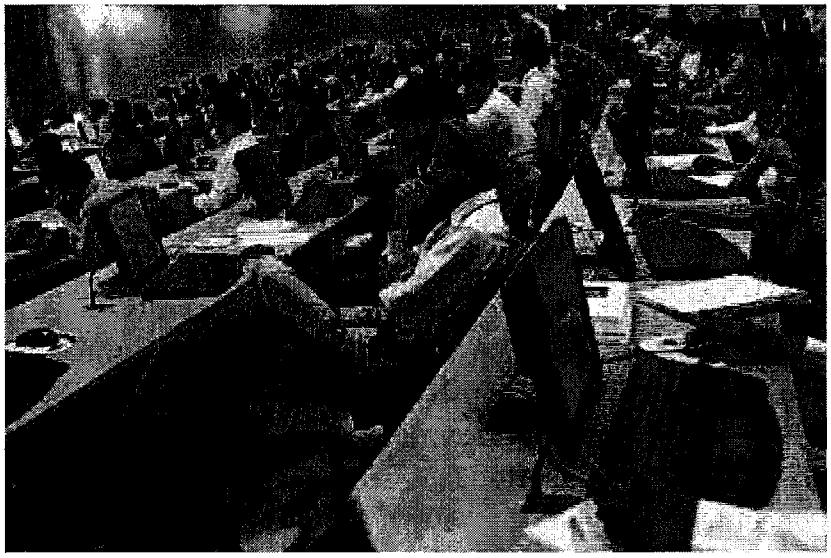
When the twentieth century opened, United States Steel Corporation was the flagship business of America's booming industrial revolution. A generation later, General Motors, annually producing millions of automobiles, became the characteristic American corporation, signaling the historic shift to a mass consumer economy that began in the 1920s and flowered fully in the 1950s. Following World War II, the rise of International Business Machines (IBM) and, later, Microsoft Corporation symbolized yet another momentous transformation, to the fast-paced "information age," when the storing, organizing, and processing of data became an industry in its own right.

The pace of the information age soon accelerated. As the twenty-first century opened, the phenomenal growth of the Internet heralded an explosive communications revolution. New corporate giants like Google redefined the ways that people knew about the world, while social networking services like Facebook and Twitter redefined the ways they knew each other. Businesspeople could now instantaneously girdle the planet with transactions of prodigious scope and serpentine complexity. Japanese bankers might sell wheat contracts in Chicago and simultaneously direct the profits to buying oil shipments from the Persian Gulf offered by a broker in Amsterdam. Peoples from all corners of the planet were rocketing down the "information superhighway" toward the uncharted terrain of an electronic global village, where traditional geographic, social, and political boundaries could be vaulted with the tap of a keypad.

But the very speed and efficiency of the new communications tools threatened to wipe out entire occupational categories, and even ways of life. Postal carriers, travel agents, store clerks, bank tellers, stockbrokers, and all kinds of other workers whose business it was to mediate between product and client were in danger of becoming road kill on the information superhighway. White-collar jobs in financial services and high-tech engineering, once thought securely anchored in places like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, could now be "outsourced" to countries such as Ireland and India, where employees could help keep a company's global circuits firing twenty-four hours a day.

Outsourcing Jobs to India

Sophisticated computer technology has allowed developing countries like India to attract Western employers seeking lower labor costs. India's educated and English-speaking work force has made it particularly suitable for international call centers and computer programming.



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Increasingly, scientific research was the motor that propelled the economy, and new scientific knowledge raised new moral dilemmas and provoked new political arguments. When scientists first unlocked the secrets of molecular genetic structure in the 1950s, the road lay open to breeding new strains of high-yield, pest-and weather-resistant crops; to curing hereditary diseases; and also, unfortunately, to unleashing genetic mutations that might threaten the complex balance of the wondrous biosphere in which humankind was delicately suspended. As the curtain rose on the new century, scientists stood at the threshold of a revolution in biological engineering. The Human Genome Project established the DNA sequencing of the thirty thousand human genes, pointing the way to radical new medical therapies—and to mouthwatering profits for bioengineering firms. Startling breakthroughs in the cloning of animals raised thorny questions about the legitimacy of applying cloning technology to human reproduction. Research into human stem cells held out the promise of cures for afflictions like Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. But some religious groups protested that harvesting stem cells involved the destruction of human life in embryonic form—just one example of the many ways that Americans continued to struggle with the ethical implications of their vast new technological powers.

Other unprecedented ethical questions also clamored for resolution. What principles should govern the allocation of human organs for lifesaving transplants? Was it wise in the first place to spend money on such costly procedures rather than devote society's resources to improved sanitation, maternal and infant care, and nutritional and health education? How, if at all, should society regulate the increasingly lengthy and often painful process of dying? (See “Makers of America: Scientists and Engineers,”.)

Chapter 42: The American People Face a New Century: 42-2 Affluence and Inequality
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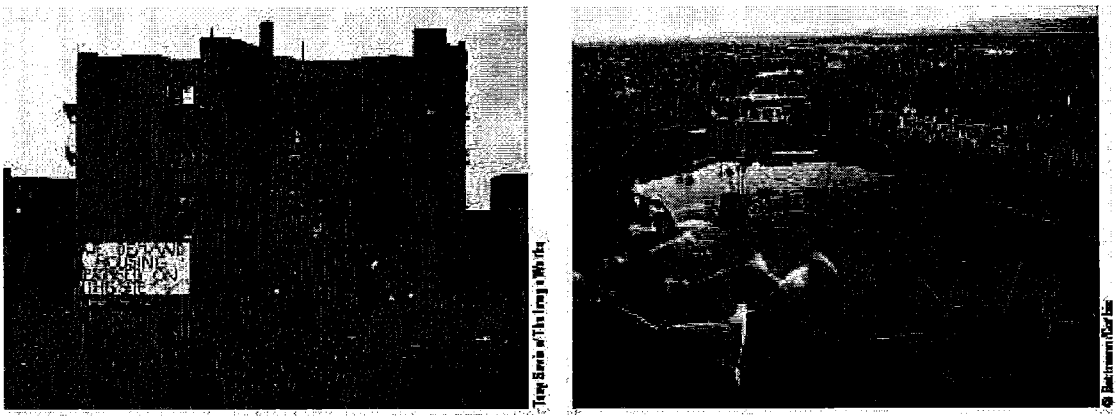
42-2 Affluence and Inequality

Americans were still an affluent people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Median

household income reached $49,400 in 2011. Even those Americans with incomes below the government's official poverty level (defined in 2010 as $22,314 for a family of four) enjoyed a standard of living higher than that of two-thirds of the rest of humankind.

Two Nations?

While decaying neighborhoods and legions of the homeless blighted American cities in the early twenty-first century, affluent Americans lived the good life in booming suburbs and in the more suburbanized cities of the Sunbelt, such as this development of million-dollar homes around a country club in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Tony Savino/The Image Works © Bettmann/Corbis

Americans were no longer the world's wealthiest people, as they had been in the quarter-century after World War II. Citizens of several other countries enjoyed higher average per capita incomes, and many nations boasted more equitable distributions of wealth. In an unsettling reversal of long-term trends in American society, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, the rich got fabulously richer, while the poor got an ever-shrinking share of the pie. The richest 20 percent of Americans in 2009 raked in half the nation's income, while the poorest 20 percent received a little over 3 percent (see Table 42.1). The gap between rich and poor began to widen in the 1980s and widened further thereafter. That trend was evident in many industrial societies, but it was most pronounced in the United States. Between 1968 and 2009, the share of the nation's income that flowed to the top 20 percent of its households swelled from 40 percent to 50.3 percent. Even more striking, in the same period the top 5 percent of income earners saw their share of the national income grow from about 15 percent to a remarkable 21.7 percent. The Welfare Reform Bill of 1996, restricting access to social services and requiring able-bodied welfare recipients to find work, weakened the financial footing of many impoverished families still further, and the Great Recession added to their ranks.

Table 42.1

Widening Income Inequality

Share of Aggregate Income	1980	1990	2000	2008

Lowest fifth	4.2	3.8	3.6	3.4
Second fifth	10.2	9.6	8.9	8.6
Third fifth	16.8	15.9	14.8	14.7
Fourth fifth	24.7	24.0	23.0	23.2
Highest fifth	44.1	46.6	49.8	50.3
Top 5%	16.5	18.5	22.1	21.7

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the top fifth of the country's households made significant gains in income, while everyone else lost ground.

(Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010;* ***U.S. Census Bureau*** *Current Population Reports.*)

Widening inequality could be measured in other ways as well. In the 1970s chief executives typically earned forty-one times as much as the average worker in their corporations; by the early 2000s, they earned 245 times as much. Prior to the passage of the Obama health-care bill in 2010, 50 million people had no medical insurance. At the same time, some 46.2 million people remained mired in poverty in 2011 (the largest number in more than 50 years). They represented 15.1 percent of all Americans (approximately 12.3 percent of whites, 25.8 percent of African Americans, 25.3 percent of Latinos, and 12.5 percent of Asians), a depressing indictment of the inequities afflicting an affluent and allegedly egalitarian republic (for comparative data, see Figure 42.1).

Figure 42.1

How the United States Measures Up

Once the undisputed world leader in countless areas of human endeavor, the United States looked to be falling behind on several crucial counts in the early twenty-first century.

