

ed by the British to deal with the catastrophe. But although the EU lifted its ban in 1999, the French put their own embargo on British beef, and the relations with France and by implication the entire EU remained strained.

In 1997 Tony Blair and his 'New Labor'³³ party won the general elections, thus ending the period of long conservative rules. Blair engineered his pre-election pledge of devolution (decentralization of government) by establishing legislative bodies in Scotland and Wales, which wished to have more to say in their domestic affairs. In 1999 Labor pushed through Parliament a bill abolishing the voting rights of hereditary peers, which besides the devolution is the second major modification of the unwritten English constitution. Of course the entry into the European Union which *The Economist* described as 'something of a rolling constitutional revolution' was the greatest change. By joining the EU significant powers were grudgingly transferred to the European Union institutions. European law now takes precedence over British law which makes the European Court in Luxemburg the supreme body, whose authority surpasses that of a British Court or Parliament. Even though Eurosceptics would like to retrieve some of the powers from the EU, it probably would be impossible without a complete withdrawal from the Union. Such a withdrawal is very unlikely because each year GB is more economically bound with Europe and because the US supports the idea of a more integrated Europe, and in fact both Tory and Labor politicians came to realize that Britain's influence in Washington depends on British clout in Europe.

After the devastating terrorist attack on the World Trade Center of September 11, 2001, the British government became the most faithful American ally in the American War against Terrorism. The British forces supported the Americans in the war in Afghanistan that broke out when the Taliban refused to hand over Osama bin Laden. The Blair government also committed British forces to the invasion of Iraq that was launched by the US in March 2003.

3: The USA in the second half of the 20th century

After World War II Americans learned their lesson, and they were no longer indulging in isolationism. The US after the war gained the status of a superpower, which for a while held the monopoly on nuclear arms. Its main adversary, the USSR, the other superpower, did not lag behind and soon equipped itself with bombs of its own. Soon a great arms race was under way, and it seemed quite possible that another global conflict was at hand. That neither superpower decided to unleash the dogs of war is the most optimistic fact

³³ New Labor – the phrase was coined by Tony Blair to indicate that the modern Labor party moved away from the left to the center of the British political scene. The objective was to win a larger electorate.

of modern times. Still the Cold War raged pitilessly and determined the policies of all countries whose governments had to take into account the fact that the two great enemies might at any moment start to fight.

The Cold War had powerful consequences for the economy of the US. The arms race as well as a conscript army (much of it scattered in different places in the world such as West Germany, Japan or South Korea) were very costly. Millions of dollars were spent on the maintenance of these forces, on arming them and developing superior weapons for them. Defense establishments proliferated in the country especially in the areas neglected by private investors such as the South or South West of the country, which for the first time since the Civil War flourished.

Where defense went other investments followed, generating incredible wealth lavishly spent on public enterprises. The warfare state worked amazingly well – weapons research created new employment, and private and public companies grew rich on contracts with the US Defense Department. Instead of the post-war depression that everyone had expected there was a great boom – the wonder of the ruined world. At the same time social programs were extended, this time under the label of ‘Fair Deal’ coined by President Truman: the minimum legal wage was raised, the benefits of Social Security were extended, and a vast slum clearance and public housing program was begun. The next president Eisenhower³⁴ slashed national defense spending and several Fair Deal Programs but did not reverse the policy of building welfare capitalism.

What absorbed Eisenhower most were foreign affairs. The foreign policy of his administration was shaped by the secretary of state John Foster Dulles who enriched Truman’s Containment Doctrine with two new terms: ‘massive retaliation’ and ‘going to the brink’. ‘Massive retaliation’ meant dependence on nuclear weapons as a deterrent, even in local conflicts. Such a policy could, in Dulles’ opinion, allow the US to reduce the army and expenditures on conventional weapons and thereby lead to budgetary savings. ‘Going to the brink’ was a new doctrine which claimed that in order to contain communism the US must take a more active stance, even sometimes going to the brink of war. Such a policy proved effective in the conflict in Korea when Eisenhower’s threat to use nuclear weapons accelerated the speed of peace negotiations, but it dismally failed elsewhere, especially in Indo-China.

