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The Taste of Democracy

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**THE TASTE OF DEMOCRACY:
From Reconstruction to the Present
Volume 2**

Doug Good

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Chapter One

Western America (1865-1900)

The Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean

Native Americans

Before Europeans *discovered* America, the American native tribes had long established histories, traditions, and developed cultures. They had not formed nation states in the European pattern, but they spread across the two continents in clan centered clusters. Tribal territories could be recognized by a common tongue, and chosen chieftains. Depending on climate and environment, tribes were distinguishable by their crops (most commonly corn), their livestock (sheep or horses in the Southwest), hunting (buffalo on the plains), fishing (salmon in the Columbia River basin), food gathering, or trading.

Reasons for Decline

Following Columbus's presumptuous party-crashing "discovery" of this Western Hemisphere and misnaming of its inhabitants as "Indians," Europeans began swarming across the Atlantic Ocean for adventure and new opportunities. These white intruders were mostly young, single men, explorers, trappers, and cowboys--aggressive types who held the natives in contempt for their primitive and settled ways.

After the United States gained independent nation status, the treaties negotiated with tribal spokespersons were not enforceable because not all natives accepted the authority of the band to which they were associated, nor did white settlers answer to the restrictions. So the resulting skirmishes were settled by whoever had the most effective fighting force, which usually was the U.S. army.

The whites steadily gained advantage over the natives by such strategies as pushing them off the best land onto reservations, and harvesting the fish on rivers reserved for the Indians.

The balance of trade---furs and jewelry from natives, and horses and guns from whites---shifted to the whites' advantage. With the new market demands for the Indian's non-food trade items, the natives raised fewer crops. Having to buy their food then, led to selling land, which made accepting life on designated reservation land the better of very bad options. Eventually the U.S. Supreme Court defined Indians as wards of the state who held no citizenship rights. Eventually federal government agencies assumed that the reservations would have a civilizing effect and help assimilate the natives into American life, but its real effect was to slur over native history and traditions as formerly warring bands were combined and confined.

Indian Wars

In 1860 the United States army attacked the Navajos in the Arizona Territory in response to a raid on a U.S. fort. The army did not stop its destruction of Indian animals

and property until they forced the Navajos into a “long walk” to a New Mexico reservation.

In 1864 a Colorado militia massacred almost an entire band of Cheyenne. But the wipe out of General Custer’s troops by Lakota and Cheyenne warriors at the battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, gives evidence that Indians could show well in battle. Typically, however, shortage of supplies and continual harassment brought eventual submission, tribe by tribe.

The Lakotas attempted to preserve their heritage through a religious revival centered on meditation and drum dancing. But in 1890 the U.S. army, under the pretext of quelling an Indian uprising, found revenge for Custer’s “*last stand*” by massacring several hundred Lakotas, including women and children, assembled in starving conditions at Wounded Knee Creek.

Indian Reform Policy

In the 1870s and 1880s government officials made more intentional efforts to acculturate the Indians. The idea was that to civilize and educate them would smooth out their savage habits and melt their multiple and competitive tribal identities. The relational problems, it was thought, would melt away if the natives would drop their traditions and warm up to American values of entrepreneurial and material ambitions.

It did not go unnoticed that Canada granted the natives the rights of British subjects, and had a high rate of intermarriage with Canadian whites, certainly a sign of a more natural acculturation. In the United States, though, reformers tended to assume that assimilation would be marked by natives learning to cherish values about individual land ownership and gender roles, not realizing the hard working Indian women had more independence and influence in their native culture than white wives.

Dawes Severalty Act

By the Dawes Severalty Act of 1877 Congress divided Indian reservation property, which was community owned, into individual family allotments, and granted citizenship to those who accepted their allotment. The government could sell any unallotted land to whites, but held the allotments in trust for 25 years so the Indians could not sell their portions meanwhile either. The thought was to break down tribal loyalties and habits, and encourage individual families to assimilate by boarding their children in off-reservation schools. At these model boarding schools the Indian children would be taught European gender roles--farming and crafts for boys and domestic chores for girls. A stipulation that mixed-blood Indians could bypass the ban on selling allotted land, plus scamming by land speculators, resulted in the complete loss of over half of original native holdings.

