

# Renewing America



*Excerpt from President Bill Clinton's First Inaugural Address (1993)*

When George Washington first took the oath I have just sworn to uphold, news traveled slowly across the land by horseback and across the ocean by boat. Now, the sights and sounds of this ceremony are broadcast instantaneously to billions around the world.

Communications and commerce are global; investment is mobile; technology is almost magical; and ambition for a better life is now universal. We earn our livelihood in America today in peaceful competition with people all across the Earth.

Profound and powerful forces are shaking and remaking our world, and the urgent question of our time is whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy.

This new world has already enriched the lives of millions of Americans who are able to compete and win in it. But when most people are working harder for less; when others cannot work at all; when the cost of health care devastates families and threatens to bankrupt our enterprises, great and small; when the fear of crime robs law-abiding citizens of their freedom; and when millions of poor children cannot even imagine the lives we are calling them to lead—we have not made change our friend.

We know we have to face hard truths and take strong steps. But we have not done so. Instead, we

have drifted, and that drifting has eroded our resources, fractured our economy, and shaken our confidence.

Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. Americans have ever been a restless, questing, hopeful people. And we must bring to our task today the vision and will of those who came before us.

From our Revolution to the Civil War, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights movement, our people have always mustered the determination to construct from these crises the pillars of our history.

Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our Nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time. Well, my fellow Americans, this is our time. Let us embrace it.

[. . .]

To renew America, we must meet challenges abroad as well as at home. There is no longer a clear division between what is foreign and what is domestic-the world economy, the world environment, the world AIDS crisis, the world arms race, they affect us all.

Today, as an old order passes, the new world is more free but less stable. Communism's collapse has called forth old animosities and new dangers. Clearly America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make.

While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges, nor fail to seize the opportunities, of this new world. Together with our friends and allies, we will work to shape change, lest it engulf us.

[. . .]

But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world, we see them embraced-and we rejoice. Our hopes, our hearts, and our hands, are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause.

The American people have summoned the change we celebrate today. You have raised your voices in an unmistakable chorus. You have cast your votes in historic numbers. And you have changed the face of the Congress, the Presidency, and the political process itself.

Yes, you, my fellow Americans, have forced the spring.

Now, we must do the work the season demands.

To that work I now turn, with all the authority of my office. I ask the Congress to join with me. But no President, no Congress, no government, can undertake this mission alone.

My fellow Americans, you, too, must play your part in our renewal.

I challenge a new generation of young Americans to a season of service-to act on your idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, reconnecting our torn communities. There is so much to be done-enough indeed for millions of others who are still young in spirit to give of themselves in service, too.

In serving, we recognize a simple but powerful truth: We need each other. And we must care for one another.

Today, we do more than celebrate America; we rededicate ourselves to the very idea of America:

An idea born in revolution and renewed through two centuries of challenge;

An idea tempered by the knowledge that, but for fate, we-the fortunate and the unfortunate-might have been each other;

An idea ennobled by the faith that our Nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measure of unity;

An idea infused with the conviction that America's long heroic journey must go forever upward.

And so, my fellow Americans, as we stand at the edge of the 21st century, let us begin anew with energy and hope, with faith and discipline, and let us work until our work is done.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does Bill Clinton call "the urgent question of our time"?

- A. how to enrich the lives of millions of Americans
- B. whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy
- C. how to minimize crime and poverty in American cities
- D. whether the world can rise to the challenge of new changes

2. Bill Clinton explains the difficulties that America faces in order to convince the listener of what?

- A. America has problems just like the rest of the world.
- B. Americans need to remember the Great Depression.
- C. Americans need to work together to renew the country.
- D. America has to fix itself before it can lead the world.

3. In this speech, Clinton maintains that Americans are a strong and determined people. What evidence from the speech best supports this statement?

- A. "Instead, we have drifted, and that drifting has eroded our resources, fractured our economy, and shaken our confidence."
- B. "Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our Nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time."
- C. "But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world, we see them embraced-and we rejoice."
- D. "From our Revolution...to the civil rights movement, our people have always mustered the determination to construct from these crises the pillars of our history."

4. Why does Clinton say, "Though our challenges are fearsome, so are our strengths. Americans have ever been a restless, questing, hopeful people. And we must bring to our task today the vision and will of those who came before us."

- A. to ensure that Americans understand the severity of the task
- B. to encourage Americans that they are up to the task
- C. to make sure Americans understand the task before them
- D. to encourage Americans to not make the mistakes of the past

5. What is the main message of this speech?

- A. Americans need to work together to create change.
- B. The United States of America is the best country in the world.
- C. The American people will always rise to meet challenges.
- D. Though America's challenges are fearsome, so are its strengths.

6. Read the following sentence: "From our Revolution to the Civil War, to the Great Depression, to the civil rights movement, our people have always **mustered** the determination to construct from these crises the pillars of our history."

As used in this sentence, what does the word "**mustered**" most nearly mean?

- A. rejected
- B. fought
- C. gathered
- D. failed

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

\_\_\_\_\_ America faces great challenges, it also possesses great strengths, Bill Clinton asserts.

- A. Therefore
- B. While
- C. Ultimately
- D. Before

8. What four world problems does Clinton say affect us all?

9. What part does Clinton say the American people must play in the country's renewal?

10. Explain how Bill Clinton tries to motivate and inspire the American people to take action and encourage them to affect change. Support your answer with details from the speech.