# Politics and Society in the “Me Decade”

How should historians characterize the 1970s?

## Introduction


The U.S. Mint released coins with bicentennial designs in 1976. Many of these designs inspired a sense of national pride. The design on the quarter, pictured above, features a colonial drummer.

On July 4, 1976, the United States celebrated the **bicentennial**, or 200th anniversary, of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Across the nation, Americans marked the day with parades, picnics, and fireworks displays. The celebration surpassed normal Independence Day festivities, lasting most of the year. The U.S. Mint issued coins with bicentennial designs, television networks featured programs exploring the nation’s first two centuries, and Americans flew bicentennial flags.

To many Americans, the bicentennial ushered in a welcomed feeling of national pride. The celebrations, which focused on the nation’s founding ideals, were a relief after the trauma of Vietnam and the disillusionment of Watergate. For others, the bicentennial illuminated the disparity between the nation’s founding ideals and its current ones. They worried that the United States had lost its sense

of purpose.

A journalist named Tom Wolfe captured these bicentennial concerns in his essay, “The Me Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” by documenting changes he had witnessed in American life since the end of the 1960s. In the 1960s, he noted, idealistic Americans had struggled to end racism, fight poverty, and create a more just society. Wolfe claimed that this drive for social change had been replaced in the 1970s with a quest for self-improvement and personal fulfillment. “We are now in the Me Decade,” he wrote, “seeing the upward roll of . . . the third great religious wave in American history.” The focus of this latest “great awakening,” Wolfe observed, was “the most fascinating subject on earth: Me.”

Wolfe’s characterization of the 1970s as the “Me Decade” stuck. Yet historians view the 1970s as much more complex than the label “Me Decade” suggests.

The bicentennial celebration at Independence Hall in Philadelphia marked the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.


Gas prices soared in 1979. American drivers waited in long lines at gas stations for fuel, like they had during the embargo in 1973. Some motorists incited fights with one another as their patience wore thin.

# 1. A Time of Economic and Political Malaise

When Gerald Ford became president in 1974, he inherited numerous political problems from his predecessor. Although the United States had withdrawn from Vietnam, war continued in the region. Ford's controversial pardoning of Richard Nixon morally divided the nation. Furthermore, the economy continued to suffer from stagflation, the severity of which Ford emphasized in a speech to Congress: "Inflation, our public enemy number one, will, unless whipped, destroy our country, our homes, our liberties, our property, and finally our national pride, as surely as any well-armed wartime enemy."

**President Ford Tries to "Whip Inflation Now"** Many factors caused the inflation that affected the U.S. economy in the 1970s. For one, President Johnson's decision to escalate the war in Vietnam while simultaneously launching a War on Poverty drove inflation. Military and welfare spending tend to be inflationary because they introduce more money into the economy without increasing the supply of goods. When too many dollars chase too few goods, prices rise.

The **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries** (OPEC) augmented this problem by raising oil prices. Formed in 1960, OPEC is an association of nations whose national incomes depend on oil sales. OPEC priced oil at $2 to $3 per barrel until the 1973 oil embargo, which revealed the degree of many countries' dependence on imported oil. OPEC began to increase oil prices after the embargo, and by 1976, the cost of one barrel of oil had risen to $12.

Soaring oil prices hurt the U.S. economy , as products using oil as a raw material became more costly to produce. Plus, rising fuel prices increased the cost of moving goods from farms and factories to consumers. Stunned by high gas prices, drivers temporarily stopped purchasing American-made gas-guzzler cars. As their sales plummeted, auto manufacturers laid off more than 225,000 workers in 1974.

President Ford tried to quash rising prices with a crusade called Whip Inflation Now (WIN), which reduced federal spending and urged Americans to conserve energy and practice thrift. "Clean up your plate before you leave the table," the president advised, "Guard your health." WIN was ultimately not effective, and prices continued to rise, increasing by a margin of 11 percent in 1975. The unemployment rate grew more than 8 percent—the highest rate since the Depression's end.

**An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter** The 1976 presidential election pitted Ford against former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter. A Washington outsider untouched by scandal, Carter appealed to American voters, promising, "I will never lie to you."

Neither candidate generated much excitement, and as Election Day neared, Americans discussed a "clothespin vote," in which constituents "hold [their] nose and vote for one or the other." Only 53 percent of eligible voters went to the polls —the lowest voter turnout since 1948. Carter won by a narrow margin.

President Carter maintained his outsider status in the White House , hiring staff from Georgia instead of experienced Washington insiders. He also failed to establish close relations with Congress. As a result, Carter's efforts to enact reforms like creating a national health insurance system were unsuccessful.

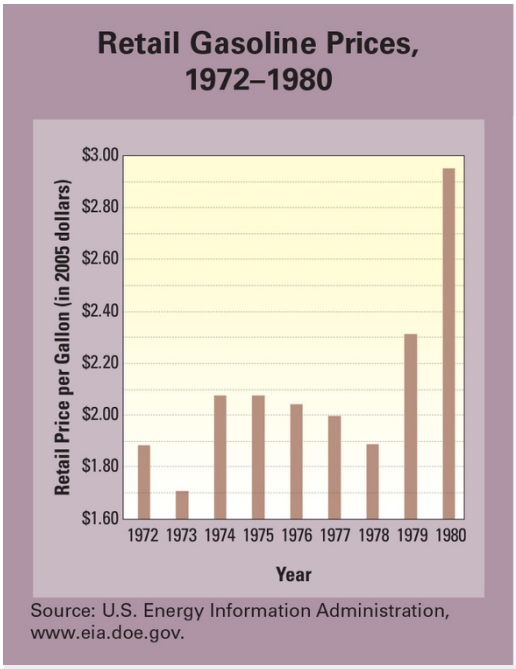
**Carter's Energy Program: "The Moral Equivalent of War"** Convinced that the era of cheap energy had ended, President Carter called on Americans to "face the fact that the energy shortage is permanent." Soon after taking office in 1977, Carter introduced a plan to end the nation's dependence on imported oil, an effort

called the “moral equivalent of war.”

Carter’s energy plan centered on conservation. He told Congress, “It is the cheapest, most practical way to meet our energy needs and to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.” Lawmakers were unconvinced by Carter’s plan, which intended to penalize energy waste and encourage energy efficiency. Reporters referred to Carter’s “moral equivalent of war” as MEOW, implying that Congress would not take it seriously.