After the war in Korea (1950–53) Vietnam, divided into the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh) and the French-ruled South, became the next battleground of the Cold War. When the French attacked Ho Chi Minh’s Vietnam, Eisenhower supported the French, and by 1953 the US paid 2/3 of the costs of the war. Red China and Russia of course supported Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Kong. After the spectacular defeat of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, there was a temporary armistice during which the US put Ngo Dinh Diem in charge of the South Vietnamese government. His government was excessively corrupt and provoked more resistance. In 1957 the guerilla warfare was resumed.

At that time Eisenhower was mostly concerned with the Middle East where Nasser, the Egyptian President who gained new confidence and charisma after the Suez Crisis in 1956, was cleverly plotting to abolish all pro-western governments in Arab countries. In

³⁴ Dwight Eisenhower – 34th president (1953–61) and a famous general. He was the supreme commander of Allied Forces in World War II, his popular name was Ike.

1958 the Iraqi government fell, but the governments in **Lebanon** and **Jordan** did not go down due to American support.

Before Ike retired, he was presented with yet another immediate problem that emerged very close to the American shores. On **January 1, 1959**, after 3 years of guerilla warfare against the dictator **Fulgencio Batista**, **Fidel Castro** came to power in **Cuba**. As soon as he murdered all his political adversaries, he began a program of land redistribution and nationalization that hit hard against American interests on the island. To make things worse, Castro started hobnobbing with Russians and worked out with them some agreements. This friendship was soon bound to pose a serious threat to American security and to international peace.

Eisenhower is remembered as the only President who deployed American troops to enforce **desegregation in the South**. In fact Eisenhower's action was a logical conclusion of the Republican policy of cajoling blacks, whose position was strengthened by their wartime service and wartime mobility. Over 1 million blacks had served in the segregated army, and after the war they demanded equal chances. The popular slogan in black communities was '**Double V**' – a victory over Hitler and a victory Hitlerism, whose potent signs the blacks could see in the political and social realities of segregated America.

The **National Association for Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** founded in 1909,³⁵ led blacks in their fight for civil rights. Blacks were continually gaining ground – they were becoming richer, better educated and better organized, and their votes were more and more important. Therefore Eisenhower continued the policies of his Democratic predecessor Harry Truman, who not only ordered the desegregation of the armed forces and but also opened civil service jobs to blacks. The situation of African Americans was improving but, in their view, it was not improving fast enough. So the NAACP continued its own work towards progress, and in 1954 had its most spectacular victory. The **Supreme Court** presided over by **Earl Warren** as Chief Justice struck down *the Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that had upheld the racial segregation in schools ever since 1896. The case known as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* made segregation in schools illegal. The president who was against this decision, nevertheless had to take action when in 1957 a white mob wanted to lynch black children who wanted to attend the white city school in **Little Rock in Arkansas**. The president sent 1000 paratroopers to protect the black students and the soldiers had to stay throughout the whole school year³⁶.

The resistance of southern diehards against desegregation reignited acute racial hostility towards blacks who were in turn becoming more and more intransigent and determined to claim their constitutional rights. In 1955 they received a new dynamic and eloquent leader in the person of **Martin Luther King Jr.** who was launched into national prominence by the **Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56)**.³⁷ King initiated a strategy of **nonvio-**

³⁵ The membership in NAACP rose during the war from 50.000 to 450.000 people.

³⁶ In 1958 the school was closed – the local authorities preferred to have it closed rather than desegregated. The fact bore out Eisenhower's objections that it was impossible to make people good by force and all federal legislation forcing desegregation was in fact counter-productive, as it produced a backlash, even in those areas where racism was subdued and the problems with segregation had already been on their way to peaceful solution.

³⁷ Montgomery in Alabama, often called 'the cradle of Confederacy', was the place where the **Civil Rights Movement** started, after an incident connected with a black woman **Rosa Parks** who refused to sit in

lent, passive resistance³⁸ based on the writings of Thoreau and the example of **Mahatma Gandhi**, who had overthrown the British Empire in India.