	U.S.	CANADA	GERMANY	JAPAN	SWEDEN	HONG KONG	UK	KOREA	ITALY	FRANCE	CZECH	SPAIN
Income Inequality (Gini Index)	45.0	32.1	27.0	37.6	23.0	53.3	34.0	31.4	32.0	32.7	26.0	32.0
Unemployment Rate	9.7	8.0	7.4	5.1	8.3	4.3	7.9	3.3	8.4	9.5	7.1	20.0
Level of Democracy	8.18	9.08	8.38	8.08	9.50	5.93	8.16	8.11	7.83	7.77	8.19	8.16
Life Expectancy at Birth	78.37	81.38	80.07	82.25	81.07	82.04	80.05	79.05	81.77	81.19	77.19	81.17
Food Insecurity	16	8	4	9	6	6	9	11	15	10	14	14
Prison Population Rate	745	117	85	59	78	141	154	98	113	96	214	159
Student Math Scores	487	527	513	529	494	555	492	546	485	497	493	483
Student Science Scores	502	529	520	539	495	549	514	538	489	498	500	488

Best Worse Worst

What caused the widening income gap? Some critics pointed to the tax and fiscal policies of the Reagan and both Bush (father and son) presidencies, which favored the wealthy (see Table 42.2). But deeper-running historical currents probably played a more powerful role, as suggested by the similar experiences of other industrialized societies. Among the most conspicuous causes were intensifying global economic competition; the shrinkage in high-paying manufacturing jobs for semiskilled and unskilled workers; the greater economic rewards commanded by educated workers in high-tech industries; the decline of unions; the growth of part-time and temporary work; the rising tide of relatively low-skill immigrants; and the increasing tendency of educated men and women to marry one another and both work, creating households with very high incomes. Educational opportunities also had a way of perpetuating inequality, starting with the underfunding of many schools in poor urban areas and the soaring cost of higher education. A 2004 study revealed that at the 146 most selective colleges, 74 percent of the students came from families with incomes in the top 25 percent, compared to 3 percent of the students from the bottom income quartile.

Table 42.2

Who Pays Federal Income Taxes? (share of U.S. income tax, by income percentile)

Income Group (base income shown as of 2007)	1994	2007
Top 1% (above $410,096)	28.7%	40.4%
Top 5% (above $160,041)	47.4	60.6
Top 10% (above $113,018)	59.1	71.2
Top 25% (above	79.5	86.6

$66,532)		
Top 50% (above $32,879)	95.2	97.1
Bottom 50% (below $32,879)	4.8	2.9

Because the United States has long had a "progressive" income tax system, in which tax obligations are distributed according to ability to pay, widening income inequality was reflected in a redistribution of tax burdens. In the booming 1990s, the rich did indeed get richer—but they also paid an increasing fraction of the total federal tax take. These figures help explain why tax cuts benefit the wealthy more than middle-income earners and the poor.

(Source: ***Internal Revenue Service data, Tax Foundation***; *http://www.taxfoundation.org/news/show/250.html.*)

Makers of America

Scientists and Engineers

Subatomic particles and space-bound satellites do not respect political boundaries. Disease-carrying viruses spread across the globe. Radio waves and Internet communications reach every corner of planet Earth. At first glance science, technology, and medicine appear to be quintessentially international phenomena. Scientists often pride themselves on the universal validity of scientific knowledge and the trans-national character of scientific networks. In a world marked by political divisions, science evidently knows no bounds.

But a closer look reveals that national context does influence the character of scientific enterprise. American scientists have repeatedly made significant contributions to the life of the nation. They, in turn, have been shaped by its unique historical circumstances—especially America's intensifying concerns about national security in the twentieth century. Once marginal players in global intellectual life, American scientists now stand at the forefront of worldwide scientific advancement. In many ways the rise of American science has kept pace with the arrival of the United States as a world power.

Nowhere was this trend more evident than in the story of "Big Science." The unusual demands of America's national security state during World War II and the Cold War required vast scientific investments. The result was Big Science, or multidisciplinary research enterprises of unparalleled size, scope, and cost. Big Science and Big Technology meant big bucks, big machines, and big teams of scientists and engineers. The close link between government and science was not new—precedents stretched as far back as the founding of the National Academy of Sciences during the Civil War. But the depression-era Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the wartime Manhattan Project ushered in ventures of colossal scale and

ambition. As the head of the TVA wrote in 1944, "There is almost nothing, however fantastic, that (given competent organization) a team of engineers, scientists, and administrators cannot do today."

Cold War competition with the Soviets translated into huge government investments in physics, chemistry, and aerospace. The equation was simple: national security depended on technological superiority, which entailed costly facilities for scientific research and ambitious efforts to recruit and train scientists. In the 1950s defense projects employed two-thirds of the nation's scientists and engineers. Laboratories, reactors, accelerators, and observatories proliferated. After the Soviets launched the world's first artificial satellite (*Sputnik I*) in 1957, the international space race became America's top scientific priority. To land astronauts on the moon, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) spent a whopping $25.4 billion over eleven years on Project Apollo. Another massive aerospace mission, President Reagan's controversial Strategic Defense Initiative (or "Star Wars"), consumed somewhere between $32 billion and $71 billion between 1984 and 1994.

Launching Apollo 11

NASA flight directors monitor the launch of the *Apollo 11* lunar landing mission from the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas, in July 1969.

NASA/Johnson Space Center

In America's burgeoning "research universities," the federal government found willing partners in the promotion of the scientific enterprise. University-employed scientists, largely paid by government grants, concentrated on basic research, accounting for over 75 percent of the estimated $51.9 billion spent on basic science in 2008. Meanwhile, private industry spent additional billions on applied research and product development.

For consumers of air bags, smart phones, and other high-tech gadgets, these investments yielded rich rewards as innovative technologies dramatically improved the quality of life. Over the course of the twentieth century, American corporations spearheaded a global revolution in communications and information technology. American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) and Radio Corporation of America (RCA) attended the birth of telephones, radio, and television. Apple, International Business Machines (IBM), and Microsoft introduced personal computers. Government and industry scientists together invented the Internet.

Twentieth-century advances in medical science and technology have also revolutionized American lives. Thanks to new drugs, devices, and methods of treatment, the average life expectancy in the United States leapt from 47.3 years in 1900 to 77.9 years in 2007. In the first half of the twentieth century, physicians discovered hormones and vitamins, introduced penicillin and other antibiotics, and experimented with insulin therapy for diabetes and radiation therapy for cancer. More recently, cutting-edge medical science has nurtured in-vitro fertilization; developed respirators, artificial hearts, and other medical devices; and largely contained the AIDS epidemic.

Much of the optimism for future medical breakthroughs centers on the $3 billion Human Genome Project, which completed its mapping and sequencing of all the genetic material in the human body in 2003. Deemed the "holy grail" of genomics research, the project promised countless benefits, including new diagnoses for genetic defects, innovative therapies, and untold commercial applications. Coordinated by the Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health, the project engaged thousands of scientists in universities and laboratories across the nation and around the globe.

A Scientist Working in Her Lab

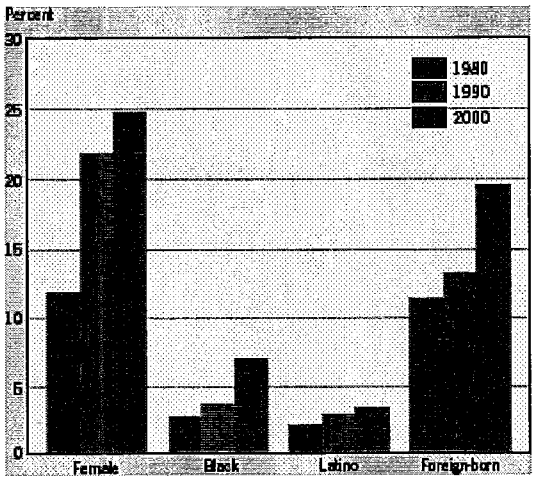
This medical school professor researching pancreatic regeneration was part of the surge of women pursuing scientific careers, particularly in the biological sciences. By 2004 as many women as men enrolled in medical schools, and minority enrollment climbed as well. In that year 7 percent of entering medical students were Latino, and 6.5 percent were African American.

To achieve such innovation, Big Science typically demands complex teams of scientists, engineers, and technicians. When traditional channels of recruitment came up short, scientific institutions increasingly recruited foreigners, women, and minorities (see Figure 42.2). Immigrants and exiles played key roles in the development of the atomic bomb and Cold War weaponry. Long relegated to junior positions as assistants and technicians, women and minorities have recently made significant gains in the "white man's world" of science. In 2007 women represented 27 percent of employed doctoral scientists and engineers in the United States, African Americans 5 percent, and Hispanics 4 percent, while the foreign-born

accounted for 24 percent.

Figure 42.2

Demographic Profile of Women, Minorities, and the Foreign-Born in Nonacademic Science and Engineering Occupations, 1980–2000



(Source: *Science and Engineering Indicators*, 2002, http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind02/c3/fig03-13.htm.)