The decline of the American Indian was not due solely to military defeats. The extinction of the buffalo, continual raids, loss of agricultural land, dilution of culture and traditions and disorientation from efforts at acculturation left the natives demoralized and without resources.

Mining

Unlike the Indians who valued nature's resources for their usefulness in providing basic subsistence, white immigrants came west with an eye on extracting resources to advance their own material standing. Forests stood waiting to be tapped, and mountains stored valuable minerals. The discovery of locations for mining of gold, silver, copper and other minerals invited a rush of prospectors eager to help themselves to wealth. Individual efforts were not often rewarded, but claims could be sold to companies who had heavy machinery, companies that hired work crews, and used corporate resources to engineer and transport the loads of ore.

In 1878 Congress passed the Timber and Stone Act that allowed individuals to buy 160 acres of timber. Lumber companies took up the practice of hiring people to file claims then transfer them to the corporation.

The Frontier

Not only were individuals from eastern states drawn west by these opportunities, migrants came from Mexico and Asia to mix with the Native Americans and newly freed African Americans. Throughout the Southwest, the *mestizo* population (a mix of Hispanic and Indian) characterized the typical small ranchers. Thousands of Chinese were hired to work on laying transcontinental railroad lines after the gold rush. Though, in 1882 Congress shut off this Asian immigration source.

With the influx of population, western territories soon were eligible to apply for statehood. At the end of the Civil War, Texas, California, Oregon and Nevada were already states. Between the end of Reconstruction (1876) and 1895, seven new western states were added--Washington, Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah.

Whatever wealth lay available out west in lumber, minerals, and oil, agriculture had the most potential, given the amount of acreage that could be farmed. But the Great Plains was an arid region. The marvelous effect of irrigation was no secret, but the question was, if river water can be diverted, who would control it? The precedent of English Common Law held that under "riparian rights" a person owning land along a stream could use the water so long as he did not diminish its volume to a degree that would harm nature or the economic prospects of those downstream. This, however, did not square with the disposition of aggressive settlers who felt rights belonged to the first claimants. The clash over riparian rights versus appropriation rights was inevitable. Ultimately western state governments stepped in to regulate usage, but in 1902 Congress took on the issue with the Newlands Reclamation Act, which provided for the use of money from federal land sales to finance irrigation projects. The resulting dams built and water channels created in arid states would turn the plains into a bread basket.

The Federal government also stepped forward to spur economic development in the West by giving the railroads a right of way through the public domain, and granting them land along the way which they could sell or use as security for loans to finance their construction. This subsidization proved its worth as railroads energized western development by providing jobs, assuring farmers and ranchers transport for their products, and serving as a hub for new and growing towns.

With the invention of machines to plough, sow, and harvest, farmers could plant and cultivate more crops per man hour labor by twenty-fold. With the completion of

South Africa

In South Africa, the rigid apartheid rule of white government in a black country began to recognize the inevitable. The government released Nelson Mandela, after twenty seven years in prison for political agitation, and he was elected the first black President of the country in 1994.

The Gulf War

The one major event that George H.W. Bush presided over involved reaction to Saddam Hussein's invasion in 1991 of Kuwait, Iraq's neighbor. Control of oil fields was a strong factor. The invasion caused concern in the U.S. that our dependence on oil from Arab states throughout the region was in jeopardy with Hussein's expanded power. Because the U.S. was not the country directly attacked, Bush's desire to help Kuwait faced much anti-war conviction from Democrats and others who remembered our failed and drawn out involvement in Vietnam. But Congress invoked the previously used *approval* of "all necessary means" to protect our national security, and supported a military response without a strict "declaration of war."

