

American Presidents and Their Attitudes, Beliefs, and Actions Surrounding Education and Multiculturalism

A Series of Research Studies in Educational Policy

Sixth Installment:
Examining Presidents Ronald Reagan,
George H. W. Bush, and William Jefferson Clinton



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Introduction

In our nation's history all of the presidents have been white males. As West states (1993) in his seminal book, *Race Matters*, the significance of the race factor cannot be overlooked in the selection of our national leaders and this national value is reaffirmed in the following quote: "Race still matters in this country, largely in ways that are subtle but is no less venomous to the threadbare proposition that we live in a colorblind society" (Wickham, 2002, p. 233).

Each president must decide through his agenda to fight for social justice or distance himself from issues of race, class, and access to employment, health care, and other societal needs. The president must negotiate his agenda through bargaining, debate, and sometimes domination. "Be-

cause of its status in the policy process, the President's agenda is the subject of intense conflict" (Light, 1999, p.1).

The president's leadership, actions, and policies have great significance on matters of social justice and matters of race. "The presidency is the chief engine of progress in American history; its leadership and power are central" (Blumenthal, 2003). The president is involved in each stage of policy making (Shull, 1993). Furthermore, "Much of the expected policy change is likely to be attributable to presidential influence" (Shull, 1993, p. 26).

This article focuses on the recent presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and William Jefferson Clinton and is the sixth installment in a series that examines how presidents, through their office of power, have impacted U.S. citizens by their actions and policies. By viewing the presidents through a multicultural lens we can more clearly understand the impact of their legacies that have been advanced and continue to exist today with respect to issues of social justice.

Our reasons for examining the presidency are apparent, "the president is the embodiment of leadership in this country.... the ambiguity of the Constitution in

relation to the chief executive . . . has the power to frame, implement, and transform government" (Baptiste & Sanchez, 2004, p. 34; Schlesinger, 2002). We invite you, if you haven't already done so, to look back at the previous five installments. Reading those installments will not only put this current article in context, but it will also give you a better sense of understanding our purpose in writing these articles.

Ronald Reagan (40th President 1981-1989)

The country in 1980 was in a profound state of gloom. For more than a year Jimmy Carter had struggled unsuccessfully to free a group of fifty-two American hostages held in Iran. And with the economy in trouble and inflation in double digits, Carter's repeated calls for sacrifice and lower expectations had left many Americans pessimistic about the future. Ronald Reagan saw his job, as president, as teaching Americans how to dream again. (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1991, p. 294)

Social Currency

Ronald Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois in 1911. He grew up in a lower middle

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class environment (www.multied.com). He had a difficult childhood and attended public school. His father was an alcoholic and his undiagnosed nearsightedness held him back in school (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999; WorldHistory.com). Reagan graduated in 1932 from Eureka College where he majored in economics and sociology (www.americanpresident.org).

In 1932 Reagan began his career in the spotlight as a radio sportscaster and was later cast in more than 50 films (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). When he became the host of the television show *General Electric Theater*, he became one of the “most recognizable men in America” (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1991, p. 292). He later became part owner of the show and very wealthy. Reagan became General Electric’s spokesperson and traveled to GE factories around the United States gaining political capital. Reagan was an active Democrat, but realized his political beliefs had changed. In 1962 he changed political parties.

Reagan received strong political support from the business community in southern California which helped him to secure his position as California’s governor for eight years (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). During this time he established a conservative record.

Looking at the presidency of Reagan one can’t help but notice the contradiction in his uncomplicated yet intricate personality. He comforted the comfortable and disarmed the afflicted (Wills, 2000). His vision for the nation was easily understood by many Americans through his unique ability of communication that was comparable to FDR and Lincoln (Truelsen, 2004).

Known as the “Great Communicator,” for many Reagan communicated a message that instilled pride and patriotism in Americans. He was able to sell America to Americans, something that hadn’t happened during previous presidencies. He gave conservatism what it had lacked—humanity, optimism, and hope (Wills, 2000). Reagan was benign and grandfatherly in style, not harsh, more similar to a democrat like Franklin Roosevelt (Wills, 2000). Reagan embodied the contradiction of being both a genuinely liked, but a highly polarizing political figure, an unusual combination perhaps found in no other modern president (Laham, 1998).

Reagan’s popularity with the American people enabled him to pursue his divisive conservative agenda, yet coming across as sincere and persuasive in large part because, like all good salesman, he truly be-



Ronald Reagan

lieved in whatever he said (Schaller, 1992). “As an actor and simplistic ideologue and the supremely homey orator, Reagan was of course a master at manipulating the now essential media cues of American political success” (Krieger, 1986).

He made politics as theater into an art form by creating a White House of illusion (Walsh, 1997). Reagan came to understand his chief function as president was essentially to serve as a national storyteller and develop a positive vision of America and what it means to the world, and connect that vision to the past, present, and future (Walsh, 1997).

Actions, Policies, and Political Decisions

Reagan deserves credit for enabling Americans to share in his vision. Under his watch the cold war came to an end and the world listened as he said those famous words, “Mr. Gorbachov, tear down these walls.” Through these accomplishments he was able to restore patriotism back to America. But through these same accomplishments his spending created a downward spiral for the American economy.

Reagan’s strategy was for the United States to spend so much money on its military defense that it would force the Soviet Union to do the same, which eventually would cause the Soviet’s collapse. The Soviet Union’s economy wasn’t the only economy that would suffer from this strat-

egy. Unfortunately, the U.S. military spending was paid for through budget cuts in economic and social programs.

Economic Ignorance. Reagan’s social policy is best seen as an abdication. Reagan’s economic policy was to adjust government regulation so that it favored business once again...the coalitions that were necessary for election were either gratified (the elderly) or abandoned (the poor) (Thomas, 1998). The Department of Housing and Urban Development was the main government supporter of subsidized housing for the poor and Reagan cut the budget by three-quarters during his eight year term.

Furthermore, under Reagan, the number of people living beneath the federal poverty line rose from 24.5 million in 1978 to 32.5 million in 1988 (Gray Panthers, n.d.). On Reagan’s policies Roger Wilkins concluded, “I think Reagan was such a genial fellow that nobody could conclude that his policies were as mean spirited as they turned out to be” (Wilkins, 2004). It is undeniable that under Reagan’s watch his policies subsidized the rich on the backs of the poor.

Reagan’s goal of paralyzing government was an obvious success, as evidence, Congress enacted the fewest number of administration-proposed bills since Eisenhower (Blumenthal, 2003; Light, 1991). He pushed for the passage of his economic and defense programs and ignored other issues, especially domestic policy issues. Reagan’s neglect of programs and issues had critics describing him as lazy (Schaller, 1992). In addition, interest payments on the national debt more than doubled, savings dropped, and the infrastructure was grossly neglected due to cutbacks (Wills, 2000).

Those who were most directly affected by those cutbacks were the poor. This becomes apparent when you examine the Census Bureau statistics that have been compiled over the past forty years which show that during the Reagan administration by 1989 the richest two-fifths of families had the highest share of national income and the poorest two-fifths had the lowest share (Cannon, 1991). Cutbacks in food stamps, Medicaid, housing subsidies, unemployment compensation, urban mass transit, student loans, and welfare were part of Reagan’s tax cuts aimed at stimulating the economy (D’Souza, 1999).

The reality was the poor got poorer and the economy never became stimulated through the Reaganomics theory (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). Al-

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though Reagan claimed he was conservative and proclaimed to be against big government, he gave us the largest government debt in history.