Despite these stunning achievements, evidence suggests that the United States might be losing its preeminence in science. After dominating the intellectual world from the 1960s through the 1990s, American scientists are now winning fewer prizes and patents and publishing fewer scientific papers than their peers in Europe and Asia. Experts predict that current school-age Americans will not be able to meet the rising demand for scientific expertise. Moreover, fewer foreigners will arrive to fill the gap, as international competition for their labor heats up in places like Brazil, China, and India. For the United States to retain preeminence in science in the twenty-first century, it must continue to welcome all talent to the field. That means attracting both foreign-born scientists and young American students whose brainpower has long helped make the nation a scientific power.

42-3 The Feminist Revolution

All Americans were caught up in the great economic changes of the late twentieth century, but no group was more profoundly affected than women. When the century opened, women made up about 20 percent of all workers. Over the next five decades, they increased their presence in the labor force at a fairly steady rate, except for a temporary spurt during World War II. Then, beginning in the 1950s, women's entry into the workplace accelerated dramatically. By the 1990s nearly half of all workers were women, and the majority of working-age women held jobs outside the home. Most astonishing was the

upsurge in employment among mothers. In 1950 nearly 90 percent of mothers with children under the age of six did not work for pay. But half a century later, a majority of women with children as young as one year old were wage earners (see Table 42.3). Women now brought home the bacon and then cooked it, too. By 2008 American women participated in the work force in higher numbers than in almost all industrialized countries except Russia and China (see Figure 42.3).

Table 42.3

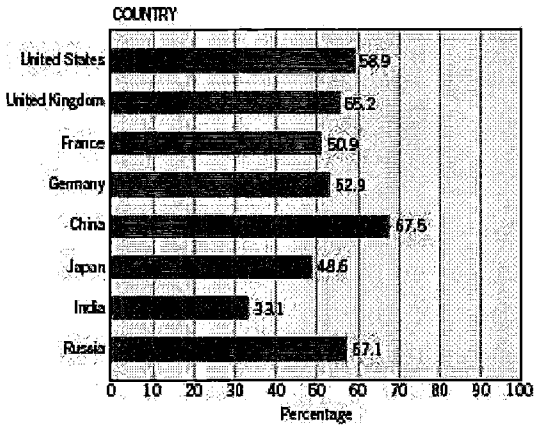
Working Women: Labor Force Participation Rates for Wives and Mothers, 1950–2007 *

Year	Married	Married, with Children	Married, with Children Ages 6–17	Married, with Children Under Age 6
1950	23.8%	NA	28.3%	11.9%
1960	30.5	NA	39.0	18.6
1970	40.8	39.7	49.2	30.3
1980	50.1	54.1	61.7	45.1
1990	58.2	66.3	73.6	58.9
2000	62.0	70.6	77.2	62.8
2007	61.6	69.3	76.2	61.5

(Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)

Figure 42.3

Women in the Work Force Globally, 2008



(Source: The World Bank, World Development Indicators.)

Beginning in the 1960s, many all-male strongholds, including Yale, Princeton, West Point, and even, belatedly, southern military academies like the Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, opened their doors to women. By the twenty-first century, women were piloting airliners, orbiting the earth, governing states and cities, and writing Supreme Court decisions.

Yet despite these gains, many feminists remained frustrated. Women continued to receive lower wages—80 cents on the dollar in 2009—compared with men doing the same full-time work. They also tended to concentrate in a few low-prestige, low-paying occupations (the "pink-collar ghetto"). Although they made up more than half the population, women in 2009 accounted for just 32 percent of lawyers and judges (up from 5 percent in 1970) and 32 percent of physicians (up from 10 percent in 1970). Overt sexual discrimination explained some of this occupational segregation, but most of it seemed attributable to the greater burdens of parenthood on women than on men. Women were far more likely than men to interrupt their careers to bear and raise children, and even to choose less demanding career paths to allow for fulfilling those traditional roles. Discrimination and a focus on children also helped account for the persistence of a "gender gap" in voting behavior. Women continued to vote in greater numbers than men for Democratic candidates, who were often perceived as being more willing to favor government support for health and child care, education, and job equality, as well as being more vigilant to protect abortion rights.

As the revolution in women's status rolled on in the 2000s, men's lives changed as well. Some employers provided paternity leave in addition to maternity leave, in recognition of the shared obligations of the two-worker household. More men assumed traditional female responsibilities such as cooking, laundry, and child care. Recognizing the new realities of the modern American household, Congress passed a Family Leave Bill in 1993, mandating job protection for working fathers as well as mothers who needed to take time off from work for family-related reasons.

A New World for Women

Revolutionary changes in the economy and in social values opened new career opportunities for women, even as many of them continued to perform their traditional duties as mothers and homemakers. Here U.S. Air Force Major General **Margaret H. Woodward** (top left) is shown at her desk as Joint Force Air Component Commander. **Drew Gilpin Faust** (bottom right) became the first woman to serve as president of Harvard University in 2007. Women athletes also came into their own in the wake of the feminist revolution. **Venus** and **Serena Williams** (top right) enthralled the tennis world as individual champions and as a doubles team beginning in the late 1990s.

Photo by Baerbel Schmidt © Bettmann/Corbis Boston Globe/Dina Rudick/Landov

Chapter 42: The American People Face a New Century: 42-4 New Families and Old
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42-4 New Families and Old

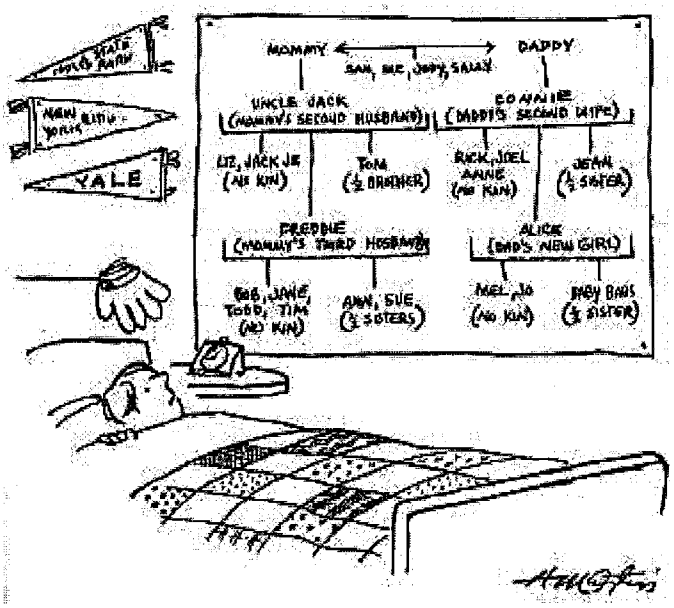
The traditional nuclear family, once prized as the foundation of society and the nursery of the Republic, suffered heavy blows in modern America. By the 1990s one out of every two marriages ended in divorce. Seven times more children were affected by divorce than at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kids who commuted between separated parents were commonplace. The old ideal of a family with two parents, only one of whom worked, was now a virtually useless way to picture the typical American household.

Traditional families were not only falling apart at an alarming rate but were also increasingly slow to form in the first place. The proportion of adults living alone tripled in the four decades after 1950, and by the 1990s nearly one-third of women aged twenty-five to twenty-nine had never married. In the 1960s, 5 percent of all births were to unmarried women, but three decades later one out of four white babies, one out of three Latino babies, and two out of three African American babies were born to single mothers. Every fourth child in America was growing up in a household that lacked two parents. The collapse of the traditional family contributed heavily to the pauperization of many women

and children, as single parents (usually mothers) struggled to keep their households economically afloat. Single parenthood outstripped race and ethnicity as the most telling predictor of poverty in America.

The Modern Family Tree

High divorce rates and the increasing number of "blended families" in modern American society could make for confusing "family trees."



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Child-rearing, the family's foremost function, was being increasingly assigned to "parent-substitutes" at day-care centers or schools—or to television and DVD players, the modern age's "electronic baby-sitters." Estimates were that the average child by age sixteen had watched up to fifteen thousand hours of TV—more time than was spent in the classroom. Parental anxieties multiplied with the advent of the Internet—an electronic cornucopia where youngsters could "surf" through poetry and problem sets as well as pornography.

But if the *traditional* family was increasingly rare, the family itself remained a bedrock of American society in the early twenty-first century, as viable families now assumed a variety of forms. Children in households led by a single parent, stepparent, or grandparent, as well as children with gay or lesbian parents, encountered a degree of acceptance that would have been unimaginable a generation earlier. Even the notion of gay marriage, which emerged as a major public controversy when the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled it legal in 2003, signaled that the idea of marriage retained its luster. Teenage pregnancy, a key source of single parenthood, was also on the decline after the mid-1990s. Even divorce rates appeared to ebb a bit, with 3.4 divorces per thousand people in 2008, down from 5.3 per thousand in 1981. The family was not evaporating, but evolving into multiple forms.