Late in 1978, Congress passed a watered-down version of Carter’s original plan, called the **National Energy Act**. This act offered **tax credits** as incentives for people to conserve energy, either by insulating their homes or investing in alternative energy sources, such as solar energy panels. Tax credits reduce the amount of taxes a taxpayer owes to the government.

The National Energy Act increased the nation’s energy efficiency, but it did not reduce Americans’ dependence on foreign oil. In 1979, a second energy crisis was triggered by a revolution in Iran, which subsequently halted its oil exports. Over the next year, oil prices rose to a staggering $39.50 per barrel. Long lines reappeared at American gas stations, and fistfights erupted among frustrated motorists.




This graph illustrates the impact of both energy crises on American gas prices. As the supply of imported oil dropped in 1973–1974 and in 1979, the price of gasoline spiked upward. Automakers began locking automobile gas tanks to prevent theft during these fuel shortages.

**Americans Face a "Crisis of Confidence"** At the low approval rating of 25 percent, Carter planned to readdress the issue of conserving energy with the nation. However, after a week of discussion with various advisers, Carter altered the message of his speech. "I want to speak to you first tonight about a subject even more serious than energy or inflation," Carter told the nation in a televised address:

> I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy . . . It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of unity of purpose for our Nation . . .
>
> In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit

> communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We've learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.
>
> —Jimmy Carter, "Crisis of Confidence" speech, July 15, 1979

This address, which the media dubbed Carter's "malaise speech," describing "a feeling of general unease," backfired. The American people did not receive President Carter's address positively. "There's nothing wrong with the American people," newspaper editorials claimed. "Maybe the problem's in the White House, maybe we need new leadership to guide us."

# 2. President Carter's Approach to Foreign Policy

After Carter took office in 1976, it became clear that his approach to foreign policy differed from Richard Nixon's realpolitik. Whereas Nixon had prided himself on his realism, Carter emphasized idealism in foreign affairs and insisted that the government not separate foreign policy from "questions of justice, equity, and human rights." "Fairness, and not force," Carter urged, "should lie at the heart of our dealings with nations of the world."

**Promoting Justice, Equality, and Human Rights** Carter struggled to realize his foreign policy ideals. He was successful in resolving certain issues, like establishing a more equitable relationship with Panama. Panamanians had long regarded a 1903 treaty between the two countries, which gave the United States permanent control over the Panama Canal, as unjust. In 1977, Carter negotiated a treaty to return control of the canal to Panama in 1999. Despite strong objections, the Senate ratified the Panama Canal Treaty in 1978.

The degree of Carter's success in human rights policy was more varied. At the start of his presidency, Carter was determined to end the United States' Cold War tendency to support dictators who opposed communism even if they abused human rights. When leftist rebels in Nicaragua ousted the country's

anticommunist dictator in 1979, Carter adhered to his policy of non-intervention. However, he continued to support dictators with poor human rights policies in other parts of the world—including the Philippines and Indonesia—that Carter believed were vital to U.S. interests.


The Camp David Accords ended hostilities between Egypt and Israel. Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt over the course of four years. In exchange, Egypt formally recognized Israel as a country.

**A Step Toward Middle East Peace: The Camp David Accords** Carter's greatest foreign policy achievements were in the Middle East. In 1978, he invited the leaders of Egypt and Israel to commence peace talks at Camp David, a presidential retreat in Maryland. Egypt and Israel had been adversaries in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, during which Israel gained control of land that had previously belonged to its neighbors. Israel's occupied territories included Egypt's Sinai Peninsula.

At Camp David, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat conversed for 13 tense days. Finally, they reached an agreement called the **Camp David Accords**, which provided a framework for peace between the two countries. Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and Egypt agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Egypt became the first Arab

country to formally recognize Israel as a country, which Arab nations had opposed since Israel's establishment in 1948.

In 1979, Sadat and Begin jointly received the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to end hostilities between their countries. Presenting the award, the chairman of the Nobel Committee spoke of Carter's work, claiming the president was "the master builder responsible for the bridge" that brought "two one-time enemies" together to talk of peace.

President Jimmy Carter shakes hands with Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin after the Camp David Accords were signed on September 17, 1978. The Accords established diplomatic relations between Israel and Egypt. The agreement also marked a high point in Carter's Middle Eastern peace efforts.

**The Death of Détente Between the United States and USSR** As president, both Nixon and Ford pursued a policy of détente toward the USSR. Carter openly criticized the Soviet Union's human rights record, but cooperated with Soviet leaders to negotiate a second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT II). In a speech before the United Nations, Carter stated, "Peace will not be assured until the weapons of war are finally put away."

Détente efforts dissolved when Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan in 1979 to

assist the country's failing communist government in subduing a rebellion. Deeming this invasion the "most serious threat to world peace since World War II," Carter promoted a boycott of the Olympic Games, which was scheduled to be held in Moscow the following summer.

**A Hostage Crisis in Iran** The Nixon Doctrine fared little better than détente during Carter's presidency. As part of the Nixon Doctrine's policy, the United States increased military aid to Iran in the 1970s. In return, the United States expected Iran's royal ruler, Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, to help maintain stability in the Persian Gulf. Carter continued to support the Shah, despite his poor human rights record, until a revolution swept through Iran in January 1979. Under a religious leader, the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, the revolutionary army declared Iran a republic and forced the Shah into exile. Khomeini then established a new government based on strict adherence to Islamic principles.

Later that year, Carter allowed the exiled Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment, enraging many Iranians. On November 4, 1979, militant students stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran's capital. In violation of international law protecting diplomats, the students took 66 Americans hostage. They paraded the hostages through the streets of Tehran, where an angry crowd shouted, "Death to Carter!"

Carter struggled to bring the hostages home for over a year. Appeals to the United Nations and other U.S. allies for assistance in securing the hostages' release accomplished little, so Carter ordered a military rescue in April 1980. The mission failed when two helicopters had engine trouble, a third was damaged while landing, and a fourth crashed, killing eight Americans.

The Iran hostage crisis erupted when Iranian students seized Americans working in Tehran's U.S. embassy. As the crisis persisted, many Americans criticized Carter over his failure to bring the hostages home. They viewed Carter's inability to free the hostages as indicative of the United States losing power.

The hostage crisis angered Americans, some of whom directed their outrage at Iran. Texans displayed signs urging, "Don't buy Iranian oil." Other Americans blamed Carter's "fairness, not force" foreign policy strategy. "Wild as he is," stated former energy secretary James Schlesinger, "the Ayatollah Khomeini would not have touched the Soviet embassy." Fifty-two of the hostages were not released until Carter left office in January 1981, after enduring 444 days in captivity.