Reagan's Policies Concerning Racism. Once in office, Reagan fought against affirmative action. He named Clarence Thomas to head the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and ignored school desegregation efforts (Wickham, 2002). Concerning Reagan's philosophy of the government, Reagan accomplished his own purposes by a malign neglect of governmental machinery rather than legislative abolition of it. Reagan left all of the New Liberal state intact, but made it almost impossible for such to function (Wills, 2000). By doing this Reagan undermined the interests of people of color without actually appearing to do so.

Reagan's neglect served to camouflage the real motivation behind his hostility to the public sector: the need to dismantle programs largely benefiting minorities and the poor, especially affirmative action, civil rights regulations, and welfare, in order to appeal to working-class whites, many of whom harbor racial resentments against people of color (Laham, 1998).

It is obvious that Reagan's words and actions define where he stood on racial issues and concerns for the needs of others regarding social justice. During his campaign Reagan stopped off at Neshoba County fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers had been murdered in 1964. He declared that he believed in states' rights and promised to restore to local and state governments the powers which properly belonged to them.

Cornel West said, "Reagan spoke in high regard of Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, as one of his heroes, at Stone Mountain, one of the headquarters of the KKK" (West, 2004). As President, Reagan cut funding for civil rights enforcement and opposed a Martin Luther King holiday (Klinkner, 2004). In 1981 Reagan sided with Bob Jones University in a lawsuit against the IRS to get a tax exemption even though there was a long-standing policy of denying tax exemptions to private schools that practiced racial discrimination.

Two years later the U.S. Supreme Court, in an 8 to 1 decision, ruled that Reagan was dead wrong and reinstated the IRS's power to deny Bob Jones University's exemption (Rein, 2002). William Raspberry, a columnist for the Washington Post, regarding Reagan's legacy on race said, "I don't accuse Reagan of racism though while

he served I did note what seemed to be his indifference to the concerns of Black Americans—Issues ranging from civil rights enforcement and attacks on 'welfare queens' to his refusal to act seriously against the apartheid regime in South Africa" (Raspberry, 2004). Education professor Phillip Klinkner said, "I don't know if Reagan was a racist by heart, but by his actions he did little or nothing to help remove the stain of racism" (Klinkner, 2004).

Further claims that Reagan and his policies had racial elements which are questionable and suspect include his handling of the Apartheid movement. The Reagan administration's policy of "constructive engagement" encouraged discrimination and oppression against the majority of the people of South Africa (International Progress Organization, 1984). Under Reagan's constructive engagement policy in Angola and Mozambique, the neighboring countries, the South African depredations killed about a million and a half people and lead to some 60 billion dollars in damage with U.S. support (Chomsky, 2004).

In 1981 Reagan explained to CBS that he was loyal to the South African regime because it was "a country that has stood by us in every war we fought, a country that, strategically, is essential to the free world in its production of minerals" (Lapsley, 2004). In an interview Father Michael Lapsley said, "I think that the interesting thing about his comment is that it focuses on profit and not people" (2004). When asked about Reagan's constructive engagement policy concerning South Africa, Lapsley said it was constructive for death (2004).

Desmond Tutu said that the Reagan White House saw "blacks as expendable" in South Africa. The South African white government forced black people from prized lands, migratory labor laws split families, and education was gutted for black children. Tutu declared "constructive engagement is an abomination, an unmitigated disaster" (Jackson, 2004). In 1986 Congress had finally had enough of the carnage to vote for limited sanctions. Reagan vetoed them but Congress overrode the veto. Reagan put no muscle behind the sanctions (2004). Over the remainder of his presidency more than 3000 people died and 20,000 were arrested under the South African state of emergency decrees (2004).

Reagan's Action: Socially Just? One of Reagan's most enduring legacies is the steep increase in homeless people. By the late 1980s the number of homeless people had swollen to 600,000 on any given night

and 1.2 million over the course of a year (Dreier, 2004). Reagan's budget cuts and overhaul of tax codes led to the explosion of homelessness in the U.S. during his eight years in office (Gray Panthers, n.d.).

Of the homeless, about 25 percent were veterans who had endured the atrocities and nightmares of Vietnam (Ludischer, 2004). Nearly 300,000 mentally ill people were held in U.S. prisons often because there was nowhere else for them to go (Campbell, 2003). During the 1980s Reagan pursued a policy toward the treatment of mental illness that satisfied special interest groups and the demands of the business community, but failed to address the issue: the treatment of mental illness (Thomas, 1998).

Reagan rescinded the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980, enacted under President Carter, as a way to reduce federal spending, reduce social programs, and transfer responsibility of many, if not most, government functions to the individual states (Thomas, 1998). The number of homeless people went from something so small that it wasn't even written about in the late 1970s to more than 2 million when Reagan left office (Gray Panthers, n.d.). The large increase of mentally ill in prisons was exacerbated by the closure of many mental institutions under the "care in the community" policy introduced in the 1980s during Reagan's presidency (Campbell, 2003). Reagan appeared to ignore homelessness and felt people were homeless by choice.

Another example of Reagan's attitude that if one ignores a problem it will eventually go away, was never more evident than with the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. Reagan had the power to make world-changing decisions yet when it came to the AIDS epidemic he failed to do anything. Reagan did not utter the word AIDS in public until 1987 (Lazarus, 2004). He did little to stop the spread of HIV and limited the amount of official resources dedicated to what was perceived by his administration as an affliction exclusively of the gay community.

Rene Durazzo, international program director for the nonprofit San Francisco AIDS foundation, said because Reagan failed to do anything we lost hundreds of thousands of people. Now the Center for Disease Control estimates that nearly one million Americans are now infected with HIV and billions of dollars have been spent on it (Lazarus, 2004).

Family Values and Education. The agenda which spurned the present controversial reauthorization of the Elementary

and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind) can be traced back to the Reagan administration and is closely tied to his “anti-child anti-family policies.”

Noam Chomsky’s lecture titled “Democracy and Education” illustrated the absence of moral consciousness that the Reagan administration had with concerns related to the valuing of human lives and civil liberties. Chomsky explains,

One of the agendas exposed is what Hewlett, an American economist who published a study called, *Child Neglect in Rich Nations*, calls the “anti-child and anti-family” spirit that existed in America during the 1980s. Examples that she gives to support her claims are when 146 countries had ratified the international convention on the rights of the child, but one had not: the United States, also when the World Health Organization voted to condemn the Nestle Corporation for aggressive marketing of infant formula, which kills plenty of children. The vote was 118 to 1, the one being the United States. Reagan’s policies were created to benefit the elite Fortune 500 companies, impoverishing others through falling wages, flexibility in labor markets, and privatization of child rearing which has led to the destruction of family identity and values. (Chomsky, 1994)

It was during the Reagan administration that in 1983 the report “A Nation at Risk” came out, based on supposed evidence, none of which was actually put into the report. It declared that our schools were in a decline, saying our children were falling when compared to students of other countries. The release of “A Nation at Risk” created a sense that our American education system was in a major crisis situation and over the next decade many notorious governmental documents were released, by the Reagan and Bush administrations, criticizing the ways schools were educating America’s children. Berliner and Biddle (1995) in their book *The Manufactured Crisis* said,

The Manufactured Crisis (referring to the hype and criticisms of education) was not an accidental event. During this period studies showing the successes in our schools were repressed and only the negative studies revealing how poorly our schools were doing received media attention. It appeared within a historical context and was led by identifiable critics whose political goals could be furthered by scapegoating educators.... Moreover, it was tied to misguided schemes that would, if adopted, seriously damage American schools. (p. 4)

These studies and the propaganda that followed were aimed at implementing the school voucher system that would increase privatization of schooling giving businesses control of education and ensuring monetary benefits.

