

Period 9: 1980 to the Present

In a Nutshell (Big Picture)

As the United States transitioned to a new century filled with challenges and possibilities, it experienced renewed ideological and cultural debates, sought to redefine its foreign policy, and adapted to economic globalization and revolutionary changes in science and technology.

Key Concepts (Broad Essential Information)

- A. A newly ascendant conservative movement achieved several political and policy goals during the 1980s and continued to strongly influence public discourse in the following decades.
- B. Conservative beliefs regarding the need for traditional social values and a reduced role for government advanced in U.S. politics after 1980.
- C. Moving into the 21st century, the nation experienced significant technological, economic, and demographic changes
- D. New developments in science and technology enhanced the economy and transformed society, while manufacturing decreased.
- E. The U.S. population continued to undergo demographic shifts that had significant cultural and political consequences.
- F. The end of the Cold War and new challenges to U.S. leadership forced the nation to redefine its foreign policy and role in the world.
- G. The Reagan administration promoted an interventionist foreign policy that continued in later administrations, even after the end of the Cold War.
- H. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. foreign policy efforts focused on fighting terrorism around the world.

Significant Topics (Must Know)

1. Reagan's Conservative "Revolution" and Policies that Followed

Ronald Reagan's victory in the presidential election of 1980 represented an important milestone, allowing conservatives to enact significant tax cuts and continue the deregulation of many industries. Conservatives argued that liberal programs were counterproductive in fighting poverty and stimulating economic growth. Some of their efforts to reduce the size and scope of government met with inertia and liberal opposition, as many programs remained popular with voters. Policy debates continued over free-trade agreements, the scope of the government social safety net, and calls to reform the U.S. financial system.

2. The End of the Cold War and the Events that Followed

President Reagan asserted U.S. opposition to communism through speeches, diplomatic efforts, limited military interventions, and a buildup of nuclear and conventional weapons. Increased U.S. military spending, Reagan's diplomatic initiatives, and political changes and economic problems in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were all important in ending the Cold War.

3. The War on Terrorism

In the wake of attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States launched military efforts against terrorism and lengthy, controversial conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. The war on terrorism sought to improve security within the United States but also raised questions about the protection of civil liberties and human rights.

4. Changes in the American Economy

Economic productivity increased as improvements in digital communications enabled increased American participation in worldwide economic opportunities. Employment increased in service sectors and decreased in manufacturing, and union membership declined. Real wages stagnated for the working and middle class amid growing economic inequality.

5. Technology, Energy, and the Environment

Technological innovations in computing, digital mobile technology, and the Internet transformed daily life, increased access to information, and led to new social behaviors and networks. Conflicts in the Middle East and concerns about climate change led to debates over U.S. dependence on fossil fuels and the impact of economic consumption on the environment.

6. Immigration and Domestic Migration

After 1980, the political, economic, and cultural influence of the American South and West continued to increase as population shifted to those areas. International migration from Latin America and Asia increased dramatically. The new immigrants affected U.S. culture in many ways and supplied the economy with an important labor force.

7. The Transformation of American Society

Intense political and cultural debates continued over issues such as immigration policy, diversity, gender roles, and family structures.

8. The United States in the Early 21st Century

Despite economic and foreign policy challenges, the United States continued as the world's leading superpower in the 21st century.

Supporting Evidence for Significant Topics

1980s Characterization

On the Surface

- Economic recovery (from stagflation)
- Psychological recovery (from the violence, chaos, and assassinations of the 1960s and early 1970s)
- Military recovery (from the Vietnam War and a general perception of being weak on the world stage)
- Political stabilization (from the Watergate scandals)
- an overall general recovery from the malaise of the 1970s

In Reality

- materialism and conspicuous consumption were at an all time high
- wealth gap widened between the rich and poor
- conditions in cities worsened as “white flight” to the suburbs continued to grow
- AIDS epidemic hits America (largely ignored and stigmatized in the early years of the crisis as a “gay man’s disease”)

Domestic Issues of the 1980s

Foreign Issues of the 1980s

The Reagan Revolution

Ronald Reagan

Reagan and the Economy

Reagan and the End of the Cold War

The Reagan Revolution and the Subsequent Issues, Events, Policies, etc. (1980s to present day)

Economic Recovery Tax Act (1981)

- law passed under President Reagan that cut income taxes over three years by 25%
- lowered the rate for the highest income bracket from 78% to 28%
- tax cuts were a fundamental part of Reaganomics

Sagebrush rebellion

- political movement in the western states that opposed federal regulations governing land use and natural resources, favoring state jurisdiction instead

Contract with America (1994)

- pledge taken by Republican candidates for Congress who promised to reduce the size and scope of the federal government and to balance the federal budget
- led to a Republican takeover of both the House and Senate in the 1994 elections

Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992)

- Supreme Court decision that upheld the right to an abortion, overturning Pennsylvania restrictions on abortion

Increase in the budget deficit and national debt

- tax cuts and increases in defense spending led to an explosion of the federal deficit and national debt during the 1980s and early 1990s

“The Third Way”

- a centrist approach to governance advocated by Bill Clinton that sought to achieve liberal objectives (equal opportunity and making work pay) through conservative means (minimal government regulation and government support of business)

North American Free Trade Agreement aka NAFTA (1993)

- agreement between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that eliminated most tariffs and other trade barriers

Medicare Modernization Act (2003)

- law passed under George W. Bush that overhauled the Medicare system, providing benefits for prescription drugs