During **John F. Kennedy**'s 'thousand days' (1961–63), King began to change his strategy. He provoked staunch racists to air their radical views in public, whereby the federal government had to take action to enforce anti-racial legislation. The civil rights issue was of paramount importance in the **1961** presidential election, and **J. F. Kennedy** did his best to rally black voters to his side. In fact it was **Robert Kennedy**, John's brother and attorney-general in Kennedy's and later Johnson's administration, that was the driving force behind many of **J. F. Kennedy**'s decisions. He was a man of great compassion and vision, and he persuaded the president to propose an ambitious civil rights bill that was to eradicate discrimination of blacks in all public places. The bill bogged down in Congress due to the opposition of Southern Democrats, which provoked a massive demonstration of supporters of the bill – 200.000 blacks and whites marched on **August 28, 1963** to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, where Martin Luther King delivered one of his most famous speeches in which he said: 'I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live up to the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal'. I have a dream that one day... the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit together at the table of brotherhood'.

John F. Kennedy in fact showed very little political talent in pushing his '**New Frontier**'³⁹ Programs through Congress dominated by opposition coming from his own Democratic party. Some people argued that he was a 'Prince Charming' whose lofty rhetoric could fan Americans into uncommon fervor.⁴⁰

Kennedy's worst failure was the **Bay of Pigs** – an attempt to invade Cuba. On **April 19, 1961** 1500 Cuban exiles supported by the CIA attempted to end the rule of Fidel Castro but failed, thus causing a great embarrassment to the President. But the failure was relatively quickly redressed. In **1962** American intelligence discovered that the Cubans were preparing to receive **Russian nuclear missiles**, which began the most serious crisis in Cold War history and took the world to the brink of a nuclear war. But the Russians relented and took the missiles back, to which America responded with a similar friendly gesture, removing their missiles from Turkey, Italy and Britain.

Kennedy also announced his plans to withdraw American forces from **Vietnam** which plunged into chaos after a series of military *coups*. Unfortunately he failed to do so, be-

the back of a segregated bus. When she was arrested M. L. King organized the bus boycott which forced the city authorities to change the law forcing the blacks to sit in the back.

³⁸ The sit-in movement – blacks occupied white restaurants demanding service; 'kneel-ins' movement in churches and 'wade-ins' in segregated swimming pools completed this tactics of non-violent resistance.

³⁹ During his presidential campaign Kennedy used the expression meaning the 'Frontier of unknown opportunities and perils – a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats'. His domestic program included urban renewal, rise of the minimum wage, enlargement of social security, grants to areas stricken by poverty. The new Frontier was first and foremost space. Kennedy poured more money into space exploration. His goal was to offset the Russian success in launching **SPUTNIK** with the first landing on the moon.

⁴⁰ A good example of his rhetoric, the 'Kennedy style' was using the Frontier image as a metaphor for his programs. Another example is the well known rhetorical question he posed before Americans during his inauguration: 'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country'.

cause on November 22, 1963 he was shot down by Lee Harvey Oswald while visiting Dallas. His early tragic death, which made him something of a legend, remains the most mysterious American political assassination.

Kennedy's reputation of a great American president eclipsed some of the accomplishments of his successor **Lyndon Johnson** who was not so glamorous and charismatic but had more clout than his dead predecessor. As soon as he became president the legislation blocked in Congress poured through and 'the war of poverty' started. Its aim was to create what Johnson called the 'Great Society', free not only of poverty but also racial injustice. His programs were supported by the majority of Americans who reelected Johnson in 1964, and he immediately gave shape to his New Deal liberalism by flooding Congress with legislation aimed at improving health, education, safety, purity of environment and the conditions of living. In 1964 Johnson signed the most far reaching **Civil Rights Bill** that had ever gone through Congress. The Bill forbade discrimination in public places and job discrimination. The **Voting Act** passed a year later gave all the so-far disenfranchised citizens the right to vote.