Foreign Policy Reagan’s disregard for civil rights, the Boland Act, and the Arms Export Control Act created a climate for militarism within the foreign policy of his administration. Those assigned to implement his policies felt emboldened to circumvent laws previously aimed at restraining such militarism (Executive Summary n.d.). By analysis of their own specialists, the per capita deaths in Nicaragua would be comparable to about 2.5 million in the United States. This is greater than the total number of casualties in all U.S. wars, including the Civil War, and all wars in the 20th century, and what’s left of the society is a wreck (Chomsky, 2004).

Further evidence that Reagan’s foreign policies were hurtful and unjust are found in the *The Conclusions and Judgment of Brussels Tribunal on Reagan’s Foreign Policy* (September 30, 1984) which acknowledges,

The Reagan administration’s foreign policy constitutes a gross violation of the fundamental principles of international law enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations Organization...The Reagan administration is responsible for complicity in the commission of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, war crimes and grave breaches of the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949. The Reagan administration has provided enormous amounts of military assistance to an oppressive regime that has used it to perpetrate a gross and consistent pattern of violations of the most fundamental human rights of the people of El Salvador. The Reagan administration’s mining of Nicaraguan harbors violates the rules of international law set forth in the 1907 Hague Convention. For the part it played in the planning and initiation of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Reagan administration has committed a crime against peace as defined by the Nuremberg principles. ...and is an accomplice to the crimes against humanity, war crimes...such complicity includes the savage massacre of genocidal character of hundreds of innocent Palestinians and Lebanese civilians. The Reagan’s administration’s dispatch of the U.S. Sixth Fleet into the Gulf of Sidra for the purpose of precipitating armed conflict with the Libyan government constitutes a breach for the peace under article 39 of the UN Charter. The Reagan administration’s “linkage” of the presence of the Cuban troops in Angola with the independence of Namibia encourages South

African aggression against Angola and thus it must share in the responsibility for South Africa’s genocidal acts against the people of Angola. Both the Security Council and the General Assembly should also take into account the numerous interventionist measures taken by the Reagan Administration, whether direct or indirect, seeking to impose financial and economic policies which are contrary to the sovereign independence of states, especially in the developing world, and which severely damage the quality of life for all people. (International Progress Organization, 1984)

Reagan Conclusion

As president, Reagan pursued policies that were short-sighted, reckless, and, for many, hurtful. His economic legacy is one of deplorable disregard for the consequences of his actions, and the ramifications of Reagan’s decisions remain with us to this day (Lazarus, 2004). The income gap between the rich and everyone else widened, wages for the working class declined, the homeownership rate fell and the poverty rate in cities grew under his watch (Dreier, 2004).

We are moving toward acknowledgement of the people of the world who suffered under Reagan—the unemployed, poor, homeless, the powerless, and people of color (Lapsley, 2004). It is quite obvious through Reagan’s policies he showed a clear lack of compassion for the social justice of human beings. Bob Fitrakis summed up the Reagan presidency by saying, “When I think of the Reagan legacy I think of urban decay, homelessness, racism, rampant corporatism, and the destruction of the American dream” (Fitrakis, 2004, ¶9). Based on such evidence, President Reagan ranks very low on criteria drawn from a multicultural and social justice perspective.

George H.W. Bush

(41st President, 1989-1993)

Bush’s thoughts on dual presidency: “People really basically want to support the President on foreign affairs, and partisanship does, in a sense, stop at the water’s edge. Whereas on domestic policy, here I am with Democratic majorities in the Senate and Democratic majorities in the House, trying to persuade them to do what I think is best, It’s complicated.” (cited in Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999, p. 342)

Social Currency

Some historians describe Bush’s per-



George H.W. Bush

sonality as a classic Type A, practical, yet pragmatic and religious (Degregorio, 1991). He grew up in a wealthy family and was raised in privilege (Kelley, 2004; Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). His father served as a Senator from Connecticut and was a partner with the Brown Brothers Harriman firm (WorldHistory.com). Bush attended Phillips Academy, a private preparatory school that has a history of educating America's elites, the majority of whom go to Yale University (Kelley, 2004; WorldHistory.com).

After serving in World War II as a naval aviator, Bush attended Yale University in 1945 and majored in economics (Microsoft Corporation, 1997-2004). At Yale he was inducted into an elite secret society called the Skull and Bones where he built friendships that would aid in his acquisition of political power (Kelley, 2004; WorldHistory.com). Bush ventured into the Texas oil business in 1953. He co-founded the Zapata Petroleum Corporation (Microsoft Corporation, 1997-2004). The following year he became president of the Zapata Offshore Company and by age 41 he was a millionaire (1997-2004).

Before becoming President, Bush served in the House of Representatives, as Chairman of the Republican National Committee, as Ambassador to the United Nations, as U.S. Envoy to communist China, as Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and was a board member of the Committee on the Present Danger. In 1980, Ronald Reagan asked Bush to be his vice presidential running mate. During his eight year vice presidency he focused on foreign policy. He brought with him a network of international contacts

that would benefit his presidency (Greenstein, 2000).

In his acceptance speech to run for the Presidency in 1988, Bush called on government and the private sector to bring about a kinder and gentler nation. This implied he would reform Reagan's conservative domestic policies (Greenstein, 2000). There were numerous issues debated during the 1988 election. One issue was how democratic nominee Michael Dukakis vetoed a Massachusetts bill that required all public school teachers to lead their classes daily in the Pledge of Allegiance. Another was that Bush considered his opponent soft on crime, since Bush supported the death penalty and Dukakis opposed it.

Other areas of opposition were that Bush supported voluntary school prayer and an amendment to restrict abortion which Dukakis opposed. Despite the huge deficit, Bush pledged to continue the Reagan economic program and vowed not to raise taxes saying, "Read my lips, no new taxes!" (as cited in Degregorio, 1991, p. 681; Kelley, 2004; Kolb, 1994). Bush also proposed tax incentives, a cut in capital gains tax, more money for education, and increase in Medicaid system.

Actions, Policies, and Political Decisions

Bush's state of the union address seemed to be a reflection of the Reagan administration's ideas with a twist on existing programs (Light, 1999). His agenda failed to declare anything to push or "rock the policy boat" (1999, p. 292). His Inaugural Address was uninspiring (Kolb, 1994). On February 9, 1989 Bush's speech to Congress, *Building a Better America*, was viewed as a significant and comprehensive domestic agenda (Kolb, 1994). The domestic themes included education, environment, drugs, crime, and future investment (Kolb, 1994).

Bush reneged on his campaign promise of "read my lips, no new taxes." He agreed to a series of tax increases aimed at the middle class. He increased federal taxes on gasoline, cigarettes, beer, and Medicare premiums. The wealthy would pay luxury taxes on certain furs, jewels, cars, boats, and private aircraft, plus incur an increase in the top income tax rate. However, interestingly, Bush's plan to cut capital gains helped the richest 1% of Americans (Walter, 2003).

Social Justice Issues in Domestic Policy. Bush did appoint a more diverse staff than Reagan. Thirteen percent of Bush's senior appointees were Black (Shull, 1993).

