George HW Bush and the End of the Cold War: Crash Course US History #44

Crash Course: U.S. History
https://youtube.com/watch?v=L-K19rVDxoM
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Hi I'm John green this is Crash Course US History and we've finally done it! We have reached the moment where we get to talk about the presidency of George H. W. Bush, the second most important man named George Bush had sweg to be president of the United States, a man so fascinating that we did not give him a face.

Mr. Green! Mr. Green! So we're almost in the present?

Well we're never really going to get to the present, me from the past, because we're always in the past, but you are like twenty years in the past, which is soon going to create a time paradox that I cannot possibly deal with. So I'm just going to let Hank deal with that over on the science shows.

(Crash Course intro)

Anyway, despite like calendars and everything, the 1990s really began in 1988 with the election of George Herbert Walker Bush, who had probably the best resume of any presidential candidate since Teddy Roosevelt. I mean he was a war hero, having enlisted in the navy upon graduating from high school, and then going on to become the youngest pilot and Navy history. He flew 58 missions in the Pacific during World War II and received the Distinguished Flying Cross for completing a mission in a burning plane before ditching into the sea. So just consider that next time you complete a heroic mission in Call of Duty 4.

After the war, Bush went to college at Yale and then moved to Texas where he made millions in the oil industry. Then he became a congressmen and then ambassador to the UN and then director of the CIA has been vice president, the guy had more careers than Barbie. Plus like every great American politician George Bush grew up in a hardscrabble poverty working his way through the--

Just kidding, he was the son of Connecticut Senator Prescott Bush.

But I guess after like 20 years of peanut farmers and former actors, America was ready to have an aristocrat at the helm again, as long as he pretended to be from Texas. Like certain Crash Course teachers wearing striped Polo shirts, George H. W. Bush was an old-school Episcopalian, so he was never totally comfortable with, like, public professions of faith.

So when it came time to pick his vice presidential candidate Bush chose J Danforth Quayle, aka Dan, a young family values senator from right here in Indiana. Now these days of course Dan Quayle is primarily known for getting in an argument with a fictional television character named Murphy Brown and also for not being able to spell the word potato, but once upon a time he was a promising young Republican.

Bush's opponent in that 1988 election was Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis who was perceived as competent but kind of heartless and weak and a little bit clueless. As this famous picture of him in a tank indicates, he was not a war hero. But at the beginning of the Democratic primary the leading contender was actually the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who had a legitimate shot at being the first African-American Democratic presidential nominee, that would have to wait, because instead the Democrats chose the northern liberal Gov. Dukakis and paired him with Texas Sen. Lloyd "I'm gonna make Dan Quayle look good" Bentsen, which I bring up primarily to point out that Texas actually used to have Democrats.

So negative campaign ads that existed before 1988 but the 1988 election took it into an entirely new level in and ushered in the in the era of going negative in politics. Like everyone says they hate negative ads but they also work, like the Bush campaign's efforts to make Dukakis look weak on defense and crime were brutally effective.

The most infamous ad featured Willie Horton, who while on furlough from prison committed rape and murder, and even though Dukakis's Republican predecessor had actually started the furlough program, the Horton crime occurred while Dukakis was Governor.

The ad worked. Dukakis was regarded as a liberal who was weak on crime. In fact it was George H. W. Bush who was the first to use the word liberal as an insult in American politics, which represents the larger shifts that were happening. So in retrospect possibly most important thing about the 1988 campaign was George Bush's famous pledge at the Republican convention: read my lips, no new taxes. No way that's going to come back to bite him.

So once he was president it's not surprising that Bush focused more on foreign-policy than domestic concerns, I mean that was his background with the UN and at the CIA. But it also makes sense in the larger historical context because the Cold War actually ended during Bush's presidency, even though no one ever gives him credit for it. I mean the Berlin wall came down, Poland's military rule ended, the Velvet Revolution happened in Czechoslovakia during Bush's watch...