Many Americans participated in the first Earth Day in 1970 by cleaning up trash and holding marches. Senator Gaylord Nelson, who organized the event, later recalled that “Earth Day worked because of the spontaneous response at the grassroots level . . . That was the remarkable thing about Earth Day. It organized itself.” Earth Day is celebrated annually in the United States on April 22nd.

# 3. Protecting the Environment

On April 22, 1970, Americans celebrated the first annual **Earth Day**. Across the country, nearly 20 million people united to demonstrate their concern for the environment. Some held marches, while others organized cleanup projects. “The Establishment sees this as a great big antilitter campaign,” observed George Brown, a California congressman. But Earth Day proved to be far more influential—polls in 1970 showed that many Americans believed the environment was the nation’s most pressing domestic issue.

**An Environmental Movement Emerges** Earth Day’s success prompted the emergence of a grassroots environmental movement. Some groups, such as the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club, had existed for many years. The Sierra

Club was founded in 1892, under the leadership of John Muir and other conservationists, to enjoy and protect the mountains of the West. Over time, the club expanded its mission to include preserving wilderness and protecting the environment throughout the nation. In the 1970s, the Sierra Club's membership expanded from 100,000 to nearly 200,000 people.

In addition, new organizations were created to respond to environmental concerns. Some dealt with local problems, such as cleaning rivers and establishing recycling programs, while others focused on national and global issues. A group called Zero Population Growth (ZPG) formed in 1968 to raise awareness of rapid population growth's role in accelerating environmental destruction. With the slogan "Stop at Two," ZPG encouraged families to stay small.

**A Decade of Environmental Legislation** In response to increasing public concern, Congress enacted a number of environmental laws during the 1970s. Soon after the first Earth Day in 1970, Congress approved legislation to create the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which aimed to repair existing environmental damage and to prevent further destruction. The EPA grew quickly—by the end of the decade, it had become the government's largest regulatory agency, comprising over 10,000 employees.

Air pollution was a major environmental concern during the 1970s. In 1970, Congress amended the Clean Air Act of 1963, setting stricter emissions standards for automobiles, factories, and power plants. In 1977, lawmakers amended the act again, this time to strengthen air-quality standards.

Congress also addressed the issue of water pollution. In 1969, Americans were shocked when the polluted Cuyahoga River burst into flames in Cleveland, Ohio. The **Clean Water Act** of 1972 limited the amount of sewage and other pollutants flowing into waterways, while the **Safe Drinking Water Act** of 1974 enabled the EPA to regulate public drinking water quality.

The EPA also worked to eliminate another source of water pollution, called **acid rain**. Acid rain is precipitation that contains acid as a result of water vapor mixing with molecules of sulfur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen in the atmosphere. These pollutants are released into the atmosphere by automobiles, factories, and power plants that burn fossil fuels. Acid rain can harm plants and animals and is powerful enough to corrode buildings and other stone structures.

During the 1970s, the EPA set limits on car pollution levels. By 1975,

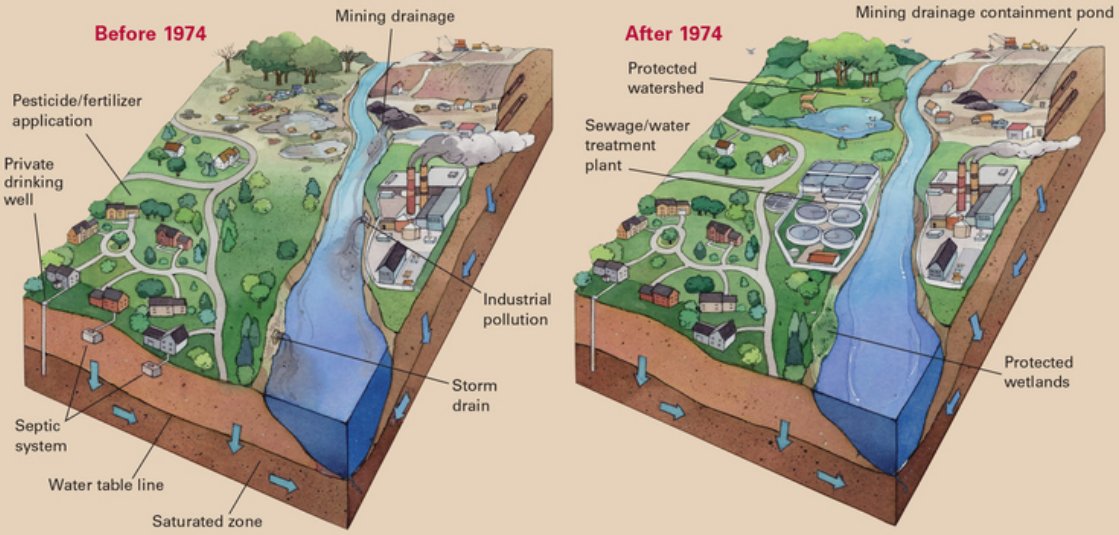
 

manufacturers were equipping cars with catalytic converters, devices that remove pollutants from cars' exhaust. In 1979, the EPA required that coal-fired power plants use smokestack scrubbers to remove exhaust pollutants. This technology was widely adopted in the 1980s.

**Environmental Disasters Fuel Public Concern** Two well-publicized environmental disasters in the 1970s underscored public concern about environmental hazards. The first of these incidents occurred in Love Canal, a neighborhood in Niagara, New York. Love Canal residents unknowingly lived atop a chemical waste dump, exposing them to poisons. As a result, residents developed unusually high rates of cancer and birth defects. When officials uncovered the root of the community's health problems in 1978, Love Canal became a media storm. The federal government eventually relocated 800 Love Canal families to safer areas, while Congress passed laws requiring companies to thoroughly clean their toxic waste sites.

The second disaster of the decade occurred at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station. On March 28, 1979, the nuclear power plant suffered a partial meltdown. Although the situation was eventually controlled, some radioactive gases escaped into the atmosphere. The **Three Mile Island accident** convinced many Americans that nuclear power plants posed an unacceptable risk to human beings and the natural environment. No new nuclear power plants have been built in the United States since 1979.

Clean drinking water is essential for human health. By the 1970s, however, the water supply in some areas had become so polluted by chemicals, sewage, or pesticides that it was unsafe to drink. The Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974 was designed to protect public health by setting national standards for safe drinking water. Since 1974, the law has been amended to protect drinking water at its sources, such as rivers, lakes, springs, and wells.