Bush's appointments included Louis Sullivan, Head of the Department of Health and Human Services, Constance Newman, Head of the Office of Personnel Management, and Colin Powell, Chairman of The Joint Chiefs of Staff. Bush also made a record number of appointments of women to federal positions (Klos, 2000). However, these appointments were overshadowed by his appointment of Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice (Walton, 1997; Wickham, 2002). Thomas a right-wing conservative, replaced Thurgood Marshall. The Black Caucus opposed the nomination of Thomas, causing Bush to lose support among women and people of color with that appointment (Barilleaux & Stuckey, 1992; Booker, 2000; Shull, 1993).

Bush used the national concern about drugs and crime to maintain political momentum. He used a Black criminal, Keith Jackson, to demonstrate the need to fight against drugs (Booker, 2000). Under Bush, William Bennett, the National Drug Policy director, became known as the "drug czar." The inequities of the fight against drugs with respect to laws and criminalization became more evident. "While African-Americans were only 12 percent of the users of illegal drugs, they represented 41 percent of those arrested on cocaine or heroin charges" (Booker, 2000, p. 160).

Another example of Bush adversely impacting African Americans was that during his 1988 campaign he used a foreboding image of Willie Horton, a Black convicted murderer who raped a White woman, to attack Dukakis for being soft on crime (Booker, 2000; Wickham, 2002). Walton (1997) claimed "Bush continued to 'stroke' the white male (and particularly southern) electorate with his use of the infamous Willie Horton ads" (p.22). The commercial outraged many Black leaders.

Bush, like Reagan, also used executive orders to diminish regulatory and enforcement support for people of color (Duffy & Goodgame, 1992; Walton, 1997). Bush's policies and actions maintained the social policy framework that was set by his predecessor (Walter, 2003; Walton, 1997). Although Bush's 1992 presidential campaign outlined a six-point urban agenda that included extending the HOPE program, Weed and Seed program, welfare reform, youth employment, and 50 enterprise zones, these ideas failed to become effectively implemented. Congress did pass the enterprise zone plan, but Bush vetoed its final form (Walter, 2003).

Bush supporters state that his admin-

istration has two undeniable domestic victories (Green, 2000). These were the Clean Air Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Green, 2000). Bush, in an attempt to bring about a kinder and gentler nation, acknowledged that discrimination existed and stated "...I will work to knock down the barriers left by past discrimination and to build a more tolerant society that will stop such barriers from ever being built again" (as cited Barilleaux & Stuckey, 1992, p. 179).

American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

On July 26, 1990, Public Law 101-336 was signed by President Bush. The act prohibits discrimination based on disability and affords similar protections for the disabled as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It was considered one of the most extensive pieces of civil-rights legislation in a decade (Microsoft Corporation, 1997-2004). The five titles under the act include: Employment, Public Services (and public transportation), Public Accommodations, Telecommunications, and Miscellaneous.

There appears to be mixed reactions to the effectiveness of this legislation. It required businesses to make their buildings accessible and since its passage numerous societal changes have been made. However, many people complain that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), is complaint driven. This means that individuals have to file a complaint with the agency in charge of handling the complaint in order to protect their rights (WorldHistory.com).

Civil Rights. Bush continued Reagan's pattern of not enforcing civil rights legislation (Walter, 2003; Walton, 1997). He also followed Reagan in the thrust to end affirmative action. During Bush's term five key Supreme Court decisions in 1989 led to the weakening of Title VII of the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Law (Walton, 1997). For example, one of the Supreme Court decisions made it very difficult for women and people of color to prove discrimination in the workplace (Duffy & Goodgame, 1992).

Congress responded with the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1991 (Walton, 1997). Bush opposed the new Civil Rights Act and vetoed it in October of 1990 (Duffy & Goodgame, 1992; LegalArchiver.org; Walton, 1997). He became the second president, Reagan being the first, to veto a civil rights measure (Walter, 2003). Although Congress refused to concur with Bush's plans on civil rights, the debate revealed his stance. Bush called for a civil rights bill that would not call for quotas. He called the previous civil rights legislation a "quota

bill" which had mostly racial connotations (Shull, 1993, p. 57). Bush also criticized Democrats for trying to make that bill into a gender issue.

On December 8, 1989, Bush stated "I think we have existing laws to protect the rights of women...and I don't think that it's particularly needed at this point at all" (as cited Shull, 1993, p. 58). Bush later agreed to a weakened version of the civil rights bill (Walton, 1997). The Bush administration succeeded in capping damages on discrimination awards to \$50,000 per person for employers with 100 or fewer employees, employers with 101 to 200 employees a cap of \$100,000, 201 to 500 a cap of \$200,000, and for employers with 501 or more workers a limit of \$300,000 for compensatory and punitive damages (United States Equal Employment Commission, 1991).

Due only to political pressure, on November 21, 1991, Bush signed the Civil Right Act of 1991 (Shull, 1993). This was his way to take a middle of the road stance, but instead he managed to anger both sides (Shull, 1993). The Act altered all prior federal legislation regarding employment discrimination, which included Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Civil War Reconstruction-Era Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA) (United States Equal Employment Commission, 1991).

Foreign Affairs Bush served as the U. S. ambassador to the U.N. and used this experience to direct his presidency. He built relationships with top world leaders which took presidential diplomacy in a new direction and meant being committed to the "new world order" (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999, p.305). "Bush's foreign policy interests and emerging events in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and particularly, the Middle East, moved the administration to focus on international concerns" (Shull, 1993, p. 41). Bush was more active on foreign affairs than he was on domestic affairs.

The most notable foreign events during Bush's term were Nicaragua and the fall of the Sandinistas, the invasion of Panama and the capture of Noriega during 1989-1990, the Cold War yielding to the New World Order, and the Persian Gulf War of 1990-1991. On August 2, 1990, the Iraqi military invaded Kuwait. After the Iraqi invasion, "the Bush administration gave various reasons for going to war. The primary reason was that Saddam, like

Hitler, was an aggressor who must be stopped, at times warning that Saddam was dangerously close to possessing nuclear weapons, at others arguing that American jobs were at stake" (Degregorio, 1991, p. 692). Bush responded with Operation Desert Shield which consisted of a diplomatic campaign, economic embargo against Iraq, and a defensive military operation. When Iraq failed to meet the January 15, 1991 deadline, Operation Desert Storm was launched.

Education. In a speech in New Hampshire on January 6, 1988, Bush declared he wanted to be the "education president." Bush failed to explain during his campaign what he meant by the phrase "education president" (Barilleaux & Stuckey, 1992; Kolb, 1994). Bush assembled governors from each state. He and the governors set four educational goals for the nation which included: a process for setting national education goals, greater flexibility and accountability in using federal resources (use of regulatory and legislative change), a state-by-state effort to restructure educational system, and reporting annually on progress toward goals (Kolb, 1994).

Bush called for educational excellence. Bush and the governors announced *America 2000*, to inspire a bottom-up, not top-down effort for improving schools (Kolb, 1994). This created the National Education Goals Panel (three Democrats, three Republicans, and four administration officials) that would oversee the progress of six national goals to be met by 2000. These six goals were: Every child would start school ready to learn; high school graduation rate would increase to 90 percent; in critical subjects at the 4th, 8th, and 12th grades students' performance must be assessed; U. S. students would be first in the world in math and science achievement; each adult must be a skilled, literate worker and citizen; every school must be drug free and offer a disciplined environment for kids to learn (Kolb, 1994).

Bush proposed public school choice. He also proposed a small spending increase for Head Start (Light, 1999). Bush advocated for the creation of a nongovernmental entity called the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC). NASDC consisted mostly of Fortune 500 companies that would donate money, \$200 million, to new school designs that would "break-the-mold" (Kolb, 1994, p. 16). Instead of meeting with populist masses, Bush socialized himself with the elitist views on education. When he met with nonelite groups or teachers, it often re-

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sulted in not doing anything that supported a populist idea (Kolb, 1994).