Let's go to the Thought Bubble. The end of the Cold War was really a failure on the part of the USSR rather than the result of successful American policies. But it left the US something of a policy limbo. I mean, the idea of super powerful malevolent Bowser-boss Soviet Union poised to destroy the American way of life provided a comfortable structure for all of our foreign relations for almost fifty years, as well as providing the reason for massive military buildup and all the jobs that came with it.

One positive result of the end of the Cold War was reduction in nuclear weapons: under Bush the US and USSR negotiated and implemented the START 1 and START 2 treaties which limited the number of warheads each country could possess to between 3000 and 3500. I mean that was still enough to end human life on earth several times over but it was amazing progress.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War led President Bush to declare the dawn of a new world order. But calling it a new world order didn't make foreign policy any easier

Without the Cold War to orient us, foreign-policy issues were much more confusing and messy. So for example Bush kept the United States out of Yugoslavia, which disintegrated in 1991 turning into a bloodbath. But he sent troops into Somalia to help deliver food aid resulting in the botched operation described in the movie and book Black Hawk Down. And then there was the foreign-policy crisis that Bush handled decisively: Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Bush brought the issue to the UN and ushered through a Security Council resolution that set a deadline for Saddam to leave Kuwait.

When he didn't make the January 15, 1991 deadline the US had already put together a coalition of 34 nations ready to make him leave. America first launched a spectacular air war that destroyed much of the Iraqi defense capability, and then our technological prowess was on display for the world on CNN, which featured coverage of smart bombs blowing stuff up.

When ground troops led by Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf finally moved in they were able to defeat the Iraqi army in less than 100 hours. Thanks Thought Bubble.

So the Iraq War (I guess we have to say First Iraq War) was a huge military success. America lost fewer than 300 soldiers, Iraq suffered somewhere between 1500 and 9500 killed in action, and the US's military objectives had been achieved clearly and quickly. And Bush claimed that the victory had forever banished the so-called Vietnam

syndrome, the reluctance to use American military power for fear of becoming bogged down in another quagmire.

Now in hindsight if the Americans had supported Iraqi efforts to topple Saddam Hussein and build a new Iraq, we might have achieved that objective as well. But the mission under the UN resolution was to get Iraqis out of Kuwait and so that's what we did. Bush didn't want to take it any further.

Oh, it's time for the Mystery Document? The rules here simple: I'll read the mystery document, I either guess the author correctly or I get shocked.

Alright, let's see what we've got today. "Five of the seven agree with President Bush that the war is just or at least necessary, but not one wants to fight in it. All are opposed to a draft, though a few said one might be necessary as a last resort. They said they would gladly serve in nonmilitary public service jobs. This might sound selfish but I think it would be a shame to put America's best minds on the front lines" said Jason Bell, 20, a junior English major from Elizabethtown, Kentucky. "If we have to go, we have to go, but I think it would be a shame."

Yeah, Jason Bell, that does sound selfish. Alright Stan, this is from like a newspaper or magazine. I assume that you are using it to call attention to the fact that this was really the first big American military initiative without a draft. It also reminds us that the war was not universally popular, I mean at least before at least before it was fought, after it was fought it pretty much was.

But I have no idea who actually wrote the piece in the mystery document. How would I know that, is it a famous journalist?Is it like David Halberstam? No? David Maraniss? Who the hell is that? Does he have a Wikipedia article? Meredith, does he have a Wikipedia article?

Alright apparently he does have a Wikipedia article, he even won a Pulitzer Prize, so congratulations sir.

So the Gulf War lifted President Bush's approval rating to an unheard-of of 89%. And in April 1991 it looked like there was no way that George H. W. Bush would lose his reelection bid, but he didn't consider the domestic issues that were kind of important to Americans.

We are very happy to talk about all the wars that we are fighting, unless and until someone raises our taxes.

So Bush wasn't much interested in putting together a domestic agenda. He once called it "the vision thing," and anyway he would've had a hard time getting anything through the democratically controlled Congress. So Congress continued to pass new deal style liberal legislation including expanded funding for head start and welfare as well as a family and medical leave bill, which Bush vetoed twice but eventually passed nonetheless.