42-5 The Aging of America

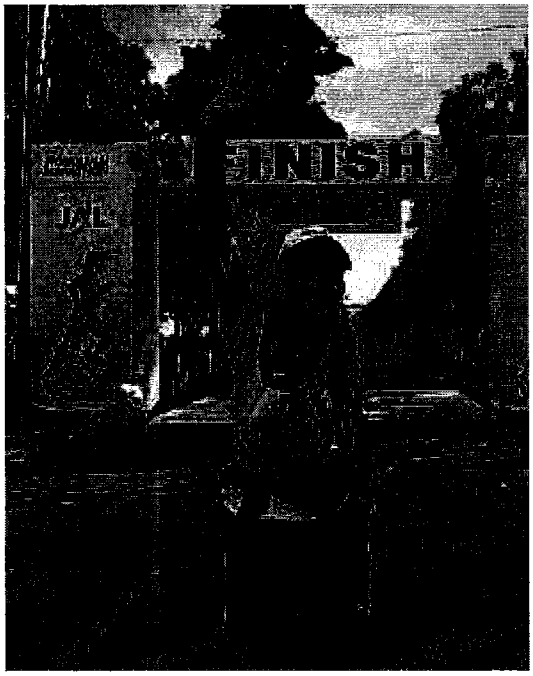
Old age was more and more likely to be a lengthy experience for Americans, who were living longer than ever before. A person born at the dawn of the century could expect to survive less than fifty years, whereas someone born in 2000 could anticipate a life span of seventy-seven years. (The figures were slightly lower for nonwhites, reflecting differences in living standards, especially diet and health care.) The census of 1950 recorded that women for the first time made up a majority of Americans, thanks largely to greater female longevity. Miraculous medical advances lengthened and strengthened lives. Noteworthy were the development of antibiotics after 1940 and Dr. Jonas Salk's discovery in 1953 of a vaccine against a dreaded crippler, polio.

Longer lives spelled more elderly people. One American in eight was over sixty-five years of age in 2009, and projections were that one of every five people would be in the "sunset years" by 2050, as the median age rose toward forty. This aging of the population raised a host of political, social, and economic questions. Older Americans formed a potent electoral bloc that aggressively lobbied for government favors and achieved real gains for senior citizens. The share of GNP spent on health care for people over sixty-five more than doubled in the three decades after the enactment of Medicare in 1965. This growth in medical payments for the old far outstripped the growth of educational expenditures for the young, with corresponding consequences for the social and economic status of both populations. As late as the 1960s, nearly a quarter of Americans over the age of sixty-five lived in poverty; three decades later only about one in ten did. The figures for young people moved in the reverse direction: whereas 15 percent of children were living in poverty in the 1970s, nearly 21 percent were impoverished in 2008.

These triumphs for senior citizens also brought fiscal strains, especially on the Social Security and Medicare systems. Social Security was established in 1935 to provide income for retired workers. Before that time, most workers continued to toil after age sixty-five. By century's end only a small minority did (about 15 percent of men and 8 percent of women), and a majority of the elderly population relied primarily on Social Security checks for their living expenses. Contrary to popular mythology, Social Security payments to retirees did not represent reimbursement for contributions that the elderly had made during their working lives. In fact, the payments of current workers into the Social Security system funded the benefits to the current generation of retirees. By the time the new century opened, those benefits had risen so high, and the ratio of active workers to retirees had dropped so low, that drastic adjustments were necessary. The problem intensified as the soaring rise of health-care costs, especially prescription drugs and long-term nursing care, threatened to bankrupt the Medicare system on which most senior citizens relied.

Senior Power

Living longer and living healthier, older Americans coalesced into one of America's most politically powerful interest groups in the early twenty-first century.



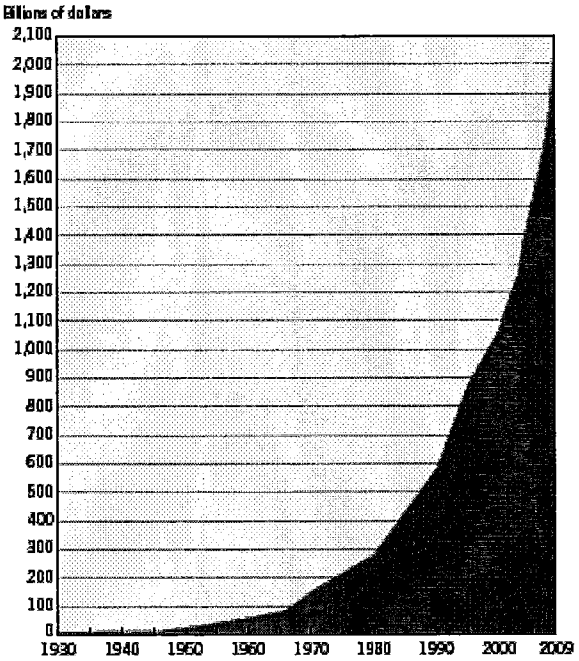
Courtesy of the Honolulu Marathon

At the beginning of the new century, as the huge wave of post–World War II baby boomers approached retirement age, it seemed that the "unfunded liability"—the difference between what the government had promised to pay to the elderly and the taxes it expected to take in—might rise above $7 trillion, a sum that threatened to inflict fiscal ruin on the Republic unless fundamental reforms were adopted. Yet because of the electoral power of older Americans, Social Security and Medicare reform remained the "third rail" of American politics, which politicians touched only at their peril (see Figure 42.4).

Figure 42.4

Government Expenditures for Social Welfare, 1930–2009

"Social welfare" includes unemployment and oldage insurance, health care, and veterans' benefits. The skyrocketing costs from the mid-1960s onward reflect new commitments made through Great Society programs and the increasing size (and political clout) of the elderly population, who were the main beneficiaries of expensive programs like Medicare. The steep rise after 1970 is also explained by the galloping inflation of the 1970s.



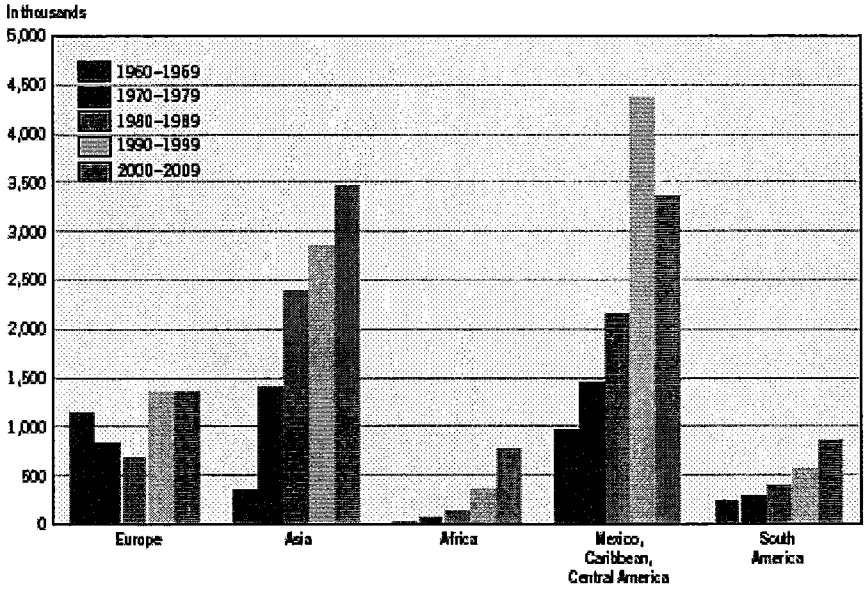
(Sources: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2010; Office of Management and Budget, Historical Tables http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals/.)

42-6 The New Immigration

Newcomers continued to come ashore in waves that numbered nearly 1 million persons per year from the 1980s into the early twenty-first century—the largest inflow of immigrants in America's experience. In striking contrast to the historic pattern of immigration, Europe contributed far fewer people than did Asia and Latin America (see Figure 42.5). And unlike their predecessors, many of the new immigrants settled not only in traditional ethnic enclaves in cities and towns but also in the sprawling suburbs of places like Los Angeles, Dallas, and Atlanta, where many of the new jobs were to be found.

Figure 42.5

Recent Legal Immigration by Area of Origin, 1961–2009



(Source: *Year-book of Immigration Statistics*, 2009, Department of Homeland Security.)

What prompted this new migration to America? The truth is that the newest immigrants came for many of the same reasons as the old. They typically left countries where populations were growing rapidly and where agricultural and industrial revolutions were shaking people loose from old habits of life—conditions almost identical to those in nineteenth-century Europe. And they came to America, as previous immigrants had done, in search of jobs and economic opportunity. Some came with skills and even professional degrees, from India or Taiwan or the former Soviet Union, and they found their way into middle-class jobs. But most came with fewer skills and less education, seeking work as janitors, nannies, farm laborers, lawn cutters, or restaurant workers.

The Southwest, from Texas to California, felt the immigrant impact especially sharply, as Mexican migrants—by far the largest contingent of modern immigrants—concentrated heavily in that region. By the turn of the century, Latinos made up nearly one-third of the population in Texas, Arizona, and California and 40 percent in New Mexico—amounting to a demographic *reconquista* of the lands lost by Mexico in the war of 1846–1848 (see "Makers of America: The Latinos,").

The size and geographic concentration of the Latino population in the Southwest had few precedents in the history of American immigration. Most previous groups had been so thinly scattered across the land that they had little choice but to learn English and make their way in the larger American society, however much they might have longed to preserve their native language and customs. But it seemed possible that Mexican Americans might succeed in creating a truly bicultural zone in the booming southwestern states, especially since their mother culture lay accessible just next door. Some old-stock Americans worried about the capacity of the modern United States to absorb these new immigrants. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 attempted to choke off illegal entry by penalizing employers of undocumented aliens and by granting amnesty to many of those already here. But immigrants just kept coming, legal and illegal alike, as political leaders struggled in vain to devise an immigration system that was fair, realistic, and true to the nation's traditions.