During the 1970s, more women launched careers in fields previously considered “men’s work.” By the end of the decade, it was no longer surprising to see women working at construction sites, delivering televised weather reports, or defending clients in the courtroom. However, most workplaces in the 1970s continued to segregate jobs by gender.

# 4. Women Continue Their Struggle for Equality

On September 20, 1973, professional tennis player Billie Jean King played an aging former Wimbledon champion named Bobby Riggs. Billed as “The Battle of

the Sexes," this tennis match was anything but ordinary. Riggs proudly admitted to being a **male chauvinist**, someone who believes men are superior to women. He boasted that he could defeat King, even at his age of 55, because she was a woman. In a match that 50 million people watched on television, King handily defeated Riggs. To many viewers, King's victory represented the current strides women were making in sports and in greater society.

**Women Challenge Gender Segregation in the Workplace** During the 1970s, record numbers of women entered professions traditionally dominated by men. The decade saw a 144 percent increase in the number of female accountants, as well as a doubling of female chemists. In 1972, only 4 percent of the nation's lawyers were women, a figure that rose to 13 percent by 1980. Additionally, at the end of the 1970s, one in five American medical students was female.

Although encouraging, these numbers distort the complexity of gender relations in the 1970s. During this decade, most women operated in a workplace segregated by gender: men did certain jobs, while women did others. In addition, jobs designated for women often paid less than their male counterparts. For example, nurses, most of whom were women, earned less than truck drivers, a profession of mostly men.

To address this inequality, feminists in the late 1970s launched a campaign for what they called **comparable worth**. Advocates of comparable worth argued that jobs typically held by women, like nursing, should receive comparable pay to jobs typically held by men that require comparable education and training. In this way, a highly trained nurse would earn more money than a less-skilled truck driver. These arguments convinced many employers to reevaluate their pay practices, some of whom agreed to increase pay for certain traditionally female jobs.

**Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections, 1964–1980**

| Year | Eligible Adults Who Voted (in millions) | |
|---|---|---|
| | Women | Men |
| 1964 | 39.2 | 37.5 |
| 1968 | 41.0 | 38.0 |
| 1972 | 44.9 | 40.9 |
| 1976 | 45.6 | 41.1 |
| 1980 | 49.3 | 43.8 |

Source: Center for the American Woman and Politics. *Sex Differences in Voter Turnout Fact Sheet.* July 1989.

In 1964, the gender gap in voter turnout was less than 2 percent. By 1980, the gap had widened to over 5 percent. By voting in greater numbers than men did, women increased their political influence with elected officials.

Feminists also addressed barriers preventing women from entering higher-paying jobs. One such obstacle was men's reluctance to promote women to management roles in most workplaces. Women described this barrier as a "glass ceiling," allowing them to rise only so far in a company, but no higher. Eventually, women began to shatter this glass ceiling, proving not only that they could handle management responsibility, but also that men could work under female bosses. Another obstacle was a shortage of affordable childcare. Without childcare, many women took part-time or less-demanding jobs, which usually paid less, in order to have greater flexibility to care for their children. Feminists lobbied for employers and government officials to establish and help fund childcare centers for working parents.

The lack of affordable childcare was part of a larger problem called the "feminization of poverty." Poverty rates for all Americans declined during the 1960s, but this decline was more significant for men than for women. In the 1970s, women were much more likely than men to be poor. Single mothers

supporting children were especially prone to poverty.

Shirley Chisholm, pictured here, founded NWPC with Bella Azbug, Betty Friedan, and Gloria Steinem. In 1972, Representative Shirley Chisholm made a historic bid for the Democratic presidential nomination. Announcing her candidacy, Chisholm stated, “I am not the candidate of black America, although I am black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women’s movement of this country, although I am a woman, and I am equally proud of that . . . I am the candidate of the people.”

Feminists addressed this problem in a number of ways.  For one, they worked to achieve fair compensation for divorced women and their children. Feminists persuaded government officials to ensure that divorced mothers received the

child-support payments they had been awarded in their divorce settlements. Feminists also sought stricter penalties for divorced fathers who did not meet financial obligations to their families.

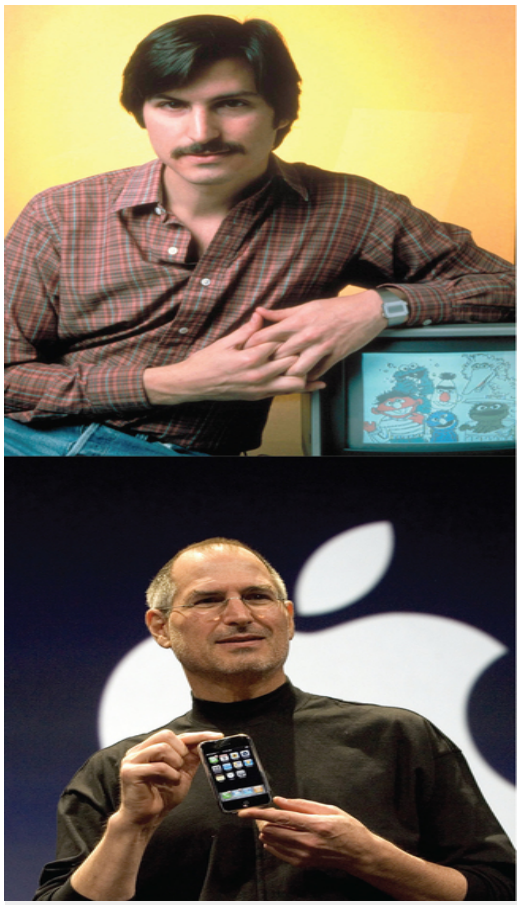
**Women Increase Their Political Clout** To engender such reform, many women entered politics. During the 1970s, a growing number of women voted, ran for public office, and worked for reform in public policy. The **National Women's Political Caucus** (NWPC), formed in 1971 by feminist leaders, encouraged women's activism and raised money to help women get elected to office. The NWPC also funded male candidates with progressive stances on women's issues.

With their increased political participation, women quickly became more influential in their political parties. In 1968, only 13 percent of the Democratic National Convention delegates were women. Boosted by the efforts of the NWPC, women accounted for 40 percent of the convention's delegates in 1972. Women Republican Party members also increased their representation at national conventions, growing from 17 percent of delegates in 1968 to 30 percent in 1972.