Bush Conclusion

George Bush made a decision during his term in office to focus on foreign policy and affairs. He showed great leadership in foreign affairs which enabled him to keep his popularity. However, he did not use his leadership to promote domestic issues and social policy. He left little evidence of a legacy in regards to his accomplishments in domestic capacities (Greenstein, 2000). One reason may be that because of his famous quote “read my lips, no new taxes” he was unable to pursue a domestic policy agenda (Light, 1999). Bush was able to only increase employment by 4 percent, when you consider the growing inflation; it resulted in a reduction of funding (Walter, 2003). His presidency preserved the status quo (Duffy & Goodgame, 1992).

Bush failed to articulate his plans for education and domestic policy issues. Choice and flexibility became the code words for deregulating education (Kolb, 1994). Bush proclaimed he would be the education president, but he gave it very little consideration (Duffy & Goodman; Shull, 1993). Education goals were set, but there was no plan to achieve them. Bush, like Reagan, continued to disadvantage others by using rhetoric, executive orders, Supreme Court decisions, fiscal cutbacks, and program reductions. His leadership facilitated changes in federal rules and regulations that negatively impacted people of color (Duffy & Goodman; Walton, 1997).

William Jefferson Clinton (42nd President, 1993-2001)

Clinton on the presidency said “I think that the presidency can still be a place of great influence and power; it’s still the central office in the country, particularly in times of adversity or crisis.” (as cited Kunhardt, Kunhardt & Kunhardt, 1999, p. 437)

Social Currency

Only two other presidents prior to Clinton had come from such modest backgrounds (Blumenthal, 2003). He was the first member of his family to go to college (Blood & Henderson, 1996) and graduated from Yale Law School. Clinton was a teacher at the University of Arkansas from 1974 to 1976 (Pearson Education, 2000-2004). He was elected Arkansas attorney general in 1976 and Governor in 1979. Clinton said his progressive views were shaped by his

childhood influences, teaching, and political involvement (Clinton, 2004).

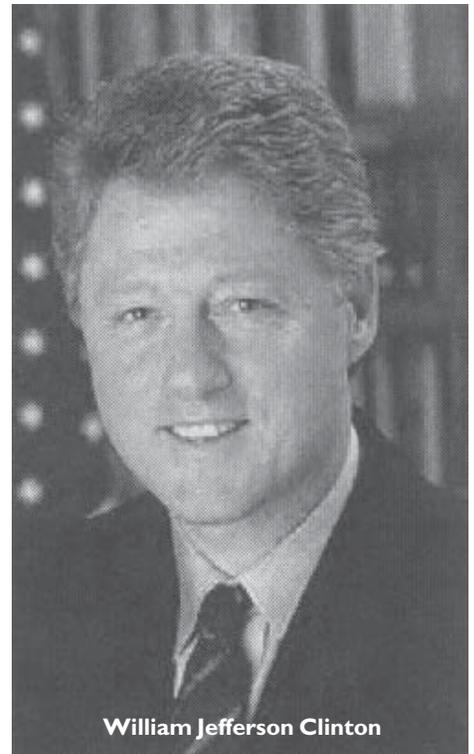
Clinton (2004) in his biography, *My Life*, tells a story about how his grandparents ran a grocery store and how all the customers were treated the same. “Occasionally, black kids would come into the store and we would play. It took me years to learn about segregation and prejudice and the meaning of poverty, years to learn that most white people weren’t like my grandfather and grandmother...” (Clinton, 2004, p. 12). Clinton (2004) also discusses how his grandfather advanced credit for purchases to people regardless of their color, and regardless of how diminutive their personal finances were.

During his presidential campaign, Clinton stressed domestic issues and accused Bush of neglecting problems at home (Kessler, 1995). The second presidential debate on October 15, 1992, included questions from the audience. Nearing the end of the debate an African American woman asked a question, “How has the national debt personally affected each of your lives? And if it hasn’t how can you honestly find a cure for the economic problems of the common people if you have no experience in what’s ailing them?” (as cited, Klein, 2002, p. 42).

Bush responded “I’m sure it has. I love my grandchildren. I’m not sure I get...help me with the question” (as cited, 2002, p. 42). Bush continued to struggle and failed to answer the question. When Clinton got his turn to respond, it was not his words, but his body language—he took three steps toward the woman and asked her, “Tell me how it’s affected you again” (as cited p. 43). Clinton was able to show concern and a desire to respond to needs, whereas Bush was hoping the moment would pass as he looked at his watch (Klein, 2002).

Actions, Policies, and Political Decisions

On, November 3, 1992, Clinton won the presidential election with 43 percent of the popular vote to Bush’s 38 percent and Ross Perot’s 19 percent. Clinton became the first President of the United States to be born after World War II (Blood & Henderson, 1996). After taking the office as president, rather than focusing on a few major social issues, Clinton instead attempted to address an array of issues. His first year in office he sent 17 legislative proposals to congress, which included an economic stimulus package, a plan to cut the deficit, campaign finance reform, health care reform and NSFTA (Light, 1999).



William Jefferson Clinton

He spent his transition period selecting a diverse staff and selecting an array of issues for his agenda (Light, 1999). Clinton cared about race relations and appointed people of color and women to high positions in his administration (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999). Penny (2001) felt that Clinton had institutionalized affirmative action at the cabinet level and his cabinet was the longest-serving of any modern president. Clinton “opened up so many questions about government, social equality, race, class, gender, the common good, and the America identity, he seemed to be associated with the movements and causes of the 1960s” (Blumenthal, 2003, p. 51).

Passage of Crime Bill. In 1994 Clinton signed into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act (Blood & Henderson, 1996). An important legislative piece was the Violence Against Women Act. This act tripled funding for battered women shelters, improved police and court enforcement, added lighting in public places, and required sex offenders to pay restitution (Blood & Henderson, 1996). The Crime Bill package also added other comprehensive measures such as allowing for the death penalty for federal offenses. It also instituted the “three strikes” law that meant a mandatory life sentence for people convicted for three felonies.

Unfortunately some conclude the bill had a negative impact on the African Ameri-

can population. Between 1993 and 1997 the number of African Americans in prison went from 2,011,600 million to 2, 149,900 (2002). However, nationwide the number of murders fell 8 percent which is one of the largest decreases in 30 years (Blood & Henderson, 1996). Other features of the bill included authorization of prison construction, 100,00 new police officers, community policing, creation of the national domestic violence hotline and assault weapons ban, creation of the National Police Corps, treatment, prevention and rehabilitation programs (Blood & Henderson, 1996).

National Voter Registration Act. In May of 1993, Clinton signed what has become known as the Motor Voter Act that he had promised in his 1992 campaign. This law permits citizens to register to vote at the same time they apply or renew their driver's license. The act resulted in the largest increase of voter registration since the 19th century with an estimated 11 million new registered voters (Blood & Henderson, 1996).