Immigration Confrontation

When Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed a tough new bill in 2010 authorizing local police to crack down on illegal immigrants, the national debate over immigration policy grew still more bitterly divisive. Champions of the bill hailed Arizona for taking a stand in the void left by federal inaction. Critics denounced it as an invitation to the harassment of all Hispanics—indeed, all people of color—regardless of their citizenship status.

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Yet the fact was that foreign-born people accounted for only about 13 percent of the American population in 2007, a far smaller proportion than the historical high point of nearly 15 percent recorded in the census of 1910, but evidence nonetheless that American society continued to welcome—and need—newcomers. Somewhat inconsistently, critics charged both that immigrants robbed citizens of jobs and that they dumped themselves on the welfare rolls at the taxpayers' expense. But studies showed that immigrants took jobs scorned by Americans and that they paid more dollars in federal taxes (withholding and Social Security taxes, as well as excise taxes) than they claimed for welfare payments. The story was different at the state level, where expenditures for immigrant education and health care often exceeded the net tax contribution of the immigrants themselves. Yet the infusion of young immigrants and their offspring was just what the country needed when faced with the challenges of an aging population. A more urgent worry was that unscrupulous employers might take cruel advantage of alien workers, who often had scant knowledge of their legal rights.

Debates over immigration were complicated by the problem of illegal immigrants. The intensity mounted in 2006, when xenophobic pundits and politicians fanned the old flames of anxiety that millions of undocumented workers were usurping American tax dollars and privileges. Immigrant sympathizers argued that unlawful aliens had to be legalized so that they could receive the same protections as other workers. Amid this chaos President **George W. Bush** and a bipartisan group of legislators proposed a law to establish a guest-worker program for undocumented workers and create a path to citizenship, albeit after paying a fine. Anti-immigrant forces condemned the plan as "amnesty." Business interests protested that it put too great a burden on employers to verify the right to work. And immigrant rights advocates claimed that it would create "second-class citizens." In the end, the compromise bill pleased no one and fell into the dustbin. But the debate over immigration only grew more bitter. Legislators in Arizona, provoked by continuing

immigrant flows over the state's long desert border with Mexico, passed a harsh anti-immigrant law in 2010 requiring local police to detain people if there was "reasonable suspicion" that they were illegal. Critics complained that the law amounted to unfair "racial profiling," and that the state was unconstitutionally usurping federal responsibility for controlling immigration. The matter seemed destined for eventual adjudication by the United States Supreme Court. Later in that same year, Congress rejected the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors), which would have provided a path to citizenship for undocumented youth who either finished college or served in the U.S. military.

Makers of America

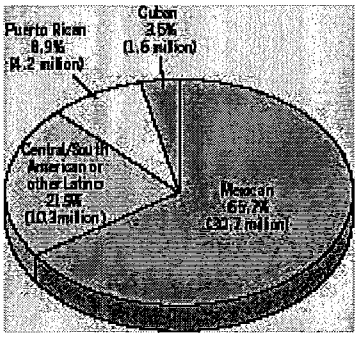
The Latinos

Today Mexican food is handed through fast-food drive-up windows in all fifty states, Spanish- language broadcasts fill the airwaves, and the Latino community has its own telephone book, the *Spanish Yellow Pages*. Latinos send representatives to Congress and mayors to city halls, record hit songs, paint murals, and teach history. Latinos, among the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. population, include Puerto Ricans, frequent voyagers between their native island and northeastern cities; Cubans, many of them refugees from the communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro, concentrated in Miami and southern Florida; and Central Americans, fleeing the ravages of civil war in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

But the most populous group of Latinos derives from Mexico (see Figure 42.6). The first significant numbers of Mexicans began heading for *El Norte* ("the North") around 1910, when the upheavals of the Mexican Revolution stirred and shuffled the Mexican population into more or less constant flux. Their northward passage was briefly interrupted during the Great Depression, when thousands of Mexican nationals were deported. But immigration resumed during World War II, and since then a steady flow of legal immigrants has passed through border checkpoints, joined by countless millions of their undocumented countrymen and countrywomen stealing across the southwestern frontier on moonless nights.

Figure 42.6

Sources of Latino Population in the United States, 2008



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Pew Hispanic Center, *Statistical Portrait of Hispanics in the United States*, 2008.)

For the most part, these Mexicans came to work in the fields, following the ripening crops northward to Canada through the summer and autumn months. In winter many headed back to Mexico, but some gathered instead in the cities of the Southwest—El Paso, Los Angeles, Houston, and San Bernardino. There they found regular work, even if lack of skills and racial discrimination often confined them to manual labor. City jobs might pay less than farm labor, but the work was steady and offered the prospect of a stable home. Houses may have been shabby in the barrios, but these Mexican neighborhoods provided a sense of togetherness, a place to raise a family, and the chance to join a mutual aid society. Such societies, or *mutualistas*, sponsored baseball leagues, helped the sick and disabled, and defended their members against discrimination.

Mexican immigrants lived so close to the border that their native country acted like a powerful magnet, drawing them back time and time again. Until tighter border controls were put in place after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, Mexicans frequently returned to see relatives or visit the homes of their youth, and relatively few became U.S. citizens. Indeed, in many Mexican American communities, it was a badge of dishonor to apply for U.S. citizenship.

Demonstrating for Immigrant Rights, Los Angeles, 2007

Latinos march in downtown Los Angeles in support of legalizing undocumented parents who have children born in the United States. U.S. law gives the right of citizenship to anyone born on American soil ("jus soli"), but not necessarily to the parents of that child.

The Mexican government, likewise influenced by the proximity of the two countries, intervened in the daily lives of its nationals in America, sometimes discouraging them from becoming citizens of their adopted country. As Anglo reformers attempted to Americanize the immigrants in the 1910s and 1920s, the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles launched a Mexicanization program. The consulate sponsored parades on Cinco de Mayo ("Fifth of May"), celebrating

Mexico's defeat of a French army at the Battle of Puebla in 1862, and opened special Spanish-language schools for children. Since World War II, the American-born generation has carried on the fight for political representation, economic opportunity, and cultural preservation.

Mexican American Farmworkers Pitting Apricots in Fruit Groves near Los Angeles, 1924

Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

Fresh arrivals from Mexico and from the other Latin American nations daily swell Latino communities across America. The census of 2000 revealed that Latinos had become the largest minority group in the United States, surpassing African Americans. As the United States moves through the twenty-first century, it is taking on a pronounced Spanish accent, and increasingly Latinos are making themselves a force to be reckoned with in American politics, culture, and the economy.

Young Latina Activists in East Boston, 2004

Latinos have become increasingly influential voters, courted by Democratic and Republican candidates alike.

Michael Dwyer/AP Images

42-7 Beyond the Melting Pot

Thanks both to continued immigration and to their own high birthrate, Latinos were becoming an increasingly important minority. The United States by 2008 was home to about 47 million of them. They included some 31 million Chicanos, or Mexican Americans, mostly in the Southwest, as well as 4 million Puerto Ricans, chiefly in the Northeast, and more than 1 million Cubans in Florida (where it was jokingly said that Miami had become the most "Anglo" city in Latin America).

Flexing their political muscles, Latinos elected mayors of Miami, Denver, San Antonio, and Los Angeles. After years of struggle, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC), headed by the soft-spoken and charismatic César Chávez, succeeded in improving working conditions for the mostly Chicano "stoop laborers" who followed the cycle of planting and harvesting across the American West. Latino influence was destined to grow, as suggested by the increasing presence of Spanish-language ballots and television broadcasts. Latinos, newly confident and organized, became the nation's largest ethnic minority, outnumbering even African Americans, in 2003. Indeed by the early twenty-first century, the Chicano population of America's largest state, California, led the Anglo population, making the state a patchwork of minorities with no single ethnic majority. In 2003 most newborns in California were Latino, a powerful harbinger of the state's demographic future—and the nation's. By 2010, the Census Bureau counted four "majority-minority" states (all of them in the booming West), where no ethnic group commanded a majority: Texas, New Mexico, California, and Hawaii. Nationwide, the birthrate for nonwhites in 2010 was poised to eclipse the white birthrate for the first time in history.

Asian Americans also made great strides. By the 1980s they were America's fastest-growing minority, numbering nearly 15 million by 2008. Once feared and hated as the "yellow peril" and consigned to the most menial and degrading jobs, citizens of Asian ancestry were now counted among the most prosperous Americans. Their rising political influence was heralded in the 1998 election of Oregon's Taiwan-born David Wu as the first Chinese American to serve in the House of Representatives.

Indians, the original Americans, numbered more than 2.5 million in the 2010 census. Half of them had left their reservations to live in cities. Meanwhile, unemployment and alcoholism had blighted reservation life. Many tribes took advantage of their special legal status as independent nations to open bingo halls and gambling casinos for the general public on reservation lands, but the cycle of discrimination and poverty proved hard to break.

42-8 Cities and Suburbs

The Oldest Americans

Members of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe celebrate the opening of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., 2004.