Women also accumulated influence with elected officials by voting more than men. Because of this, election candidates could no longer risk failing to address women's concerns. In addition, Congress voted in 1972 to prohibit discrimination against women in the armed services at the national level. Under pressure from women voters, state legislatures reformed laws that had made it nearly impossible to prosecute cases of sexual assault against women. Women also worked with local governments and school boards to ensure that their daughters were granted the same opportunities as their sons.

# 5. Technology Reshapes How People Work and Play

In May 1977, the first installment of the Star Wars epic was released in movie theaters. With its dazzling computer-generated special effects and fast-paced action, the film became a blockbuster hit. Star Wars was so popular with moviegoers of all ages, in fact, that it revived the science-fiction film genre. In addition, the movie showcased innovations in computer technology—by the 1970s, technological innovations were transforming everything from movies to medicine.



Steve Jobs cofounded Apple Computer in 1976. Two years later, Apple Computer released the Apple II—an affordable personal computer that revolutionized how people used computers at home and at work. Over the next 35 years, Jobs continued to advance personal computing devices until his death in 2011.

**The Microprocessor Shrinks Computing Devices** Computing machines began to influence how Americans worked as early as the 1950s. However, the first computers were large and complicated to use. During the 1970s, new technologies replaced bulky vacuum tubes and transistors with tiny silicon chips, inspiring a computing revolution. For the first time, ordinary Americans could easily purchase and use a personal computer, or PC.

Microprocessors, which were introduced in 1971, facilitated the invention of the PC. In essence, a processor is a computer's brain—it performs the basic operations that enable a computer to do work. A microprocessor integrates all of the elements of a processor on a piece of silicon, called a chip. As smaller silicon chips were invented, computers and other computing devices began to shrink in size.

The microprocessor inspired an array of new inventions , one of which was the pocket-sized calculator. The first of these, called the Bowmar Brain, hit the U.S. market in 1971. Unlike bulky adding machines, this mini number-cruncher was only a little more than 5 inches high and 3 inches wide. With a $245 price tag, the Bowmar Brain was initially a luxury item. But as the supply of pocket calculators grew to meet people's increasing demand, prices dropped significantly.

Another popular new product based on microprocessor technology was the video game. The first successful video game was a ball-and-paddle game called Pong, which appeared in game arcades in 1972. In 1975, Pong's manufacturer, Atari, released a home version of the game in the form of a video game console that connected to a television. To company executives' surprise, Atari sold 150,000 units that year. During the 1975 holiday season, people waited in lines for hours to purchase a "pong on chip"-powered home video game.

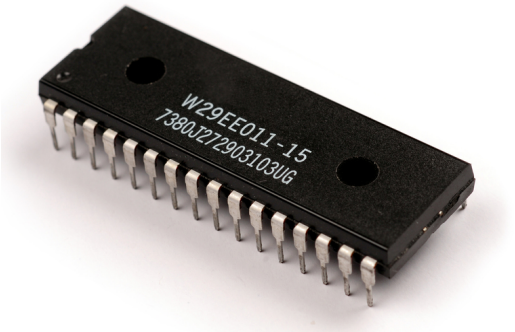
In 1977, a California-based company called Apple Computer released a computer that was small and cheap enough to use at home. By modern standards, the Apple II was slow and had miniscule memory. Yet the Apple II launched the personal computer revolution, selling at a price that middle-class families could afford. Families, businesses, and schools purchased more than 2 million Apple IIs between 1977 and 1993, the end of the computer's production.

**Medical Advances** In the 1970s, numerous medical advances improved health care. Inspired by the success of the polio vaccine, researchers developed vaccines for other childhood diseases. By 1971, scientists had developed a combination vaccine to prevent measles, mumps, and rubella, or German measles.

The microprocessor was incorporated into an imaging device that enabled doctors to see inside the body. This computed tomography (CT) scanner, which was introduced in 1974, uses X-ray and computer technology to construct detailed three-dimensional images of a patient's internal organs. Doctors use CT scanners to spot tumors, bone breaks, and other anomalies that less-advanced

technologies cannot detect.

Other medical advances provided options for women who had difficulty getting pregnant. In 1978, the first “test-tube baby” was born in England. In these cases, a woman’s egg is fertilized outside of her body in a process called “in vitro,” meaning “in glass,” because it occurs in a glass test tube or dish. Then, a doctor implants the fertilized egg in the woman’s womb, and pregnancy proceeds as normal. The first American test-tube baby was born in 1981. Although the practice remains controversial, more than 40,000 babies are born in the United States each year through in vitro fertilization.




Invented in 1971, the microprocessor contributed to the development of pocket calculators, personal computers, and CT scanners. This tiny chip enabled the shrinking of these devices, leading to a personal technologies revolution in the 1970s. The first home video games and computers were invented with the help of microprocessors.

**Microwaves and Movies at Home** The invention of two electronic devices shaped Americans’ home lives in the 1970s. The first of these was the microwave oven. Although microwave technology had existed since the 1940s, Raytheon did not produce a microwave oven for home use until the late 1960s. Microwave ovens bombard food with radio waves, and as the waves pass through the food, they set molecules of water, fat, sugar, and other elements into rapid motion. This motion causes friction, which creates heat. Foods that take an hour to cook in a

conventional oven heat in minutes in a microwave, a feature that appealed to the growing number of working women.

The second electronic device to transform American home life was the videocassette recorder, or VCR, which enabled people to record TV programs on videotape and replay them later. VCR users could also play prerecorded tapes of movies and videotapes they had made using video cameras, or camcorders. VCRs reshaped American entertainment in the 1970s. Previously, people watched movies at theaters or at home on television broadcasts, but with the VCR, movie fans could rent or buy videotapes of movies to watch at any time. In addition, television show viewers no longer had to organize their schedule around broadcast times.

Some people criticized the decision of an American businessman to purchase the London Bridge and relocate it to the Arizona desert in 1971. Reconstructed in Lake Havasu City, the bridge is the state's third most visited attraction. Retirees in the 1970s were drawn to Sunbelt states like Arizona, in pursuit of an active lifestyle in a warm climate.

# 6. The Baby Bust and Retirement Boom

In 1971, a new landmark appeared in the Arizona desert. It was the London Bridge, the old English bridge that was always falling down in nursery rhymes. Built in 1831, the London Bridge had become a victim of its own great weight. London officials announced in 1962 that the bridge was sinking into the Thames River, and would have to be torn down. Instead, an American businessman named Robert McCulloch purchased the bridge and had it transported, stone by stone, to Arizona. Workers reassembled the bridge in tiny Lake Havasu City, a resort community that McCulloch was developing in the Arizona desert.