With the family medical leave act of course America joined every other country in the world and offering paid maternity and paternity leave to new parents-- what's that? we didn't we still do that? we still don't have the will have paid leave? oh god...

However you are no longer allowed to be fired for 12 whole weeks while you take unpaid leave to care for your child. That's why Stan couldn't replace me with me with text to voice software after my daughter Alice was born.

But in news that actually was sort of cutting-edge, Congress also enacted the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1991.

Okay, before I talk about the recession that ended George Bush's presidency I want to talk about Rodney King, because this revealed huge fissures in the American population and called into question the achievements of the rights revolution.

In April 1992, an all-white jury in Simi Valley found three of four policemen not guilty of beating black motorist Rodney King, even though the incident have been recorded on videotape. After the verdict, Los Angeles erupted into the deadliest riots seen in America since the New York City draft riots.

52 people were killed and 2300 injured in rioting that caused $1 billion in property damage, so obviously race remained a volatile issue in the US.

This was also an issue that Bush seemed unprepared to deal with. Like he toured burned out LA neighborhoods but he had little in the way of real comfort to offer which contributed to the perception that he was this millionaire Ivy League educated Washington insider who was out of touch with regular Americans. But the biggest issue to most Americans was money. America fell into recession in 1990 and the slump lasted until 1992.

It might've been caused by the end of the Cold War and subsequent reductions in defense spending or by Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan's sluggish refusal to lower interest rates, or maybe the economy just needed to reset at a lower number after growing every year since 1982. Or maybe macroeconomics is more complicated than who's president and sometimes people unjustly get blamed or credited for things that they had very little to do with.

Regardless 4.5 million Americans lost their jobs and the unemployment rate rose from 5.3% in 1989 to 7.5% in 1992, its highest level in almost a decade. Along with the many thousands of manufacturing workers who lost their jobs in America's continuing deindustrialization, white-collar workers were thrown out of work, too, and college graduates, of whom there were record numbers, couldn't find work as they came out of school. Stop me if any of that sounds familiar.

One person who struggled to find a job after graduating from the Bush recession was none other than CrashCourse writer Raoul Meyer, who after sending 100 resumes out, got three job interviews and ended up working at a small independent school in Alabama where he became the teacher of... me from the past.

Now the recession was certainly bad for Bush politically but what probably destroyed his reelection hopes was the whole taxes thing. In 1991 with tax receipts dropping and spending not slowing very much, President Bush did something that now seems unthinkable: he authorized the tax increase. And in doing this, he really called his conservative credentials into question, especially in the eyes of small-government-wanting libertarian-leaning Republicans.

They never really trusted the faux-Texan Bush anyway but he had said "read my lips" and they believed him but it turned he had no lips. Now when coupled with Bush's lukewarm support of the evangelical wing of the Republican Party and his running mate's inability to spell the word potato, it all prompted a primary challenge from conservative commentator Pat Buchanan, which he beat back easily.

However some in the GOP voter base, especially evangelical Christians, stayed home on election day. Then there was also a third-party candidate: Texas billionaire and Muppet impersonator H Ross Perot, who won 19% of the vote, the best third-party performance since Teddy Roosevelt in 1912.

All of this came together to open the door for a pudgy lab from

Hope, Arkansas who never inhaled marijuana and didn't cheat on his wife except for sometimes, named William Jefferson Clinton.

Looking back from today the fascinating thing about the George H. W. Bush administration is that it seems like a weird interruption in a larger narrative.

For a couple decades we'd seen increasing conservatism and rising partisanship, and then suddenly George HW Bush comes along and everybody kinda works together. They didn't always make good decisions from working together, but they did make decisions.

So what's really fascinating to me is that if you're from Eastern Europe or China this period was one of the most important in history, whereas if you're American, arguably the most important thing the leader of this era ever did was raise George W. Bush.

For better and for worse America didn't really change that much as a result of the end of the Cold War. We're creeping up now on the growth of the Internet which will change the way that Americans and everyone else imagines history and everything else forever.

Thanks for watching, I'll see you next week.

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