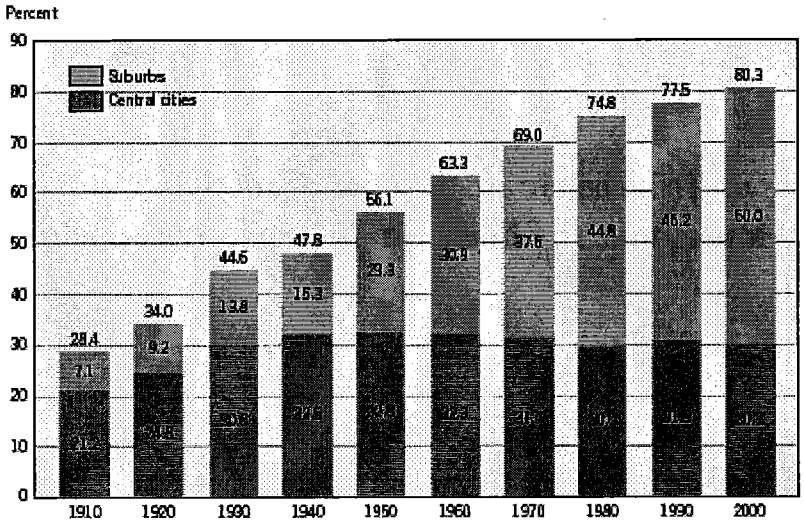
AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

America's "alabaster cities" of song and story grew more sooty and less safe in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Crime was the great scourge of urban life. The rate of violent crimes committed in cities reached an all-time high in the drug-infested 1980s and then leveled off in the early 1990s. The number of violent crimes even began to decline substantially in many areas after 1995. Nevertheless, murders, robberies, and rapes remained shockingly common not only in cities but also in suburbs and rural areas. America imprisoned a larger fraction of its citizens than almost any other country in the world, and some desperate citizens resorted to armed vigilante tactics to protect themselves.

The migration from cities to the suburbs was so swift and massive that by the mid-1990s a majority of Americans were suburban dwellers (see Figure 42.7). Jobs, too, became suburbanized. The nation's rather brief "urban age" lasted little more than seven decades after 1920, and with its passing many observers saw a new fragmentation and isolation in American life. Some affluent suburban neighborhoods walled themselves off behind elaborate security systems in "gated communities," making it harder, perhaps, to sustain a sense of a larger and inclusive national community. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the suburban rings around big cities such as New York, Chicago, Houston, and Washington, D.C., were becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, though individual schools and towns were often homogeneous.

Figure 42.7

Percent of Total Population Living in Metropolitan Areas and in Their Central Cities and Suburbs, 1910–2000



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1910 to 2000, compiled in *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century*, no. 2002.)

Suburbs grew fastest in the West and Southwest. In the outer orbits of Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas, and Phoenix, builders of roads, water mains, and schools could barely keep up with the new towns sprouting across the hardscrabble landscapes. Newcomers came not only from nearby cities but from other regions of the United States as well. A momentous shift of the American population was under way, as inhabitants from the Northeast and the Rustbelt Midwest moved southward and westward to job opportunities and the sun. The Great Plains, where 60 percent of all counties were losing population as the twentieth century ended, faced the sharpest decline, hollowing out the traditional American heartland. By the early twenty-first century, the Great Plains contained fewer people than the Los Angeles basin, despite being five times the size of the entire state of California.

Some major cities exhibited signs of renewal. Commercial redevelopment gained ground in cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and even the classic "city without a center," Los Angeles. Well-to-do residents reclaimed once-fashionable neighborhoods and sent real estate values soaring. But these latter-day urban homesteaders struggled to make their cities genuine centers of residential integration. Cities stubbornly remained as divided by wealth and race as the suburban social landscape surrounding them.

42-9 Minority America

Racial and ethnic tensions also exacerbated the problems of American cities. These stresses were especially evident in Los Angeles, which, like New York a century earlier, was a magnet for minorities, especially immigrants from Asia and Latin America. When in 1992 a mostly white jury exonerated white Los Angeles police officers who had been videotaped

ferociously beating a black suspect, the minority neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles erupted in rage. Arson and looting laid waste entire city blocks, and scores of people were killed. In a sobering demonstration of the complexity of modern American racial rivalries, many black rioters vented their anger at the white police and the judicial system by attacking Asian shopkeepers, who in turn formed armed patrols to protect their property. A decade later many a burned-out lot remained abandoned and weed-choked in neighborhoods still plagued by gang violence and the demoralizing effects of grinding poverty.

The Los Angeles riots vividly testified to black skepticism about the American system of justice. Just three years later, again in Los Angeles, the televised spectacle of former football "hero" O. J. Simpson's murder trial fed white disillusionment with the state of race relations. After months of testimony that seemed to point to Simpson's guilt, the jury acquitted him, presumably because certain Los Angeles police officers involved in the case had been shown to harbor racist sentiments. In a later civil trial, another jury unanimously found Simpson liable for the "wrongful deaths" of his former wife and another victim. (In 2008 Simpson was sentenced to thirty-three years in jail for unrelated felony convictions.) The reaction to the Simpson verdicts revealed the yawning chasm that separated white and black America, as most whites continued to believe Simpson guilty, while a majority of African Americans told pollsters that the original not-guilty verdict was justified. Similarly, complaints by African Americans that they had been unlawfully kept from the polls during the 2000 presidential election in Florida reflected the conviction of many blacks that they were still facing a Jim Crow South of systematic racial disfranchisement.

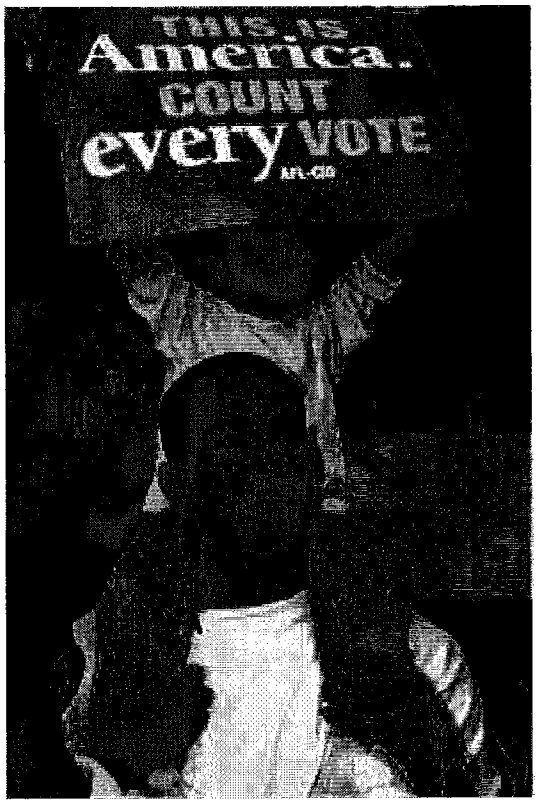
American cities have always held an astonishing variety of ethnic and racial groups, but by the late twentieth century, minorities made up a majority of the population of many American cities, as whites fled to the suburbs. In 2002, 52 percent of all blacks lived in central cities within metropolitan areas, compared with only 21 percent of whites. The most desperate black ghettos, housing a hapless "underclass" in the inner core of the old industrial cities, were especially problematic. Successful blacks who had benefited from the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s followed whites to the suburbs, leaving a residue of the poorest poor in the old ghettos. Without a middle class to sustain community institutions like schools and small businesses, the inner cities, plagued by unemployment and drug addiction, seemed bereft of leadership, cohesion, resources, and hope.

Single women headed about 45 percent of black families in 2009, more than three times the rate for whites. Many African American women, husbandless and jobless, struggled to feed their children. As social scientists increasingly emphasized the importance of the home environment for success in school, it became clear that many fatherless, impoverished African American children seemed consigned to suffer from educational handicaps that were difficult to overcome.

Still Fighting to Vote

An African American father and daughter participate in a rally in downtown Miami several weeks after the November 2000 election to demand a recount of dismissed presidential election ballots. Many Florida blacks complained that election officials had disproportionately disqualified their votes and unfairly

turned them away from the polls, resurrecting the kind of obstacles that long had kept blacks from voting in the South.



Luis Alvariz/AP Wide World Photos

Some segments of the African American community did prosper in the wake of the civil rights gains of the 1950s and 1960s, although they still had a long hill to climb before reaching full equality. By 2009, 43 percent of all black families (compared to 68 percent of all white families) had incomes of at least $50,000, qualifying them (barely) as middle class. Blacks continued to make headway in political life. The number of black elected officials had risen above the nine thousand mark, including more than three dozen members of Congress and the mayors of several large cities, not to mention President Barack Obama.

By the early twenty-first century, blacks had also dramatically advanced into higher education, though the educational gap between blacks and whites stubbornly persisted. In 2009, 12.7 percent of blacks over age twenty-five had a bachelor's degree, compared to 19.3 percent of whites and 21 percent of non-Hispanic whites. The political assault against affirmative action in California and elsewhere in the 1990s only compounded the obstacles to advanced training for many young African Americans. But defenders of affirmative action chalked up a major victory in 2003 when the Supreme Court in a key case involving the University of Michigan affirmed that achieving racial diversity on college campuses was a legitimate means to secure a more equitable society. The Court preserved affirmative action in university admissions as long as schools avoided using quotas, point systems, or other mechanistic ways of diversifying their student bodies, though it remained uneasy about letting such programs endure indefinitely. Justice **Sandra Day O'Connor** said, "We expect that twenty-five years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary."