Affordable Care Act (2010)

- although a law reforming the health care system was rejected under President Clinton, a law establishing near universal health care coverage was passed under President Obama
- strong opposition to “Obamacare” from conservatives led to the founding of the Tea Party

The End of the Cold War and Post Cold War Issues and Events (1990s)

Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) aka “Star Wars”

- President Reagan’s program to create an effective laser-based defense against a nuclear missile attack
- SDI was part of Reagan’s arms race challenge to the Soviet Union in the 1980s

Mikhail Gorbachev

- leader of the Soviet Union who assumed power in 1985 and introduced political and economic reforms in the Soviet Union, relaxed tensions with the United States, and presided over the break up of the Soviet Union

Iran-Contra Scandal (1987)

- in an effort to back rebel Contra forces that sought to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist and pro-Soviet government, the Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to the anti-American government in Iran to help secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon, transferring profits from the Iranians illegally to the Contras in Nicaragua

Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

- Reagan-era plan to draft treaties with the Soviet Union to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems

Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty (1987)

- treaty that provided for the destruction of all U.S. and Soviet medium-range missiles in Europe

Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989)

- barrier between West Berlin and Communist East Berlin that was torn down in 1989, symbolically marking the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union

Fall of the Soviet Union (1991)

- due to the Soviet government's inability to stop the rise of nationalism and the independence of Soviet republics, the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist on December 26, 1991

Persian Gulf War (1991)

- war in the Persian Gulf region triggered by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait
- an international coalition led by the U.S. defeated Iraqi forces and liberated Kuwait from Iraqi control

Dayton Agreement (1995)

- agreement signed in Dayton, Ohio by three rival ethnic groups in Bosnia who pledged to end a four-year-old civil war

Bombing of Yugoslavia (1999)

- NATO bombings of Yugoslavia that led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo and put an end to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s

The Transformation of America at the turn of the Century

Rust Belt

- description for the Northeastern and Midwestern states that have experienced economic decline, population loss, and urban decay due to the loss of industry primarily to the Sun Belt

Boomburbs

- rapidly growing area that remains essentially suburban in character even as it reaches populations more typical of a large city (Sugar Land would be a good example of a boomburb)

Information technology

- the management and processing of information with computers and other forms of telecommunications
- created an economic boom in the 1990s, providing the United States with the longest period of economic expansion in its history

Kyoto Agreement (1997)

- United Nations agreement to reduce emission rates of carbon dioxide and other industrial produced gases linked to climate change

Global warming

- the gradual warming of the surface of the Earth that could cause major ecological changes in the future

Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

- law that prohibited the hiring of undocumented foreigners
- offered amnesty and legal resident status to immigrants who could prove they had entered the United States before 1982

Immigration Act of 1990

- law that reformed the Immigration Act of 1965, increasing the number of immigrants allowed annually into the United States
- the law gave preference to skilled workers and those with families already living in the United States

Cultural pluralism

- the coexistence of many cultures in the United States without any one culture dominating a locality or region
- the idea of cultural pluralism seeks to reduce racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination

Glass ceiling

- term used to describe the barrier within a company that prevents women and/or minorities from rising to upper-level positions.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell aka DADT (1994)

- policy prohibiting military personnel from discriminating against or harassing closeted homosexual or bisexual service members or applicants, while barring openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons from military service
- President Obama reversed DADT in 2011

Defense of Marriage Act aka DOMA (1996)

- federal law that defined marriage as a legal contract between a man and a woman

Nancy Pelosi

- first woman to become Speaker of the House of Representatives (2007)

Barack Obama

- first African American to become president of the United States. (2009)

United States v. Windsor (2013)

- Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional for the federal government to deny federal benefits of marriage to married same-sex couples, if the marriage is recognized or performed in a state that allows same-sex marriage

Obergefell v. Hodges (2015)

- Supreme Court declared that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states
- the ruling struck down any state laws that prevented or limited same-sex marriage

The War on Terrorism (2001- present)

Al Qaeda

- terrorist network established by Saudi Arabian Osama bin Laden in 1989
- organizes militant Islamic groups that seek to remove foreigners from Islamic holy lands and to unite all Islamic lands under one single rule

Taliban

- organization of Muslim fundamentalists that gained control over Afghanistan in 1996 following a long bloody Civil War that ensued after the Soviet Union withdrew in 1989
- established a strict Islamic government that provided safe haven for Al Qaeda in the years leading up to the 9/11 terrorist attacks

Attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (September 11, 2001)

- attacks by Al Qaeda on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. that killed approximately 3000 people and started the U.S. War on Terrorism.

Patriot Act (2001)

- law that reduced constraints on the Justice Department and other law-enforcement agencies in dealing with individuals who were suspected of being linked to terrorists

Department of Homeland Security (2001)

- cabinet-level department created after the attacks of September 11th to protect the United States and its territories from terrorist attacks, man-made accidents, and natural disasters

War in Afghanistan (2001)

- after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NATO forces led by the United States entered Afghanistan to dismantle Al Qaeda and eliminate its safe haven by removing the Taliban from power

Iraq War (2003)

- invasion of Iraq led by the United States, followed by a longer phase of fighting, in which an insurgency emerged to oppose the occupying forces and a newly formed Iraqi government

Weapons of mass destruction

- nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons that have the potential to kill large numbers of people
- the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003 on the grounds that Iraqis had weapons of mass destruction. The weapons were never found.