With his extensive record of ambassadorial experience and personal contacts abroad, Bush put together an impressive alignment of friendly states, including approval from the United Nations, and launched a counter attack in the autumn of 1991, dubbed the Gulf War, that quickly decimated Hussein's army. Bush decided not to push on to topple Hussein's regime, because he expected that the Iraqi people would rise up and oust the dictator themselves. That did not happen, but the winning coalition put Hussein under heavy sanctions against goods and arms, and enforced a no-fly zone over Iraq.

Following this military victory, Bush's popularity soared, setting him up with a big incumbent advantage for the next election, two years off. However, Bush slipped back into a laid back approach to rising economic troubles. Recession set in and the run up to the 1992 election saw the President's ratings plummet. His image was also hurt in the autumn of 1991 by his nomination of African American, Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. Though ultimately approved, the publicly aired Senate hearings descended into a sordid discussion of Thomas' alleged sexual harassment of a woman who worked for him in the 1980s. This prurient display of "he said, she said" testimony raised issues of sex, power, and racism. This scene displeased more than liberals and Democrats, and diminished Bush's standing in the process.

Chapter Seventeen

Clinton, Bush Jr., and Beyond

Bill Clinton garnered only 43% of the popular vote in the 1992 Presidential election, but won because 20% of the remainder threw their vote away by casting it for third-party candidate, Ross Perot. George Bush (Senior). and his party were repudiated, along with many incumbents of both parties. The Democrats took control of both U.S. legislative Houses. Clinton and his party leaders put a new face on the Democratic

Party, toning down the old liberalism. They agreed that government bureaucracy often was the problem, not the solution, and that small businesses could more effectively grow the economy rather than public job programs. And they built on the idea that all Americans are in the democratic project together.

Gays in the Military

Clinton stumbled over two divisive questions his first year. He had campaigned on the promise to end discrimination against gays in the military. After all, hadn't Truman ended segregation of African Americans in the army by executive decree? But anxious to move forward without greasing the skids first by assuring the support of the military and Congress, Clinton announced a half measure that said if a gay person did not "tell," the military would not "ask." This upset both conservatives and liberals. The military felt un-consulted, and the gays felt dishonored.

Health Care

Regarding Clinton's dearest wish---health care---Republican opposition was still entrenched, even though the idea of a national program was as old as the 1930s, and was even suggested by Richard Nixon. Some felt Clinton made the issue too personal for wide appeal when he appointed his wife, Hillary Clinton, to co-chair the task force drafting the legislative proposal. Special interests got picky. The medical community worried about government bungling, and the business sector worried about losing money. Congress voted the bill down.

The Parties Clash

The Republicans scripted their own fresh image. Under the leadership of House Speaker, Newt Gingrich, they came up with the "Contract with America," a spate of proposals for shrinking government intrusion in the market place, cutting out relief spending, balancing the federal budget, and promoting so-called American family values. This wasn't so different from old Republican dogma, but it sounded more patriotic.

In the next mid-term elections the Republicans recovered control of both Houses of Congress, and did well at the state level. But overconfidence and a desire to slash funding for favorite Democratic agenda items---social, educational, veterans, and farm aid programs---led them to refuse to accept Clinton's budget for 1995-96. Clinton rejected their terms and shut the government down until they relinquished. The public judged the Republicans as responsible for concocting the crisis.

Clinton subsequently adjusted some of his legislative goals by accepting restraints on welfare benefits and allowing more consolidation of ownership in radio and television stations. But he was most effective in restoring his appeal by stealing Republican thunder on the ills of big government and sacredness of family values. His optimistic assumptions about the future reverberated with an electorate that was feeling good about a return to prosperity, and he defeated Robert Dole in the 1996 election.