But the legislation did not end segregation and discrimination and made blacks bitterly disillusioned with American justice. Many blacks also felt disillusioned with King and his non-violent tactics, which anyway did not turn out to be useful in northern ghettos which in the 1960s were continually burning. Finally the violence took the form of the **Black Power Movement** whose leaders, such as **Malcolm X**, were dedicated to destroying white supremacy with guns and clubs if need be. **Martin Luther King's assassination on April 4, 1968** (he was killed by a half-insane Southern white) seemed to bear out the **Black Panthers**⁴¹ claim that the time had come to use brutal force to end discrimination. This seemed to be the end of the 'Second Reconstruction' as Kennedy's and Johnson's efforts to give Afro-American fair treatment were called. The Black population sunk back into apathy, as the eyes of the nation were turning on the **Vietnam War**.

The American commitment in the war was steadily growing, and by 1969 there were over half a million American troops in Vietnam, engaged in 'search-and-destroy' operations. As the Americans involuntarily accepted the primary responsibility for fighting the communist Vietcong, the death toll among the American soldiers dramatically rose. In spite of American military superiority, the war in Vietnam was a 'limited war' – the American involvement had to be relatively small not to provoke a Soviet or Chinese reaction. For the Vietnamese communists the war was a matter of survival, and they were ready to go on as long as they had any strength to fight. As for the limited war with unclear objectives, the war in Vietnam started to seem too costly in terms of casualties and money pumped into it.⁴² As the war was turning out to be un-winnable, it started to tear to pieces Johnson's popularity. It was then that **Robert Kennedy** assumed the leadership of the anti-war forces in the Democratic Party and won the race for the nomination for president. He was murdered on the day he won the California primary election by the Palestinian fanatic **Sirhan Sirhan**. There seemed to be no end to the national traumas.

Richard Nixon, a Republican, won the next presidential election (1968) and took over the task of patching up the distressed nation. He had to deal with the wide spread youth

⁴¹ Black Panthers were black extremist.

⁴² \$322.000 were spent on every communist killed in Vietnam, as compared with 53\$ spent on every poor person in the country.

revolt and the emergence of the anarchistic counter-culture, with race riots that followed in the wake of M. L. King's assassination, and with the escalation of the Civil Right movement that now embraced other marginalized ethnic groups such as: Hispanic Americans or Native Americans and minority groups such as for example gays. Many of these developments were anathema for the president who represented 'the silent majority' – the white working class and middle class citizens who held back from the political and social upheavals that were transforming the nation.

In fact Nixon was a cynical man, morally shallow and duplicitous, which quickly got him the nickname 'Tricky Dick'. He promised 'peace with honor' in Vietnam, but instead he launched a last offensive against the communists in Vietnam, just when the peace agreement was about to be signed. In 1971 the so-called **Pentagon Papers**, leaked from the Defense Department, were printed in the *New York Times* and revealed to the public the truth about the American involvement in Vietnam.⁴³ This scandal gave the Americans a foretaste of what was about to come.

Nixon's handling of economic problems was equally ineffective. The country was suffering a recession due to its effort to win the expensive Vietnam War and cover the costs of the 'Great Society' programs that the president could not manage to roll back. He was far more successful in foreign affairs where he had the assistance of the most remarkable American diplomat **Henry Kissinger**, a German Jew who made a tremendous career in the US where his unsentimental, un-ideological outlook on international politics and his 'shuttle diplomacy' around the world to find solutions to international problems were appreciated. Thanks to him Nixon acquired the reputation of a 'global peacekeeper' that secured his reelection in 1972. He was the first and only president to resign just two years later because of the petty intrigue he himself had set up. The intrigue involved people from Nixon's closest environment who during the 1972 election tried to steal information from the offices of the Democratic Party in the **Watergate** Hotel in Washington, D. C. The burglars were caught and the worst political scandal in American history started to unfold that sent most of the president's associates to jail and started **impeachment** proceedings. On 8 August 1974 Nixon resigned claiming that he had been destroyed by unprincipled and vindictive enemies. Till the very end he refused to admit that the charges against him were valid even though there was overwhelming evidence piled against him⁴⁴.