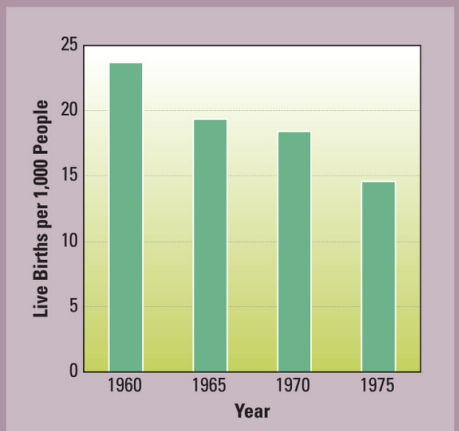
As McCulloch had hoped, the relocated London Bridge attracted people to his real estate development. Many of Lake Havasu City's visitors were older people who chose to retire in the community. In this way, Lake Havasu City became one of numerous Sunbelt cities populated by the aging U.S. population of the 1970s.

**A Baby Bust Begins the Aging of America** During the post-World War II baby boom, the average age of the U.S. population decreased. This trend reversed in the 1970s—as the U.S. population aged, the average age of Americans increased.

This shift was partly caused by declining birthrates. At the peak of the baby boom in 1957, the average American family had three to four children. Between 1975 and 1980, that figure lowered to one to two children. Newspapers called this sharp decline in the birth rate the "baby bust," or **birth dearth**.

Many factors contributed to this dearth, or lack, of births, one of which was the growing number of women in the workforce. In 1950, one-third of adult American women worked outside the home. By 1978, half of adult American women were in the labor force. Those who entered full-time professions, such as law, medicine, or teaching, often postponed having children to pursue their careers. If and when they did begin families, most of these women had fewer children than previous generations.

**U.S. Birthrate, 1960–1975**




Source: *Vital Statistics of the United States* 2000, Volume 1.

After a long baby boom, birthrates began to decline in the mid-1960s. This shift represented a change in the longer-term trend of having big families. In the 1970s, American families had fewer children than in previous generations.

Another key factor in America's aging was increasing life expectancy. A person born in 1900 expected to live an average of 49 years, but a person born in 1980 had a life expectancy of almost 74 years. With this increase, there were more older people in the U.S. population than ever before.

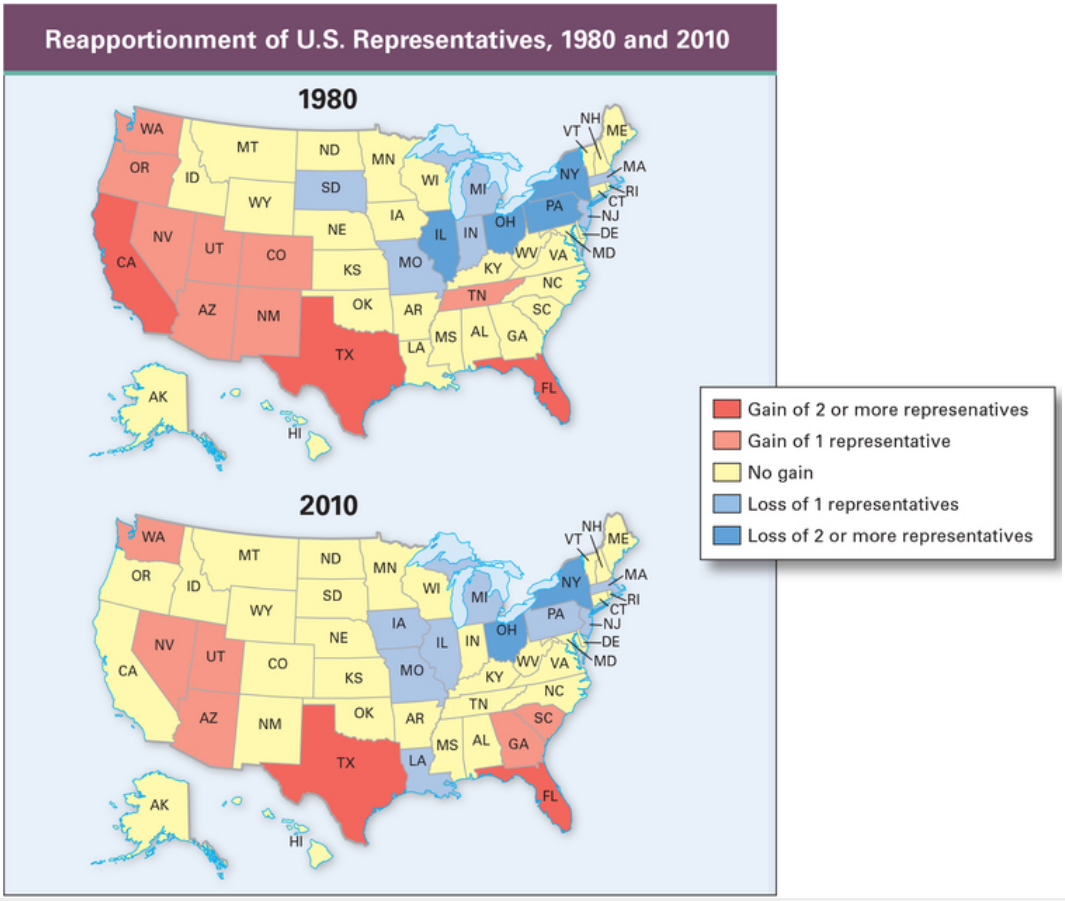
**With Longer Lives, Americans Redefine Retirement** Longer life expectancies meant Americans who retired in the 1970s had more retirement years than earlier generations had. In addition, the post-World War II economic boom provided many Americans sufficient money for their retirement. Many retirees owned their own homes, and most had pensions from years of working for one employer. Retirees also benefited from the expansion of Social Security and Medicare benefits in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1950, approximately 33 percent of older Americans lived in poverty, but by 1978, only 14 percent were poor.

With these changes, older Americans began to redefine retirement as a period of fun, travel, and relocation. A growing number of older Americans, especially those

living in northern states, sold their homes and moved to the Sunbelt. Other retirees, called “snowbirds,” traveled seasonally, moving from place to place. Resort communities like Lake Havasu City attracted mobile retirees who visited to boat and golf during the winter months.