Decade of Prosperity

Presidents get blame or credit for the state of the economy, but politics does not explain some of the marvels of the 1990s. New technology usually precedes the readiness of the consumers to buy, but the time was ripe for information technology to catch on. Fax machines, personal computers, compact discs, cell phones, and the internet fed the hunger. "Silicon Valley" near San Francisco became the Mecca for start-up digital companies, spawning new employment opportunities. Integrating circuits and miniaturizing of processing on the computer chip reduced the size of the requirements of a computer and increased the speed of calculations exponentially. Expanded markets and lower prices followed.

Clinton's advisors influenced a reduction in middle-class taxes and serious cuts in deficit spending. It worked, allowing Clinton to balance the federal budget and end the overall deficit by 1997, with the effect of lower interest rates, increased investment, a soaring stock market, and a rise in the gross national product number.

Global Economy

With the Cold War doused, global economics more freely colored the international scene. Countries made trade agreements and international corporations spread around the globe. American companies reduced the influence of unions by sourcing out operations to foreign locations. Commentators considered imported modernization a gift to outlying countries. Critics, however, pointed out some downsides to the new realities. Favorable trade balances changed direction, and outsourcing of jobs squeezed employment opportunities at home. Pollution and toxic waste went un-policed in less developed countries, and national sovereignties were bullied.

U.S. Military Action Abroad

During the Vietnam War, Clinton was a college student, vulnerable to the draft. His draft board did not call him to service, but he came to judge the impact of foreign military involvement as negative. He witnessed how the politics and civil disputes in foreign lands could chew up our best intentions to help, and spit us out as minced meat. Bush, Sr. had begun humanitarian assistance to starving Somalis in 1992. But Clinton withdrew our troops when a local warlord attacked. In 1994 Clinton turned his back on tribal massacres in Rwanda. More pressure was felt for U.S. intervention when the Balkan states in Eastern Europe engaged in "ethnic cleansing," a euphemism for genocide. Clinton approved U.S. air strikes to wake up the Serbians committing atrocities, and brokered a fragile peace arrangement. But the provincial Yugoslavian President, Slobodan Milosevic, renewed atrocities against the Muslims in Serbia that shocked the world. In 1999 Clinton ordered heavy aerial bombardment in conjunction with NATO forces. Milosevic retreated, and a U.N. peacekeeping force moved in. Then the International War Crimes Tribunal indicted Milosevic for crimes against humanity.

Arabs and Israelis

Putting more hopes in peace maneuvers, Clinton made special efforts to help resolve the fighting between the Palestine Liberation Front (PLO) and Israel over Palestine occupation. In 1993, the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, and Israel's Prime

Minister, Yitzhac Rabin, met in Washington where Rabin agreed to give Palestine self-rule in the disputed territory, and Israel shortly came to an understanding with Jordan. But Arab terrorism and Israeli retaliation continued, including the assassination of Rabin. The new Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu reverted to a hard line. Determined U.S. diplomacy aided a fragile peace arrangement in 1997 whereby Israel withdrew forces from the West Bank, but tension continued. In his final month in office as President, Clinton made one last effort to soften Arafat's hard line and soften Israel's intransigence. The leaders came close to agreement but the talks fell through.

International Terrorism

To this point the United States only tangentially had been drawn in to ethnic wars and terrorist attacks in other countries. But a broader terrorist net was weaving in the Middle East that reflected the Muslim fundamentalist hatred of American influence in Arab countries. Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian who earlier had joined Islamic guerrilla fighters to assist the Afghan people in resisting Soviet occupation, organized a worldwide terrorist network called Al Qaeda. He intended to expel the immoral and tyrannizing Western influence from Muslim nations. The United States was the most obvious violator. U.S. officials knew of bin Laden's activities and were alert to the possibility of attack. Even so, Al Qaeda operatives struck isolated targets, killing Americans in Riyadh, Kenya and Tanzania. Then in the year 2000 the U.S. destroyer, *Cole*, was hit, killing 17 U.S. soldiers. We understood bin Laden to be responsible, but he eluded our attempts to hunt him down.