Thus the 1960s and 1970s were a watershed in American history. President Jimmy Carter⁴⁵ aptly recapped all the important changes that took part in American consciousness in his 1979 speech:

We were sure that ours was a nation of the ballot, not the bullet until the murders of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. We were taught that our armies were always invincible and our causes always just, only to suffer the agony of Vietnam. We respected the presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase 'sound as a dollar' was an expression of absolute dependability, until ten years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our nation's resources

⁴³ Two years later on March 29, 1973 the last American troops left Vietnam.

⁴⁴ The most conclusive evidence against Nixon was the tape recording of the conversations in the White House between Nixon and his aids which were revealed to the public.

⁴⁵ One of the chief advisors of President Carter was Zbigniew Brzezinski, a Polish refugee whose ideas about foreign politics were in many ways similar to those of Henry Kissinger.

were limitless until 1973, when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil. These wounds are still very deep. They have never been healed.⁴⁶

President Gerald Ford, who took the reins of the country after Nixon stepped down in disgrace, was not the man that could avert the decline, so it was not surprising that in the **1976** election **Jimmy Carter**, a Democrat, had a crushing victory.⁴⁷ But still only 50% of voters took part in the election, which was the lowest turn-out in American history. The other half decided to sit the election out following the popular advice of bumper stickers which said: 'Don't vote it only encourages them' (the politicians).

Carter had some notable successes in the first two years of his presidency. He admitted to his administration more blacks and women than any president before. He offered amnesty to those who had fled the country to avoid being drafted for the unpopular Vietnam war. But the **energy issue** was the most urgent and difficult. American oil reserves had been running out for some time, and the US depended on Arab countries for supplies, while at the same time politically supporting the biggest enemy of oil-producing countries in the Middle East – Israel. This obvious contradiction, which America politicians failed to notice, made the Arab countries ask pretty obvious questions: why should they supply America with cheap petrol? Why should they subsidize the 'American way of life'? Since no legitimate reasons could be found **The Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC)** decided to increase the price of oil fourfold in December 1973. In the summer of 1979, with the outburst of another war in the Middle East, America was again hit by another devastating fuel shortage. The support for Carter fell lower than that for Nixon during the worst moments of the Watergate scandal. The drastic drop in his popularity was not even remedied by his success in engineering a peace arrangement between Israel and Egypt in Camp David (a presidential retreat in the hills of Maryland). The final blow came from **Iran** where the Pro-American **Shah** and his government were abolished and a new Muslim government under the leadership of **Ayatollah Khomeini** took control. The Shah fled to the US where he was treated for cancer while Iranian nationalists took control over the **American embassy (November 4, 1979)**. Diplomats, officials and other staff members were held as hostages. The rescue attempt fell through and there were eight casualties. In his last act as president Carter bought off the prisoners with several billions dollars of Iranian assets from American banks which he had frozen when the conflict had begun.

When **Ronald Reagan** became president in 1981 the economy was still in recession. Reagan was a Conservative Republican and *a nouveau riche* who hated taxes. He was a second-rate actor and host of a popular TV show through most of his professional life, which gave an air of confidence to his public appearances. When he won the presidency few people believed he was up to the job, yet a very fortunate incident helped to improve his outlooks. He was shot by an assassin and went about the business in such an exhilarating way that most Americans could not help but admire his courage and his sense of humor.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ This fragment of Carter's speech is quoted on page 669 of *the Penguin History of the USA*.

⁴⁷ Ford did not stand a chance mostly due to his decision to pardon Nixon. Another thing that pulled Ford down was the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975. The last Americans fled from Saigon ignominiously leaving behind to their enemies many of their Vietnamese collaborators. Communists also won in Laos and Cambodia.

⁴⁸ Regan had a real gift for catchy lines. When he came round after the attempted assassination he told his wife 'Honey I forgot to duck'. This and other famous lines he uttered came from old films or other people (in this case the boxer – Jack Dempsey).

That admiration helped Reagan to carry out his policies dubbed **Reaganomics**. He cut the money for health, housing, education and culture; he cut funds for civil rights enforcement as well. He carried out the biggest tax cuts in history believing that more cash in the hands of rich would result in more investment and less unemployment. He increased military spending.