Welfare Reform Act of 1996 This bill was signed three months after Clinton was elected to a second term. The nation's welfare rolls have been cut from 12 to 6 million people (Penny, 2001; Wickham, 2002). In 2000 the percentage of Americans on welfare reached its lowest level since 1961. Clinton ignored the studies which suggested many women receiving public assistance would suffer under his initiative (Booker, 2000). Through this initiative Clinton created new methods to help move people from welfare to work. The Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit encouraged businesses to hire people from The Access to Jobs initiative which provided such services as transportation, and housing vouchers (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

Empowerment Zones. In order to meet the needs of underserved communities, Clinton created Empowerment Zones to serve urban and rural areas. The intent was to encourage investment, economic development and renewal to communities which would revive distressed communities (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

Civil Rights. President Clinton increased the budget to \$37 million (15 percent) for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). This assisted the EEOC with mediation, improved technology, and extended staff. The average time for resolving private-sector complaints was reduced from 9.4 months to 6 months (Office of Communications, 1998). The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division received a significant budget increase of 86 percent over the 1993 funding

level (Fact Sheet on Civil Rights Enforcement, 2000). The funding increase facilitated the Justice Department's investigations and prosecutions of civil rights cases. The increased funding also assisted Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to reduce and investigate housing and lending discrimination (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

In June of 1995, the Supreme Court ruled that the use of race, ethnicity, or gender needed to be eliminated or reformed if it created a quota or preferences for unqualified individuals (Blood & Henderson, 1996). Clinton ordered an assessment of Affirmative Action programs and directed Cabinet agencies to collect data on racial profiling. He supported increased ethics training and improved the diversity of police forces (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

On July 19, 1995 Clinton gave a defining speech to which he discussed landmark events and actions by the people and government that opened doors to opportunities. He asserted that people cannot be denied the opportunity to use their full human potential. Clinton's remarks show his undeniable support for Affirmative Action:

...let us remember always that finding common ground as we move toward the 21st century depends fundamentally on our shared commitment to equal opportunity for all Americans. It is a moral imperative, a constitutional mandate, and a legal necessity... our whole history can be seen first as an effort to preserve these rights, and then as an effort to make them real in the lives of all our citizens.... Emancipation, women's suffrage, civil rights, voting rights, equal rights, the struggle for the rights of the disabled—all these and other struggles are milestones on America's often rocky, but fundamentally righteous journey to close the gap between the ideals enshrined...

Clinton further gave evidence to support why Affirmative Action was still important. Clinton provided the results of the Glass Ceiling Report, which reported that white males made up 43 percent of the workforce, but held 95 percent of the senior management positions. African Americans consisted of only six-tenths of one percent of senior management, Hispanics held four-tenths of a percent, Asian Americans held three-tenths of a percent, and women held between three and five percent of these positions. Clinton also stated how Black home loan applicants with the same qualification requirements as whites are more than twice as likely to

be denied credit. He also reported that the federal government received more than 90,000 complaints of employment discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or gender, but less than 3 percent were reverse discrimination. He recommended not to end, but to fix some of the practices of affirmative action.

Today, I am directing all our agencies to comply with the Supreme Court's Adarand decision, and also to apply the four standards of fairness to all our affirmative action programs that I have already articulated: No quotas in theory or practice; no illegal discrimination of any kind, including reverse discrimination; no preference for people who are not qualified for any job or other opportunity; and as soon as a program has succeeded it must be retired. Any program that doesn't meet these four principles must be eliminated or reformed to meet them. (as cited Wickham, 2002, p. 258)

The Clinton administration strongly opposed all local initiatives to eliminate affirmative action programs (Office of Communications, 1998). As evidence of this he opposed California Proposition 209 and similar measures in Houston. Clinton continued to increase the funding of civil rights enforcement and in 2000 he allocated \$82 million toward the enforcement of civil rights (Fact Sheet on Human Rights, 2000).

Early in his Presidency, Clinton got involved in a controversy of allowing gays in the military. This issue had never before been a matter of national concern (Blumenthal, 2003). Light (1999) stated that due to his naiveté of Washington this was one of the issues that gave him an early reputation for being indecisive. He attempted to make gay rights equal to other rights movements. He placed the issue in his presidential speech on November 8, 1997. He made an executive order banning discrimination against gays in the federal government. He proposed new laws that would make violence against a person on the basis of gender, disabilities, or sexual preference hate crimes, but the legislation did not pass (Blood & Henderson, 1996). He also spoke at the Human Rights Campaign, one of the largest gay events. "No president had ever appeared at a gay event..." (Blumenthal, 2004, p. 275).

William Jefferson Clinton has been called the nation's first black president because of his social actions and programs (Wickham, 2002). Under the Clinton administration the largest four-year drop in African American poverty in 25 years was obtained (Office of Communications,

1998). President Clinton helped to create programs that assisted economic development in distressed communities. Clinton signed the Transportation Equity Act on June 9, 1998 that ensures that minority business owners have an opportunity to compete for transportation projects. This resulted in thousands of minority-owned businesses to compete more effectively for government contracts (Office of Communications, 1998).

Clinton, for most of his eight year term, retained a high approval rating of 90 percent with African Americans (Wickham, 2002). During Clinton's administration, African Americans achieved great economic gains and unemployment rate went down to record lows (Wickham, 2002). The unemployment rate of African Americans went from double digits to 9 percent in 1998 which is one of the lowest unemployment rates for African Americans (Office of Communications, 1998). In 2000 the unemployment rate averaged 7.7 percent and median household incomes were up 15.1 percent since 1993 (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

Between 1993 and 1999 the Small Business Administration (SBA) approved over 13, 000 loans to African Americans (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000). Record enrollment figures were recorded for African American high school graduates going on to college. In 1983 there were only 39 percent of African Americans going on to college in 1997 there were 60 percent (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000). African Americans also supported Clinton's stance on the death penalty and welfare reform.

DeWayne Wickham (2002) asserts that Clinton had a connection with African Americans. Clinton was also the first President to visit sub-Saharan Africa (Wickham, 2002). Clinton thought there was a hole in America's foreign policy. Due to the whole history of slavery, he felt it was important to establish African policy (Wickham, 2002).

During Clinton's eight-year term over two dozen African Americans were appointed to positions within the White House and hundreds to other jobs throughout the executive branch of government (Wickham, 2002). No president has appointed so many African Americans to prominent positions (Booker, 2000). Clinton had seven African Americans in his cabinet. In an interview he was asked why he opened the door so widely to African Americans in his administration, to which he stated "to prove we could build a

twenty-first century community that was truly diverse and committed to excellence, to me that was a very important part of the job of being president" (Wickham, 2002, p. 163). He further states that this set a precedent for future Presidents. Clinton stated recently referring, to George W. Bush, "he's got the most diverse Republican administration in history" (p. 163). Furthermore, Clinton appointed more than sixty African American federal judges (Wickham, 2002).

African Americans weren't the only people of color who benefited from Clinton's desire to include and embrace diversity. Clinton created the most diverse cabinet, administration, and judiciary appointments in history which also included Hispanic American appointments (Fact Sheet on Latinos, 2000). Nine percent of Presidential appointments and six percent of judicial appointments were Hispanic Americans (Fact Sheet on Latinos, 2000).

There were also other actions and policies made by President Clinton that supported Hispanic Americans. Clinton put forward a Hispanic Education Action Plan, increased funding for Hispanic-serving colleges, established a Hispanic Advisory Commission, and implemented the Student Diversity Partnership Program (Fact Sheet on Hispanic Community I, 1998). Clinton opposed English-Only legislation which would have jeopardized services and programs for non-English speakers (Fact Sheet on Hispanic Community I, 1998). He also opposed propositions which would have made illegal immigrants ineligible to attend public schools and receive public health care services (Fact Sheet on Hispanic Community I, 1998). Furthermore the National Voter Registration Act made voting easier for millions of Hispanic voters.

Significant gains were made by Hispanic Americans during Clinton's term. The unemployment rate dropped from 11.3 percent to 7.5 percent for Latinos (Fact Sheet on Latinos, 1998). Hispanic Americans' median household incomes increased and the largest Hispanic poverty drop in two decades occurred (Fact Sheet on Hispanic Community I, 1998).

