



TERMS TO KNOW:

Before or after watching this episode, encourage students to define and review the terms below. Students may also want to make their own lists of new vocabulary words and identification terms as they watch.

- Authoritarian
- Counterculture
- Definitive
- Exceptionalism
- Innovation
- Prosperity
- Silicon
- Suburbia



America The Story of Us is useful for American History, Social Studies, and Media courses. It is appropriate for 7th grade students and above, and is an excellent resource for professional development.

EPISODES 11-12: SUPERPOWER/MILLENNIUM

INTRODUCTION

The final two episodes of this series look at defining moments in U.S history from 1945 on and trace them back to their antecedents in earlier American history. Some of the nation's most prominent personalities and leaders share their ideas on the definitive moments in American history, and reflect on what is unique about the U.S.

The story of post-war America is retold through multiple voices – events explored include the building of the interstate highways and suburbia, the tensions of the Cold War, the euphoria of the Civil Rights movement, the role of hippies and counterculture, the dark hours of Vietnam and Watergate, the Reagan era, the rise of Silicon Valley and the groundbreaking election of President Barack Obama.

Following the theme of technological innovation throughout the series, these episodes look at how the U.S. landed humans on the moon and contributed to enormous technological inventions such as the Internet. Through the reflections of historians and notable Americans, we'll look at what has endured through 400 years of U.S. history, and ponder the stories that have yet to be told.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What inventions do you think have been most important in U.S. history and why?
2. What do you think have been the five most important events in U.S. history since WWII?
3. Many historians debate whether or not the U.S. has seen continual progress throughout its history, or if there have been moments of back-peddling or regression. How do you define progress in history? Do you think the U.S. has always progressed? Discuss.



4. If you could interview one American about our nation's past, who would it be, and why?

Primary Source:

Barack Obama was officially sworn in as 44th President of the United States on January 20th, 2009 in Washington, D.C. In his inaugural address, Obama outlined his understanding of the most important tasks facing the nation in the context of its current political realities. The excerpt below is one section of Obama's speech.

President Barack Obama, Inaugural Address (excerpt)

“Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends – hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism – these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.”

- January 20th, 2009



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think Obama meant when he called certain values “the quiet force of progress”? Which of these values do you think are most important, and why?
2. President Obama noted that Americans faced a “new era of responsibility.” Why do you think his words and vision have connected with so many Americans?
2. Obama was elected in 2008; how do you think people will explain this time period 100 years from now? How do you think this time period is similar to or different from other eras in American history?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

What else was going on during this time period? Explore the sites below to learn more about the era of U.S. history covered in this episode.

View videos and read more about many topics discussed in these episodes
www.history.com

Go to the Library of Congress online and in person to learn about our nation's history
www.loc.gov

Visit the Smithsonian National Museum of American History to explore the past online and in person
<http://americanhistory.si.edu>

Visit the National September 11th Memorial and Museum online
www.national911memorial.org

PLACES TO VISIT:

Interested in what you saw in this episode? Visiting historic sites is a great way for teachers, students, and families to learn more about the past. Explore these historic sites, or look for local historic sites in your town or city to visit.

Visit the National Park Service online to find historic sites near you
www.nps.gov/index.htm

Learn more about our nation's historic places from the National Trust for Historic Preservation
www.preservationnation.org