In foreign politics Reagan had to deal with crises in Central America. In **Nicaragua** he reversed Carter's policy of supporting the existing Cuban-sponsored government of **Sandinistas**⁴⁹ by giving money and weapons to the government's enemies called 'contras'. A Civil War also continued in **El Salvador** where the Reagan administration subsidized **Duarte**'s government. The Middle East still was an unsolvable problem, this time it was torn by a bloody religious war between **Iran** and **Iraq**. The two conflicts, in Central America and the Middle East, came together for a while to the foreground of public attention when it turned out that Reagan's administration endorsed a secret sale of military hardware in Iran in order to gather funds to subsidize the contras in Nicaragua. The **Iran-Contra affair (Irangate)** showed how deep was Reagan's commitment to destroy the Sandinistas. His attempts, for the time being, ended in fiasco and seriously undermined American credibility.

George Bush, Reagan's Vice President, who took office after Reagan's two terms (1989), pledged to continue Reagan's agenda. Bush was more interested in foreign policy than domestic policy, where he was unwilling to make certain unpopular moves (like raising taxes). His dream was to restore America's prestige abroad and to reinstate America in her position of the invincible world superpower. For two years of his presidency he just sat back and observed how communism was crumbling in central and Eastern Europe. In 1991 Bush surprised everybody announcing unilateral American cut backs in nuclear weapons in Europe and Asia. **Gorbatchov** responded promising he would do the same. The Cold War ended, but it did not put an end to local wars. In 1991 Bush sent a large army to **Saudi Arabia** after **Iraq**'s annexation of **Kuwait**. The climax of this so-called **Gulf War** was the swift ground assault 'Desert Storm' (February 24, 1991) that ousted the Iraqi forces from Kuwait in four days.

In 1993 the tables turned again. **Bill Clinton**, a Democrat, introduced some more liberal measures into White House policies focusing again more on domestic issues and the ailing economy which by then was showing the first signs of recovery. He increased taxes for the rich, and further cut government spending; he introduced a number of anti-crime bills and other social reforms. In brief he was commonly regarded as the successor to the New Deal and Great Society Programs. Accused of lying about his affair with **Monika Lewinsky**, he pressured her to give false testimony in court. He was **impeached** on January 7, 1999, but the impeachment did not receive the required 2/3 majority and failed. Therefore he remained in office till the end of his second term.

After this so-called **Zipper gate** scandal **George Walker Bush**'s victory was a forgone conclusion. G. W. Bush is the son of the former President George Bush and like his father he is a Republican. He became president on 20 January 2001 after a very tough race. The 2000 election for President between him and Al Gore, the candidate of the Democratic Party, was very close and the votes had to be counted again. Finally the Supreme Court

⁴⁹ The government of Sandinistas named after the guerilla leader from the 20s and 30s Cesar Augusto Sandino took power in coup d'etat in 1979 after overthrowing the pro-American government of Samoza.

ruled that Bush had won, and in this way Bush became the 43rd US President. But after the terrorist attack against the **World Trade Center** in New York (11 September 2001)⁵⁰ his crusade against terrorism rallied many people to his side. The attacks were ascribed to **Al Quaeda**, a terrorist group led by **Osama Bin Laden**, who carried a variety of terrorist acts in the past. The attacks resulted in strong anti-terrorist laws passed not only in the US but also many other countries. Soon the war on terror also became the main justification for different military campaigns – in Afghanistan, where Osama Bin Laden was thought to be hiding, and in Iraq (2003), which allegedly was producing nuclear weapons to launch attacks against the US and its western allies. **The war on terrorism** was used by other countries as well as a pretext to dispatch old enemies, as it was in the case of Israeli action against Palestinians or Russian action against the Chechens. Bush easily defeated his rival John Kerry in the presidential election in 2004, but presently the support for him is at its lowest ebb. Bush has not managed to capture Osama Bin Laden and there were no nuclear weapons in Iraq, which after several years of guerrilla warfare is gradually turning in the eyes of public opinion into another Vietnam.

⁵⁰ The terrorists carried the attack through the hijacked planes from the Eastern coast. Two planes hit the twin Towers which soon after collapsed. The third plane hit the Pentagon and the forth that headed for the White House crashed in Pennsylvania. Nearly 3.000 people died.