42-10 E Pluribus Plures

Controversial issues of color and culture also pervaded the realm of ideas in the late twentieth century. Echoing early-twentieth-century "cultural pluralists" like Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, many intellectuals after 1970 embraced the creed of "multiculturalism." The new mantra celebrated diversity for its own sake and stressed the need to preserve and promote, rather than squash, a variety of distinct ethnic and racial cultures in the United States.

The nation's classrooms became battlegrounds for the debate over America's commitment to pluralism. Multiculturalists attacked the traditional curriculum as "Eurocentric" and advocated greater focus on the achievements of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. In response, critics charged that too much stress on ethnic difference would come at the expense of national cohesion and an appreciation of common American values.

The Census Bureau further enlivened the debate when in 2000 it allowed respondents to identify themselves with more than one of the six standard racial categories (black, white, Latino, American Indian, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander). Signifying a mounting revolution in attitudes toward race, nearly 7 million Americans chose to describe themselves as biracial or multiracial. As recently as the 1960s, interracial marriage was still illegal in sixteen states. But by the early twenty-first century, many Americans, including such celebrities as golfer Tiger Woods and actress Rosario Dawson, were proclaiming their mixed heritage as a point of pride.

In 1990 the African American intellectual Shelby Steele (b. 1946) declared in his provocative book, *The Content of Our Character*,

> *"What is needed now is a new spirit of pragmatism in racial matters where blacks are seen simply as American citizens who deserve complete fairness and in some cases developmental assistance, but in no case special entitlements based on color. We need deracinated social policies that attack poverty rather than black poverty and that instill those values that make for self-reliance."*

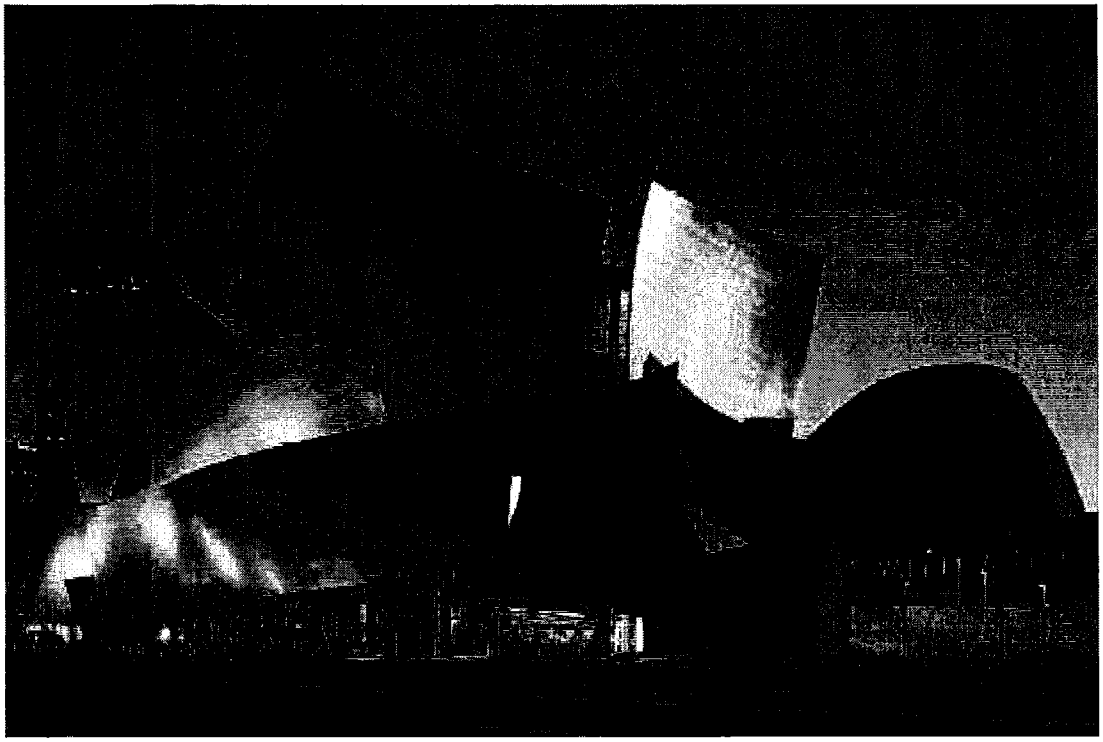
42-11 The Postmodern Mind

Despite the mind-sapping chatter of the "boob tube" and the distractions of the Internet, Americans in the early twenty-first century read more, listened to more music, and were better educated than ever before. Colleges awarded some 3 million degrees annually, and more than one person in five in the twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-old age group boasted a college bachelor's degree in 2009. (Nearly one in three had an associate's degree.) The swelling ranks of educated people lifted the economy to more advanced levels while creating more consumers of "high culture." Each year millions of Americans visited museums and patronized hundreds of opera companies and symphony orchestras—as well as countless popular music groups.

Commentators often described these contemporary Americans as living in a "postmodern" age, though few could agree on precisely what that term meant. But whatever else it denotes, *postmodernism* generally refers to a distrust of rational, scientific descriptions of the self or the world, and the insistence that human beliefs and realities are socially "constructed." In place of modernism's faith in certainty, objectivity, and unity, postmodernism stresses skepticism, relativity, and multiplicity. Postmodernism has enormously influenced contemporary philosophy, social theory, art, architecture, and literature, among other fields.

Postmodern architecture made the most visible footprint on the American cultural landscape. Rejecting the austere functionalism that had dominated architecture for much of the last century, postmodernists such as Robert Venturi and Michael Graves revived the decorative details of earlier historical styles. Modernists had valued minimalism and an absence of ornament—"Less is more," the renowned German architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe proclaimed. But postmodernists celebrated a playful eclecticism of architectural elements—"Less is a bore," as Venturi put it. The flight from stark modernism took especially fanciful forms in Frank Gehry's use of luminous, undulating sheets of metallic skin in the widely hailed Guggenheim Museum (1997) in Bilbao, Spain, and the Walt Disney Concert Hall (2003) in Los Angeles.

Architect Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, California, Completed in 2003



© Atlantide Phototravel/Corbis

The postmodern sensibility carried over into other art forms. Classical music composers like John Adams and John Zorn broke down boundaries between "high" and "low" styles and blended diverse musical genres and traditions in an experimental mix. Choreographers such as Steve Paxton and Twyla Tharp paired everyday movements with classical techniques and gave contemporary dancers license to improvise. Hip-hop artists from Biz Markie to Jay-Z "sampled" beats from other sound recordings, and lyrical MCs overlaid them with complex "rapping" schemes. Born in America's urban ghettos in the 1970s, hip-hop blossomed into a mainstream cultural phenomenon, both nationally and internationally. "Mash-up" artists also gained popularity, cleverly fusing fragments from songs of different musical genres or remixing one song's vocal track over another song's instrumentals.

The term postmodernism often means different things to different people. Choreographer Twyla Tharp (b. 1941) captured some of the trouble in defining a term that resists easy definition:

> *"There's this expression called postmodernism, which is kind of silly, and destroys a perfectly good word called modern, which now no longer means anything."*

Visual artists also felt the eclectic urge. Cindy Sherman, Jenny Holzer, and Kara Walker combined old and new media to confront, confound, and even offend the viewer. Jeff Koons and Shepard Fairey borrowed industrial materials and pop culture imagery to blur the hidebound distinction between highbrow and lowbrow cultures. Their pastiches of

disparate fragments, often presented in ironic fashion, came to symbolize post-modern art.

Postmodern literature, like art, had deep roots in the second half of the twentieth century. After World War II, authors like William S. Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon pioneered the use of nonlinear narratives, pastiche forms, parody, and paradox in their fiction. A newer generation of writers, including Michael Chabon, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Zadie Smith, adapted these techniques for contemporary audiences. Among these "post-postmodernists," David Foster Wallace playfully lampooned North America's dystopian future in *Infinite Jest* (1996), complete with calendar years named after corporate sponsors. Colson White-head ruminated on modern racial uplift among rival schools of elevator operators in *The Intuitionist* (1999). Jonathan Franzen satirized dysfunctional midwestern families to great critical acclaim in *The Corrections* (2001) and *Freedom* (2010).

Kara Walker Stands Before her Painting, Gone, An Historical of a Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart, 1994

Walker has daringly adapted the venerable technique of cut-paper silhouettes to explore modern themes of racial identity and historical revisionism. Here she contrasts the romantic image of the antebellum South captured in Margaret Mitchell's celebrated novel and film *Gone with the Wind* with the perspective of an enslaved black woman.

Jason Kempin/Getty Images

Latinos Breaking in Los Angeles

Breakdancing emerged among African Americans in New York in the late twentieth century to become an integral part of hip-hop culture.

Nick Onken/Getty Images

Other major works of contemporary fiction, especially from the pens of female and minority authors, complemented postmodernism's ethos of pluralism and cultural diversity. Toni Morrison wove a bewitching portrait of maternal affection in *Beloved* (1987) and in 1993 became the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature. E. Annie Proulx won widespread acclaim with her comical yet tender portrayal of a struggling family in *The Shipping News* (1993). Her moving tale of homoerotic love between two cowboys in "Brokeback Mountain" (1997) reached a mass audience in 2005 as an award-winning motion picture. James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, Joy Harjo, and Sherman Alexie contributed to a Native American literary renaissance that sought to recover the tribal past while reimagining its present.