Actions Involving Race. On May 16, 1997, Clinton publicly recognized the social injustice done to African Americans in a study conducted by the United States Public Health Service. Clinton made the long awaited apology after forty years stating, "The United States government did something that was wrong—deeply, profoundly, morally wrong." To the eight men who were survivors of the syphilis study at

Tuskegee, Clinton apologized for the unethical tragedy they were made a part of and asked for forgiveness. Clinton said in his speech of apology "...today America does remember the hundreds of men used in research without their knowledge and consent." He then set forth five initiatives to strengthen the ethical conduct and protection of human subjects, have researchers work more closely with communities, and provide people of color postgraduate fellowships.

In order to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the desegregation of Little Rock, Arkansas, Central High School Clinton walked up the steps with the nine black students who first walked the steps. President Clinton addressed the nation, "Like so many Americans, I can never fully repay my debt to these nine people, for with their innocence, they purchased more freedom, for me, too, and for all white people" (as cited Blumenthal, 2004, p.274-275).

Education. Clinton made the largest investment in Education in 30 years (Fact Sheet on Hispanic Community II, 1998). He signed and passed the Head Start Amendment of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America, Improving American's Schools Act, School-to-Work Opportunities Act, National and Community Service Trust Act and Direct Lending and Pay-as-You Can Loans. To ensure student access to higher education Clinton established the first African American Advisory Board and increased the funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to over \$250 million (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

The Clinton administration also created the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund which expanded the access to educational technology (Fact Sheet on Education Hispanic Americans, 2000). This increased overall investment for educational technology from \$23 million to \$769 million. The Clinton administration also secured the E-Rate program. The Telecommunications Act discounted the cost of internet services for schools and libraries (Office of Communications, 1998). In 1994 only 35 percent of public schools were connected to the Internet. Clinton's programs were able to increase internet access to 95 percent of public schools (Fact Sheet on Education Hispanic Americans, 2000).

Clinton recognized the need for supervision and enrichment for "latch-key" kids. He created 21st century community learning centers. The after-school programs not only helped student achievement, but helped to reduce juvenile crime and victim-

ization in neighborhoods (Office of the Press Secretary, 2000). The Clinton administration also acknowledged that students involved in these after-school programs are less likely to use drugs and become pregnant (Office of the Press Secretary, 2000). These after school learning communities served rural and inner city communities. After seeing the programs' benefits, Clinton proposed 1 billion toward the programs, but Congress only approved \$600 million toward after-school programs (Office of the Press Secretary, 2000).

Clinton also recognized the benefits of Head Start. Throughout his administration he expanded Head Start and increased annual funding (Fact Sheet on Education, 1995). Clinton proposed the largest Head Start expansion in history. He helped to increase funding for Head Start by 90 percent (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000; Fact Sheet on Education Hispanic Americans, 2000).

In order to place quality teachers in underserved areas he funded several initiatives to address this need. One initiative was called Hometown Teacher Recruitment. The program would allow these districts to assist in recruiting and training members from their community to become teachers for the school district (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000). Another initiative is called GEAR-UP, a mentoring program for middle school children. The program offers intervention services and helps middle school students to finish school and prepare for college (Fact Sheet on Education Hispanic Americans, 2000). The initiative in 2000 served over 750,000 low-income students (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000).

National Health Care Clinton's most significant agenda item was providing national health care, but unfortunately he was unable to get it passed through Congress. The bill was 1,342 pages and consisted of a new federal system for health care costs and increased benefits. Clinton's health care package was viewed by Congress as, "cumbersome, over-designed, and poorly explained" (Light, 1999, p. 291).

Unable to get Congress to act on the total package, Clinton proposed small scale changes. These ideas included the Family and Medical Leave Act, which guaranteed portability of health insurance from job to job, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The Clinton administration also tried to provide health care through other avenues. In 1997 Clinton helped to provide \$24 billion toward health care coverage (Fact Sheet on African Ameri-

cans, 2000). He also advocated for prevention efforts and expanded access to HIV treatments to high-risk communities (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000). Further evidence of wanting to serve the poor and elderly, Clinton was able to expand Medicare through the Medicare Select program. The program went from 15 states to 50 (Blood & Henderson, 1996). The program allows qualified recipients to buy discounted policies that cover the difference between what Medicare pays and what health care costs.

Clinton Conclusion

Overall Clinton emerged with actions that assisted social justice issues of race, class, and access to employment and health care rather than taking a position of neglect. Clinton attempted to pass an array of legislation rather than focus on a few powerful issues. This may have hindered his ability to pass legislation that would have benefited those he hoped to help.

In matters of social justice issues such as issues of affirmative action, gay rights and access to healthcare he took a stance to combat these issues. Unfortunately, he was unsuccessful at using his political leadership to address the issue he seemed to be most passionate about, health care. However, his leadership actions tended to promote rather than hinder closing the economic and education gap that previously divided our society.

Comparative Legacies of Reagan, Bush, and Clinton

Impact of Deficit

Is it possible that the deficit played a major part in what was included in the agenda and social policy initiatives set by each president? From George Washington through Jimmy Carter the accumulated national debt was \$908 billion. In the 1980s the American people were told if they cut domestic spending, increased defense spending and gave tax cuts the budget would be balanced (Walton, 1997).

Reagan and Bush's economic policies left a national debt of nearly \$4 trillion (Walton, 1997). Reagan left a legacy of a huge deficit that hindered the choices that could be made by future presidents. Bush and Clinton had to consider the deficit when planning their agendas. Reducing the deficit was a prominent theme for Bush and Clinton. The costs associated with reforms and cutting the deficit seemed to be a major factor in the agenda-setting process.

It is important to point out that the huge federal budget deficits severely hindered the ability of the federal government to invest in domestic policy in order to relieve social ills.

On September 27, 1994, the Republican candidates on the steps of the Capital signed the "Contract with America" (Walters, 2003). The vision outlined in this contract was "to renew the American Dream by promoting individual liberty, economic opportunity and personal responsibility, through limited and effective government, high standards of performance, and an America strong enough to defend all her citizens against violence at home or abroad" (as cited Walters, 2003 p. 79-79).

Ten bills were proposed to accomplish this vision. They included Fiscal Responsibility Act, Taking Back our Streets Act, Personal Responsibility Act, Family Reinforcement Act, American Dream Restoration Act, National Security Restoration Act, Senior Citizen Fairness Act, Job Creation act, Wage Enhancement Act, Common Sense Legal Reform Act and Citizen Legislature Act. Most of these bills favor Whites and half of them have a negative and punitive impact on Blacks (Walters, 2003).

When our political leaders do not support or relieve social ills they are sending a message such as: the poor are poor because they choose to be poor. In order to redirect resources our society blames Blacks, Hispanics, women, the poor and immigrants for their failure to achieve (Walters, 2003). "This new individualism mischievously ignored—and continues to ignore—the pervasive phenomenon of White group rights that are legitimately exercised every day in many different ways" (Walters, 2003, p. 79).

When the Republicans became the majority in the House of Representatives for the first time in forty years Newt Gingrich, as Speaker of the House, declared that he would continue the Reagan revolution (Walton, 1997). President Clinton answered; he used his power to veto legislation that would have severely cut funds for Medicare, education, and the environment (Blumenthal, 2004).