**Population and Power Shift from the Rustbelt to the Sunbelt** The migration of Americans from northern to southern states catalyzed shifts in economic and political power. Fast-growing Sunbelt states saw their economies grow with the influx of residents and new businesses. In contrast, the Northeast and the Midwest suffered economically. Portions of these regions became known as the **Rustbelt**, named for the rusting factories that declining industries abandoned. Even well-established Rustbelt industries, such as steel milling and automobile assembly, struggled to survive the stagflation of the 1970s. Many laid-off workers migrated to the Sunbelt in search of work.

The political clout of Sunbelt states increased along with their populations. After each census, seats in the House of Representatives are reapportioned to reflect population changes. States with expanded populations gain seats in the House and, therefore, votes in the Electoral College. Since the 1970s, Sunbelt states have gained more than 35 electoral votes at the expense of Rustbelt states. From 1964 to 2004, every successful presidential candidate hailed from a Sunbelt state.




Warm weather and economic opportunities drew millions of Americans to the Sunbelt during and following World War II. As a result, this region benefited from the reapportionment of seats in the House of Representatives, which occurs shortly after each census. Meanwhile, states in the Rustbelt lost economic and political power.

One way Americans in the 1970s fostered selfimprovement was through fitness. Jogging became a popular fad. For joggers, running was not only a physical exercise but also strongly connected to spiritual improvement.

# 7. Looking for Meaning and Fun in Daily Life

Some Americans looked inward in the 1970s, exploring their identity and beliefs. Others found joy in the decade's various fads and fashions.

**The Third Great Awakening: Self-Improvement and Spirituality** When Tom Wolfe wrote of the Third Great Awakening in the 1970s, he contemplated two broad movements. He named the first of these the "therapeutic movement," which focused on self-improvement through some form of therapy, or treatment. A variety of self-improvement activities emerged during the decade. Their common goal, observed Wolfe, was to change "one's personality— remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one's very self."

The second broad movement was more spiritual in nature. The 1970s witnessed an explosion of new religious groups, some of which were based on Eastern religious traditions, mainly Buddhism and Hinduism. Buddhist meditation and the Hindu practice of yoga both gained a large following. One group, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, originated in India. Members of this group regularly chant a mantra, or set of sacred words, to bring about a higher spiritual awareness. The mantra begins with the phrase “Hare Krishna,” or “Oh, Lord Krishna,” so this group is commonly known as the Hare Krishnas.

Other new religious groups drew from outside influences. One of the most successful of these groups was the Unification Church, which was founded by a Korean religious leader named Sun Myung Moon. In 1972, Moon moved to the United States and expanded his faith movement. Called Moonies by people outside the church, his followers rapidly grew in number. In 1982, Moon made headlines by presiding over a mass marriage of 2,075 couples in New York’s Madison Square Garden. Moon had selected many of the couples to marry.

**Exploring Identity, Ethnicity, and Diversity** For some, turning inward meant exploring one’s cultural identity. This was especially true for descendants of immigrants from Italy, Poland, and elsewhere in southern and eastern Europe. When they arrived in the United States, these immigrants were expected to assimilate, or “melt,” into a society dominated by **WASP**s, or white Anglo- Saxon Protestants. As novelist James T. Farrell observed in 1972, “The melting pot was essentially an Anglo-Saxon effort to rub out the past of others.”

In his 1973 book *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, Michael Novak emphasized many ethnic groups’ stubborn survival. He invited readers to explore their ethnic identities by asking questions like, “Who, after all, are you? What history brought you to where you are? Why are you different from others?” In answering these questions, many Americans reclaimed their ethnic background as a heritage to be proud of, not a past to leave behind. This renewed interest in **ethnicity**, or ethnic identity, soon influenced politics. In 1974, President Ford established the Office of Ethnic Affairs.

The growing awareness of ethnic diversity also affected popular culture. Movies like *The Godfather* and *Saturday Night Fever* portrayed ethnic groups whose values and traditions often differed from the audiences’ identities. The creators of the television show Sesame Street, which debuted in 1969, carefully constructed the program to reflect the nation’s diversity. Sesame Street took place on a fictional street where people of different backgrounds lived and worked. The

puppets on the show interacted with an African American couple, a Latina woman, and people with disabilities.

**Fun, Fads, and Funky Fashions** The 1970s also had a fun, less serious side. Disco, a genre of dance music loved by some and loathed by others, drew young people to dance clubs called discotheques, where disc jockeys kept records spinning and dancers dancing long into the night. As one disco fan recalled, “With its driving beats, [disco] almost had a hypnotic feel that makes you wanna dance . . . It’s really hard to sit still when you hear a good disco tune.”

The decade had various silly fads, such as the pet rock craze. Pet rocks are rocks individually packed in boxes resembling pet-carrying cases. Another fad called streaking involved running naked through public places—one streaker ran across the stage during the 1974 Academy Awards ceremony.

The 1970s also saw a flowering of funky fashions, including platform shoes, polyester leisure suits, and hot pants. The bell-bottom pants crowd shifted from hippies to housewives. Also popular were mood rings, which supposedly changed color to match the wearer’s mood. A black ring signaled stress, while blue meant the wearer was relaxed or in a romantic state of mind.

This photograph shows cast members from Sesame Street at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City in 2017. Big Bird, a 7-feet-tall canary, is one of the show's many famous characters.

# Summary

**During the 1970s, the U.S. economy suffered from stagflation as the nation faced a number of crises. The decade was also a time of changing views about everything from the environment and ethnicity to retirement and gender equality.**

**Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries** A major cause of inflation was OPEC's decision to raise the price of oil, which led to increased prices for many goods.

**National Energy Act** In 1978, Congress worked to reduce U.S. dependence on imported oil. The National Energy Act offered incentives for conserving energy and using alternative energy sources.

**Camp David Accords** In 1978, Jimmy Carter brokered a peace agreement

between Israel and Egypt. The Camp David Accords ended the long-standing war between these two countries.

**Earth Day** The first Earth Day celebration in 1970 signaled the emergence of a new environmental movement. Followers worked to clean up and protect the environment both locally and globally. Congress passed antipollution laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

**Three Mile Island accident** An accident at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in 1978 highlighted the potential dangers of nuclear energy.

**Searching for meaning** During the 1970s, many Americans turned inward to search for meaning. Some explored self-help movements, new religions, or their ethnic identities.

**Population changes** Fewer births and longer life expectancies led to an aging of the U.S. population. The population also shifted south, as people migrated from the Rustbelt to the Sunbelt.

