

American History and Today (part one: 1914-64)

“Recounting the past in photos, film clips and music”

3 important lessons learned from World War I (1914-18) ¹

- Exhaust diplomacy before using force. War should always be regarded as a last resort.
- War is always unpredictable. Once large-scale violence is unleashed, it's difficult to control.
- History teaches life lessons. "There's a danger that World Wars become so distant in our memories that they become abstract." Since 1945 the major powers have not fought each other.

3 important observations gleaned from the Roaring Twenties

- The U.S. experienced culture clashes that began in earnest as immigrants arrived after World War I (1914-18); African Americans migrated from farms in the south to cities in the north; women newly empowered with the vote entered politics; Catholics began climbing the economic ladder.
- Prohibition of alcohol (1919-33) had unintended consequences, such as fueling organized crime.
- Unrestrained global economic growth is likely to encounter Isaac Newton's Third Law of Physics: "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

3 important observations gleaned from The Great Depression (1929-41) ²

- The decline of the U.S. economy in 1929 pulled down most other countries. Then in 1930 U.S. protectionist policies promoted retaliatory tariffs in other countries, exacerbating collapse.
- President Franklin Roosevelt's *New Deal* policies in 1933 either began or accelerated the economic turnaround, and his reassuring words (fireside chats) were the essence of leadership.
- The Depression was backdrop to some of the most memorable stories written: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men*;³ and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.⁴

3 important lessons learned from World War II (1939-45)

- Acknowledge the “messy complexity” of other cultures. Germany underestimated the Soviet Union's resolve and Japan gambled that the U.S. would bargain for peace after Pearl Harbor.
- Hold to your society's fundamental principles, such as democracy, especially in times of crisis.
- Promote multilateral, multinational solutions in foreign policy.³ World War II brought about a wave of fervent internationalism that resulted in the creation of the UN, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the World Bank, among others.

3 important observations gleaned from the first decade of the Atomic Age (1945-56)

- By assuring “mutual destruction,” nuclear weapons have served as a useful deterrent to war.
- Nuclear technology has been used for peaceful means. The first nuclear reactor to provide electricity to a national grid opened in England in 1956. Fifty years later (2006) there were 442 reactors in 32 nations that generated one-sixth (16%) of the world's electricity.⁴
- The 1951 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was a warning of sorts. It was based on a 1940 short story that was updated after the nuclear bomb (1945), then released during the Korean War.

References:

1. “3 Important Lessons Learned from World War I,” July 28, 2014. Cooper Allen, USA Today.
2. From multiple sources that appear under the title “Great Depression.”
3. “Choices Under Fire: Moral Dimensions of World War II,” a book by Michael Bess.
4. “New Scientist” story Sept. 4, 2006, written by John Pickrell.

3 important observations gleaned from the Eisenhower administration years (1953-61)

- 34th U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower had an acute political sense, and outstanding leadership qualities, each “born out of a sense of self-security” (owing to his military training).⁵
- A fiscal conservative, Ike resisted efforts by some Republicans to repeal parts of *The New Deal*.⁵
- Eisenhower created the U.S. interstate highway system, the largest public works program in the country's history, which connected 47,000 miles of roads and transformed U.S. business.

3 important observations gleaned from the U.S. presidential election of 1960

- 70 million Americans viewed the first debate between VP Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy, which was 39% of the U.S. population (180 million). By comparison, 84 million Americans (26% of the U.S. population), viewed the first Clinton-Trump debate in 2016.
- Presidential elections are won by electoral votes, not popular votes. A (wise) campaign strategy devotes most of the candidate's time, money, attention and energy to those “feasible” states that constitute a majority and does not waste time (where there) is little chance of success.⁶
- Even a young U.S. Senator (JFK), inexperienced in executive administration and a member of an oft-disparaged demographic minority group (Catholic), can, through hard work, defeat a hard-nosed, hardhearted WASP who scowls more than smiles.⁶

“American History and Today (1914-64)” film clips

Produced & presented by John LeGear from TimComm.com

**indicates film clip may be found on YouTube

1. 1-2:** **Back to the Future** (1985) starring Michael J. Fox to the tune “Sh-Boom” (1954) performed by The Koi Boys
2. 1-8: **World War I** (1914-18) overview excerpted from The History Channel
3. 1-25: **Historian/Journalist Jon Meacham** excerpt from his book/documentary **“The Soul of America”**
4. 1-34: **Inherit the Wind** (1960) starring Spencer Tracy dramatizing “The Scopes Monkey Trial” of 1925
5. 1-37: **Route 66** by Marcia Ball as she celebrates the highway opened in 1926 and highlighting Pontiac, Illinois
6. 1-53** **Cheek to Cheek** from **“Top Hat”** featuring the incomparable Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers (1935)
7. 1-56: **1936 montage** (historic images) from the middle of **The Great Depression** in America
8. 1-59** **Amelia Earhart tribute** from the film “Amelia” (2009) starring Hilary Swank and Richard Gere
9. 1-64: **War of the Worlds** radio play by Orson Welles broadcast Oct. 30, 1938
10. 1-69: **Mr. Smith Goes to Washington** (1939) starring James Stewart
11. 1-73: **The Great Dictator** speech by Charlie Chaplin in his film of the same name mocking Adolph Hitler (1940)
12. 1-75: **Bombing of London** in 1940 from the film **Hope and Glory** (1988) starring Sarah Miles
13. 1-77** **World War II tribute** (1939-45) and song A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square by Joanie Summers (1962)
14. 1-80** **A Royal Night Out** (2015 film) recalling **Victory in Europe Day** May 8, 1945
15. 1-90: **Vietnam before the U.S. War** during Truman administration (1949) from **“Vietnam”** by Ken Burns & Lynn Novick
16. 1-94: **Korean War** seals U.S. fate in Vietnam (1950) from **“Vietnam”** by Ken Burns & Lynn Novick
17. 1-97: **The Day the Earth Stood Still**: Michael Rennie & Patricia Neal (1951) warn of the risks posed by nuclear bombs
18. 1-115: **Blue Suede Shoes** by Elvis Presley (1956)
19. 1-119: **Duck and Cover** civil defense film featured in schools throughout US in 1950s and early 1960s
20. 1-123: **The Constitution is our Rule book** (from the film “Bridge of Spies”) starring Tom Hanks and Scott Shepherd
21. 1-130: **Alan Shepard space launch** (1961) from **“Hidden Figures”** (depicting mathematician Katherine Gobel Johnson)
22. 1-143: **Johnny Angel**: Shelley Fabares' song serenades recount of **The Cuban Missile Crisis** in October 1962
23. 1-155: **I Have a Dream** speech by Martin Luther King during the **March on Washington** on August 28, 1963
24. 1-165:** **Twist and Shout**: The Beatles (1963) blended with Matthew Broderick in **Ferris Bueller's Day Off** (1986)