Homegrown terrorism

The U.S. had its own homegrown troubles in the 1990s. Timothy McVeigh, an American and Gulf War veteran with imagined personal grievances against his own government, leveled the Federal Building in Oklahoma City with a truck bomb. Investigating his background, authorities learned of his sympathy for militia group conspiracy notions. These militia groups, privately trained in paramilitary style, were a combination of tax resisters, white supremacists, and gun control opponents who cultivated fantasies about various enemies taking control of our government.

Americans also experienced terror around the country on secondary school campuses from crazed students opening fire on teachers and classmates. But the United States lived in a state of serenity. Local shoot outs and assassinations of prominent individuals distressed us, but we seemed immune to foreign surprise attacks on our homeland.

Impeachment

Clinton's second term as President was marred by a scandal of his own making. He had a reputation for womanizing, and an Arkansas state employee, Paula Jones, had accused Clinton of sexual harassment when he was Governor. Charges were eventually dropped, but then White House Intern, Monica Lewinsky, revealed her tryst with the President. Congress earlier had appointed, Kenneth Starr, as an independent counsel to investigate other charges of an illegal real estate deal by Hillary Clinton. He

did not uncover wrongdoing, but now he widened his searches. Starr found some proof of guilt in the Lewinsky matter, and Congress stepped in to bring impeachment charges against the President.

The House impeachment had the appearance of a vendetta, because the Constitution sets the standard for conviction at “high crimes and misdemeanors.” Clinton was not the first President suspected of dalliances. While campaigning for President, Grover Cleveland admitted to fostering an illegitimate child; and the voters still elected him. Thomas Jefferson, Warren G. Harding, and John Kennedy had similarly smudged reputations. But since the Watergate scandal, presidential misbehavior was getting more attention. Clinton’s ratings were high. He had been re-elected and the country was prospering under his tutelage, so why would the report of a new dalliance lead to impeachment when the public was not that outraged?

The first (and only other) impeachment of a President (Andrew Johnson) was sourced in political squabbling over Reconstruction policies. The charges against Clinton were perjury before a grand jury and obstruction of justice, but some commentators interpreted it as a payback by the Republicans for what the Democrats did to Nixon after Watergate. This suggestion gains credence from the view of legal experts that a prosecution in civil court would not likely win this case, and the party line vote count in the Senate gave the aroma of partisan hardball by the Republicans. The Senate acquitted Clinton, and he finished out his term, though with injured effectiveness.

The Election of year 2000

Vice President Al Gore, unencumbered with Clinton’s particular character weaknesses, hoped to trade on Clinton’s popularity as he faced the son of former George Bush, Sr. in the 2000 election for the presidency. George W. Bush’s advantage in the campaign was name recognition and a huge sum of cash donations. He also turned his former problem with alcohol into an advantage by crediting his turnaround to his “born again” commitment to God, which excited the religious right, a strong base in the Republican Party. As Senator from Tennessee, Gore had a reputation as a policy wonk and an unusually active role as Vice President, but his public image was hindered by a stiff speaking style. The election was very close. Gore had the lead in popular votes, but the result of the Electoral College count depended on one state, Florida, where the tally was disputed. Bush had the edge, but the Democrats sued for a recount, but the Supreme Court threw the suit out, and Bush, Jr. became President by court ruling.

Right Wing Agenda

By September of Bush’s first year as President, his agenda had inspired few others than those of his followers who were farther to the “right” than even Ronald Reagan’s legacy. One thing he quickly established was his alignment with business interests. He favored a large tax cut for the wealthy, favored oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and chose a Secretary of the Interior who opposed environmental protections. He elevated pride of country by embracing “exceptionalism”---the idea that we are better than others and will go our own way without anyone’s help, thank you. He announced

his intent to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia, listed North Korea, Iraq, and Iran as members of an “evil empire,” renounced the 1997 Kyoto protocol for controlling global warming, and took a hands-off approach to the Israeli-Palestinian troubles.