In November of 1995, President Clinton had to decide what he was willing to risk. Clinton was willing to shut down the federal government. After three days Clinton and the Congress agreed to a temporary spending bill and the federal government reopened. "A month later Clinton received another budget that was unacceptable and resulted in the federal government to be shut down for two weeks" (Blumenthal, 2004). Clinton emerged as a

President who was willing to protect programs that impacted the poor and people of color.

Legacy on Social Justice

For Reagan the American Way was defined by "his belief in individual effort and in American capitalism" (Kunhardt, Kunhardt, & Kunhardt, 1999, p. 261). It appeared Reagan didn't have the knowledge and understanding to deal with these issues or he simply just didn't care. Reagan said, "For eight years somebody handed me a piece of paper every night that told me what I was going to be doing the next day" (Wills, 2000 p. 371). Michael Deavor said that the president often slept through Cabinet meetings because to him they were irrelevant and boring (Schaller, 1992).

In a similar way, George H. Bush failed to provide his administration with direction. Bush's White House Deputy Assistant for Domestic Policy said, "...early morning meetings, late nights, lots of press briefings, and countless fact sheets announcing the details of one policy proposal after another. What was lacking, however, was a sense of purpose and direction. There was no focus" (Kolb, 1994, p. 9). Bush had great rhetoric regarding civil rights, but very little meaningful action. Bush favored the status quo in many aspects of his domestic policy (Kolb, 1994). "The fiscal cutbacks, reductions in force, and eliminations of antipoverty and social welfare programs during the Reagan and Bush years virtually ensured that the goal of the African American community for economic stability and progress would crumble and fade" (Walton, 1997, p. 25).

Reagan and Bush's Supreme Court judge appointments had conservative records on civil rights issues (Shull, 1993). Two-thirds of all federal judiciary appointments were made by Reagan and Bush (Shull, 1993). The power to make appointments even influences independent agencies such as the Civil Rights Commission (CRC). Reagan and Bush used their appointments to move the agency to a more conservative direction (Shull, 1993).

Clinton appointed the most diverse Cabinet in history (Fact Sheet on African Americans, 2000). He supported and included people of color at every level in our society. Concerning people of color, "Clinton not only opened his mind, but also his administration" (Wickham, 2002, p. 234). No other president before or after has empowered so many people of color. He placed more African Americans in the executive branch of government than any other.

Clinton announced in his "One America" speech,

Consider this: We were born with a Declaration of Independence which asserted that we were all created equal and a Constitution that enshrined slavery. We fought a bloody civil war to abolish slavery and preserve the union, but we remained a house divided and unequal by law for another century. (as cited Wickham, 2002, p. 238)

President Clinton's One American initiative was a stepping stone to social justice for all. He used his executive leadership to promote human rights and social justice which has contributed to closing the economic and political gap that divides Americans.

President Clinton was very vocal in matters of race (Booker, 2000). No president has "made as many statements affirming the principles of racial equality and justice" (Booker, 2000, p. 163). Clinton publicly addressed the "nation's race problems with a candor and insight that far surpassed that of any of the forty-one men who preceded him into the Oval Office" (Wickham, 2002, p. 155).

The impact of policy measures are difficult to judge under the Reagan and Bush administrations because of reduced data dissemination of government documents (Shull, 1993). We found the data under the Clinton administration to be more accessible. This led us to question, why don't we have access to this data? What is being kept from the American public?

Legacy on Education. In the past, few presidents have convened meetings with governors. Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 convened the first summit with governors to address environmental concerns, and Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 discussed the Great Depression (Kolb, 1994). In an attempt to show he was fulfilling his campaign pledge, Bush met with the governors to discuss education. Many members of Congress resented the fact that they were not invited to attend the colorful Charlottesville Education Summit (Kolb, 1994). Bill Clinton at the time was the head of the National Governors' Association's education committee. Clinton continued to convene with governors. If governors and politicians are in charge of assessing their national goals don't they have an interest in showing improvement under their watch?

Bush may have placed education on his agenda, but there was a failure to benefit the majority of students. "Even his

much-touted education reforms were shaped primarily with elites in mind, rarely with the desires of real people taken into consideration" (Kolb, 1994, p. 16). Like his other domestic policies it was not a matter of investing more, but in spending better (Kolb, 1994). His six national goals hardly went beyond words on paper and there was limited action taken to promote or implement them. They failed to make a difference in education.

However, Bush did select Lauro Cavazos to the Secretary of Education. Cavazos became the first Hispanic cabinet member (Kolb, 1994). Was this a political move to win Hispanic votes? After serving a year, Cavazo's was fired on December 12, 1990 (Kolb, 1994).

In America's history there has been limited federal involvement in educational issues such as curriculum content and quality (Kolb, 1994). Under Reagan the media propaganda that was created to undermine public education through the infamous report, *A Nation at Risk*, was the means to legislate school vouchers and the corporate privatization of public education. Bush continued the Reagan legacy by bringing the idea of national standards to the foreground which Clinton extended and which the current President Bush has expanded into the No Child Left Behind Legislation that we have today.

National standards are now being touted as necessary, but who benefits? Can we standardize a curriculum and value diversity? It seems we are headed toward further conformity rather than addressing the issues of diversity. Do our national standards address the issues of diversity? Is the public aware of the hidden agenda of No Child Left Behind led by the Business Round Table's involvement in that legislation? (Emory & Ohanian, 2004).

Conclusion

The public's perception of the president has to a large extent been shaped by the degree to which he has fulfilled his responsibility to protect the civil rights of all individuals. A president who fails in this responsibility is likely to be judged very harshly by historians. The United States is a racially diverse nation; and the stability of this country requires that all individuals be treated fairly, regardless of their race or ethnic origin. Americans entrust the president, as the nation's chief law enforcer, with ultimate responsibility to assure that the United States lives up to its noble constitutional ideal of guaranteeing every individual equality under the law. (Laham, 1998, p. 213)

As educators we must continue to challenge our students to think critically about our past and current president's actions and policies. Students need to create their own meanings and understandings of how our past presidents have influenced policies and notions of social justice. Students need to be given the opportunity to learn different perspectives so that they can fully participate in democratic decision making and take a political stance for issues that impact them.

"Unless the system is more responsive to the real human needs that have been neglected and often compounded by American presidents, the future of America is not very promising" (Steinfeld, 1972). Conclusive evidence based on these three presidents, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and William Jefferson Clinton through their actions and policies describe their responsiveness to the needs of our multicultural diverse nation in very different ways.

Looking at the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, their decisions clearly exposed their beliefs and philosophies with regards to the poor and people of color. "During the Reagan-Bush era, African Americans learned once more that political majorities can shift the political context by mobilizing around the issue of race, and that such a shift most often results in the loss of rights, liberties, and freedoms for African Americans" (Walton, 1997, p.371). Reagan and Bush appointed conservative justices that have similar beliefs to their own to be the federal courts chief decision-making figures. Their appointments left a legacy of court decisions that have impacted and continue to impact how the law is defined in regards to social justice issues.

We feel that Reagan did the least of the three to guarantee the equal rights for all people.

Employing language that conjured up a mythical past when everything was in order, Reagan appeared to genuinely want to turn the clock back to have a time when America's White dominated political and social structure was unchallenged by the claims of disadvantaged groups, when everyone 'knew their place.' (Walters, 2003, p. 69)

Reagan and Bush's lack of enforcement regarding civil rights laws negatively influence our assessment of their presidencies. We would rank Clinton's presidency almost as high as Lyndon Baines Johnson's in ensuring and protecting equality.

Note

Desegregation is used rather than integration. Desegregation speaks to the law and integration speaks to a social policy that was not ever met.

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