In her touching novel *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Amy Tan (b. 1952) explored the complex dilemmas of growing up as a Chinese American:

> *"'A girl is like a young tree,' [my mother] said. 'You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak...; .' Over the years I learned to choose from the best opinions. Chinese people had Chinese opinions. American people had American opinions. And in almost every case, the American version was much better. It was only later that I discovered there was a serious flaw with the American version. There were too many choices, so it was easy to get confused and pick the wrong thing."*

Immigration in the new century also began to yield its own rich cultural harvest. Asian American authors flourished, among them playwright David Hwang, novelist Amy Tan, and Chinese-born Ha Jin, who wrote evocatively about his country of origin in novels like *Waiting* (1999) and *War Trash* (2004). Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) explored the sometimes painful relationship between

immigrant Indian parents and their American-born children. Latino writers made their mark as well. Junot Diaz's Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) brilliantly bridged the worlds of the Dominican Republic and New Jersey in a dazzling concoction of street-smart Spanglish.

On the stage, contemporary political themes and social commentary predominated. The AIDS epidemic inspired Tony Kushner's sensationally inventive *Angels in America* (1991), as well as Jonathan Larson's Tony Award–winning musical *Rent* (1996). Eve Ensler espoused feminist empowerment (and an end to violence against women) with comic intimacy in her *Vagina Monologues* (1996). Cuban American Nilo Cruz won a Pulitzer Prize in 2003 for *Anna in the Tropics*, about immigrant cigar makers confronting the tide of mechanization in 1929 Tampa. Tracy Letts peeled back the hypocrisies of middle-American family life in *August: Osage County* (2007). Lynn Nottage's deeply moving *Ruined* (2008), about a young African rape victim, found hope and redemption even amidst the brutal chaos of the Congo's eternal wars.

Film, the most characteristic American art form, continued to flourish, as pioneering directors such as George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, and Spike Lee were followed by a wave of even bolder young iconoclasts, including Quentin Tarantino, the Coen brothers, and Kathryn Bigelow. Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), notable for their unconventional storylines, cinematic allusions, and dark comedic stylings, were prime examples of postmodern film. On the television screen, documentaries thrived, as innovative filmmakers such as Ken Burns chronicled great American themes like the history of baseball, jazz, the national parks, the Civil War, and World War II. Cable television entered a golden era, as high-quality dramas such as *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) and *The Wire* (2002–2008) enjoyed commercial and critical success.

42-12 The New Media

By the early twenty-first century, the Internet had dramatically transformed daily life for most Americans. First created by the government for Cold War intelligence sharing, the World Wide Web spread like wild-fire through American homes, schools, and offices during the mid-1990s. The percentage of households with Internet access skyrocketed from 18 percent in 1997 to about 70 percent in 2009. In rapidly increasing numbers, Americans turned to the Internet to communicate, shop, work, and electronically bond with family, friends, and lovers. The "dot-com" explosion of Internet-based high-tech companies drove the tremendous economic boom of the late 1990s.

Even as the "dot-com bubble" began to deflate, the Internet demonstrated its staying power. Many online start-up companies failed, but those that survived often became giants in retail (Amazon.com), information gathering (Google), and even finance (E*Trade). The Internet reshaped the traditional corporate world as well, as almost every business, group, or organization—from used-car dealers to sports teams to college arts groups—had its own

Web site.

Fulfilling the promises of its early boosters, the Internet seemed to have a democratizing effect, spreading power and information among more and more Americans. Young people in particular flocked to social-networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to make connections, often with people in foreign countries. YouTube allowed everyday users to post home videos online for the whole world to see. And millions of people around the globe started a media revolution with their "Weblogs," or "blogs." "Bloggers" lent their voices to issues from foreign policy to college life, offering their beliefs and opinions without fear (and often without research). As the "blogosphere" grew, it posed a major challenge to the traditional media—newspapers especially—that had shaped Americans' understanding of the news for hundreds of years. Supporters argued that this "new Media" added fresh voices and new perspectives, but opponents questioned bloggers' expertise and accused them of spreading misinformation.

Tahrir (Liberation) Square, Cairo, Egypt, January 31, 2011

A man takes pictures with his cell phone amid the uprisings that ousted Egypt's president. Social media fueled the "Arab Spring" protests that swept across the Middle East in early 2011.

AP Photo/Ben Curtis

Blogs were not the only threat the Internet posed to the "mainstream media." Americans became ever less willing to read the morning paper or watch the evening network news shows when they could access a welter of information on their computer screens. Cable news had challenged the old system since the 1980s, but the spread of the Internet made the twenty-four-hour news cycle a reality. Consumer demand pushed daily newspapers to offer their reporting online, often for free. Subscription rates plummeted, and ad sales—the engine that drives print journalism—fell off markedly. As with railroads and the telegraph in the nineteenth century, and radio and television in the twentieth century, computers and the Internet drove major readjustments in modern American economic, social, and cultural life.

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42-13 The American Prospect

The American spirit pulsed with vitality in the early twenty-first century, but grave problems continued to plague the Republic. Women still fell short of first-class economic citizenship, and American society groped for ways to adapt the traditional family to the new realities of women's work outside the home. A generation after the civil rights triumphs of the 1960s, full equality remained an elusive dream for countless Americans of color. Powerful foreign competitors challenged America's premier economic status. As manufacturing jobs disappeared, and as corporate giants like Enron and Lehman Brothers collapsed, many Americans began to fear their economy as a treacherous landscape, even as it offered some of them astounding prosperity. The alarmingly unequal distribution of wealth and income threatened to turn America into a society of haves and have-nots, mocking the ideals of democracy and breeding seething resentments along the economic frontier that divided rich from poor.

Environmental worries also clouded the country's future. Coal-fired electrical-generating plants helped form acid rain and measurably contributed to the greenhouse effect, an ominous warming in the planet's temperature. The unsolved problem of radioactive waste disposal hampered the development of nuclear power plants. The planet was being drained of oil. Disastrous accidents like the explosion of BP's Deepwater Horizon oil-drilling rig off the Louisiana coast in 2010, which spilled millions of barrels of oil into nearby coastal waters and threatened the Gulf of Mexico's rich but fragile ecosystem, dramatically underscored the risks of mankind's increasingly desperate quest for fossil fuels.

By the early twenty-first century, the once-lonely cries for alternative fuel sources had given way to public fascination with solar power and windmills, methane fuel, electric "hybrid" cars, and the pursuit of an affordable hydrogen fuel cell. Energy conservation remained another crucial but elusive strategy—much-heralded at the politician's rostrum, but too rarely embodied in public policy, as witnessed in the Bush administration's rejection of the Kyoto Treaty on global warming in 2001 and the disappointing failure of the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009.

As the human family grew at an alarming rate on a shrinking globe, new challenges still faced America and its historical beliefs. The task of cleansing the earth of its abundant pollutants—including nuclear weapons—was one urgent mission confronting the American people in the new century. Another was seeking ways to resolve the ethnic and cultural conflicts that erupted with renewed virulence around the globe in the wake of the Cold War's end. At the same time, new opportunities beckoned in outer space and on inner-city streets, at the artist's easel and in the concert hall, at the inventor's bench and in the scientist's laboratory, and in the unending quest for social justice, individual fulfillment, and international peace.

The terrorist attack on America on September 11, 2001, posed yet another challenge to the United States. Shielded for nearly two centuries against assaults on its soil, it would now

have to preserve its security in a world made smaller by global communication and transportation, without altering its fundamental democratic values and way of life. The great danger posed by terrorism was not that Al Qaeda or other foreign enemies would seize control of the country or any portion of its territory. It was, rather, that in fighting terrorism, Americans would so compromise their freedoms at home and so isolate the country internationally that it would lose touch with its own guiding principles. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq made these difficulties clear. The challenge was to enhance national security without eroding democratic liberties, to protect the country's borders without preventing the arrival of desirable immigrants, and to use military force wisely without undermining America's standing in the world.

In facing those challenges, the world's oldest republic had an extraordinary tradition of resilience and resourcefulness to draw on. Born as a revolutionary force in a world of conservatism, the United States stood in the twenty-first century as a conservative force in a world of revolution. It had long held aloft the banner of liberal democracy in a world racked by revolutions of the right and left, including fascism, Nazism, and communism. Yet through it all, much that was truly revolutionary also remained a part of America's liberal democratic heritage, as its people pioneered in revolutions against colonialism, racism, sexism, ignorance, and poverty.

The dream of "making the world safe for democracy," articulated nearly a century earlier by Woodrow Wilson at the end of the First World War, gained a new poignancy after September 11, 2001, when Americans expressed a yearning for greater equality, opportunity, and democracy in the Middle East—all in the hope of diminishing the root causes of international terrorism. The capacity to nurture progress abroad, however, depended on the ability of Americans to improve their own country, and to do so in the midst of new threats to their own security. As Wilson wrote in 1893, long before he became president, "Democratic institutions are never done; they are like living tissue, always a-making. It is a strenuous thing, this of living the life of a free people."

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42-14a To Learn More

A complete, annotated bibliography for this chapter—along with brief descriptions of the People to Know—may be found on the American Pageant website. The Key Terms are defined in a Glossary at the end of the text.

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Chapter Review

42-14b

Go to the CourseMate website at www.cengagebrain.com for additional study tools and review materials—including audio and video clips—for this chapter.

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