September 11 Attack

Then on September 11, 2001, came devastating and murderous attacks on the New York World Trade Towers and the Pentagon. International terrorism suddenly brought the American public into the real world. President Bush came alive; now he had something of his own to believe in and get aroused about. He announced that his response to this killing of innocent Americans would be the hallmark of his Administration. He was right, but it didn’t turn out as he hoped.

Government intelligence agencies revealed that the perpetrators were carrying out orders from Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda terrorist organization. Afghanistan was known to be harboring bin Laden, so President Bush demanded that the Taliban regime turn him over, or the U.S. would invade and capture the criminal without help. They wouldn’t, and invasion followed, without success in finding the fugitive. Bin Laden had native supporters and mountainous country in which to hide.

Deciding on War

As a diversion from our fruitless chase of bin Laden, Bush cast our effort more generally as a “War on Terror.” Some analysts critical of Bush, using his slight knowledge of foreign affairs and habit of bumbling syntax, presented evidence suggesting that he was a mere tool of the “neoconservatives” who gathered around a published foreign policy agenda for American dominance of the Middle East and control of the oil resources there. Vice President Richard Cheney (former CEO of Halliburton, a corporation active in the Middle East) and Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, were devotees of this agenda, known as Project for the New American Century (PNAC). As part of Bush’s inner circle, Cheney and Rumsfeld talked at Cabinet meetings about how to implement this vision. They realized that by recasting our military goal in terms broader than capture of bin Laden, the public would support a move against Iraq and the tyrannous leader that everyone hated.

With the emotional fervor of an American public aroused and frightened by the 9/11 attack, Bush explained (falsely) that the real threat of terror was in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein had stockpiled weapons of mass destruction (a nuclear arsenal and biological weapons) and stood in partnership with Al Qaeda. Bush explained that Iraq was the real target we should be aiming at in response to 9/11, and inferred that Hussein was personally responsible for the attack. In this scenario we would be justified in invading a country that had not invaded us. In this environment of crisis, members of Congress, in tune with their constituents’ fears, approved the President’s military intent. They gave him funding, set up a Homeland Security Department to coordinate protective measures, and passed the Patriot Act to allow the government to overstep privacy issues and operate on wartime rules of surveillance and law enforcement.

Military Engagement

Unlike his father, who had gathered United Nations and allied support before the earlier attack on Hussein, Bush, Jr. ignored the protests of the United Nations and other European allies, and decided to go it alone (with token help from Britain and other smaller states). On Bush's watch, bin Laden remained at large while we proceeded to fight the longest war (including Afghanistan operations) in our history, and with no more success than we had in Vietnam. We were proud of capturing Hussein and seeing him executed, but he obviously was not the root problem, for civil war and terrorist attacks in Iraq continued and our soldier death count steadily mounted. We could point to the democratic constitution that the Iraqis instituted under our direction, but were disappointed that the Iraqi people were not enamored with our presence in occupation of their country.

As the war dragged on, Americans at home became restive. Bush stoked up fears regularly of imminent attacks on our cities, reported plots discovered, and maintained an updated list of lower Al Qaeda leaders that we kept finding and killing as apparent proof that our war effort was keeping our country safe from another 9/11. Despite growing opposition, Bush still had enough backers for reelection in 2004.

Changing of the Guard

But by 2008 the country was ready to find a way out of Iraq. In campaigning for the Presidency, Barack Obama promised a military draw down in Iraq and a shift of attention to the original, more limited goal of finding bin Laden; and he was elected. As the first black man to gain the White House, and with a Democrat now in office after eight years since Clinton, domestic issues returned to the fore. Under Obama our troops continued to fight in Afghanistan, but the long sidetracked issue of national emergency action to deal with a sudden collapse of the economy monopolized national attention in 2008.

The question for the future was, could the two major parties rise above ideological squabbles and the carping of the right and left partisan wings, to deal responsibly with the issues of national debt, diminished international respect, immigration, environmental changes, drug wars and street violence---a full plate.

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