**Gender equality** Women worked to achieve greater equality in the workplace and politics. A growing number of women entered professions that had once been dominated by men.

# A Shift to the Right Under Reagan

How did the Reagan Revolution impact the nation?

## Introduction

Press Secretary James Brady and police officer Thomas Delahanty lie wounded on the sidewalk after the attempt on Reagan's life. President Reagan and Officer Delahanty made full recoveries, but the shooting left Brady permanently paralyzed. Would-be assassin John Hinckley Jr. was committed to a mental institution after being declared not guilty by reason of insanity.

Ronald Reagan took office on January 20, 1981, at almost 70 years old. Two months after Reagan's inauguration, his presidency—and his life—nearly came to an abrupt end when a lone gunman attempted to assassinate the president as he left a Washington, D.C., hotel. The would-be killer was 25-year-old John Hinckley Jr.

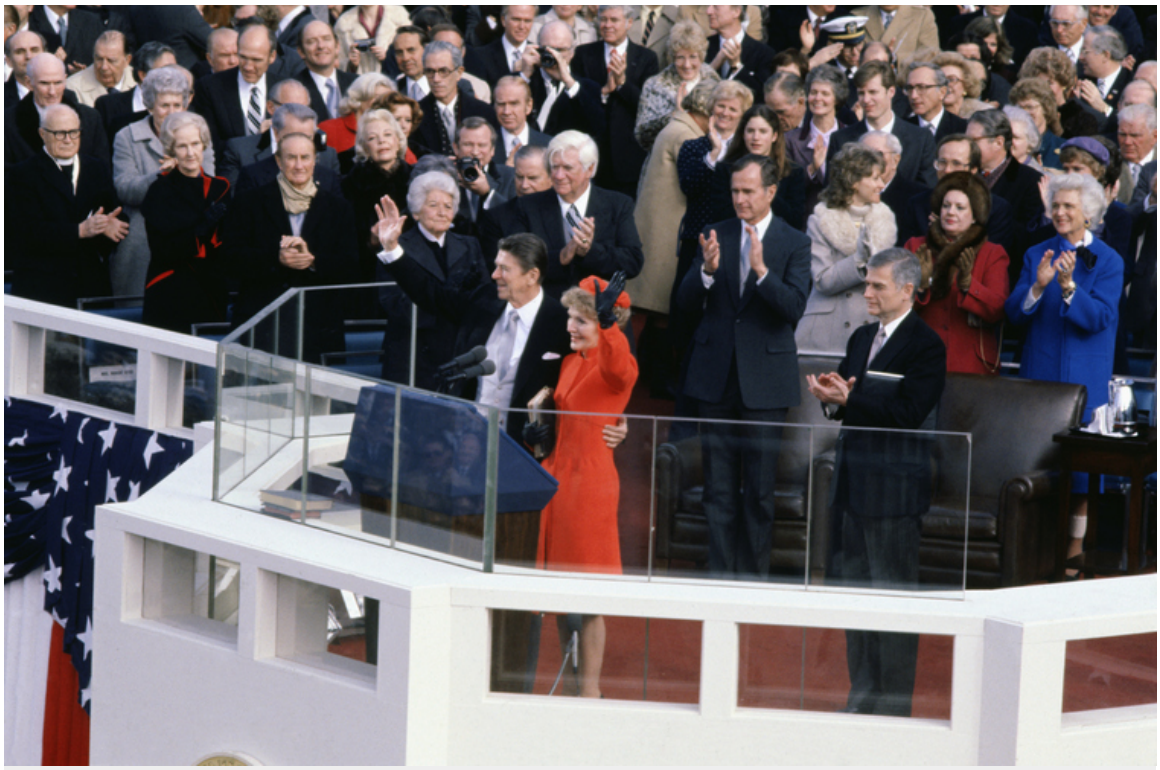
Timothy McCarthy, one of President Reagan's Secret Service agents,

had assumed the day would be routine. Everything occurred as planned until Reagan left the hotel and walked toward the presidential motorcade. “Just before the president got to the car,” McCarthy recalled, “Hinckley pushed himself forward and fired six rounds in about one and a half seconds.” McCarthy threw himself in front of Reagan, taking one of the bullets. Another bullet hit Reagan in the chest.

A police officer and Reagan’s press secretary, James Brady, were also caught in the gunfire. While Reagan and the other injured men were immediately transported to the hospital, police arrested Hinckley, who confessed that he shot the president to attract the attention of a famous movie actress. Hinckley was declared not guilty by reason of insanity at his trial. Originally committed to a mental institution for life in 1982, he was later granted conditional release in 2016.

After the shooting, Reagan joked with hospital doctors before undergoing surgery. As they wheeled him into the operating room, he looked around, smiled, and said, “I hope you are all Republicans.”

When Reagan was elected president, some people wondered whether he possessed the energy and stamina for such a demanding job. However, he survived the shooting and led the country for two terms as president. His conservative agenda, which called for lowering taxes, reducing government regulation of business, and cutting funding for social programs, ushered in an era of political and economic change known as the **Reagan Revolution**.



President Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan wave to crowds after the president’s inauguration in 1981.


A former actor and Republican governor of California, Ronald Reagan made an appealing presidential candidate. His friendly manner and positive, “can-do” attitude won the support of voters across the country, including some moderate Democrats. Reagan’s natural public speaking ability earned him the nickname “the Great Communicator.”

# 1. The Triumph of the Conservative Coalition

Two years after the assassination attempt, Ronald Reagan addressed a gathering of conservative Christian organizations. They were part of a broad coalition of diverse groups of Americans with traditional social values. In his speech, Reagan referenced many of the points that had helped him win conservatives’ support, including religion’s important role in the founding of the nation. “Freedom prospers when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged,” he said.

**Evangelical Christians Gain a Political Voice** Reagan's audience comprised evangelical Christians, or evangelicals. Evangelicals are Christians who emphasize the authority of the Bible, believe strongly in spreading their faith, and seek a direct, personal experience with God. Many describe their conversion to evangelical faith as being "born again." By the late 1970s, evangelicals had become a significant force in both religion and politics.

Many evangelicals, particularly conservative fundamentalists, were upset by the perceived decline of moral and religious values in American society. They were distressed by rising divorce rates, drug use, gay rights, and feminism, as well as Supreme Court decisions that legalized abortion and banned prayer in public schools. They feared that the nation was spurning religion, thereby becoming a "godless culture."

In 1979, evangelical leaders united to form the **Moral Majority**, a political lobbying group led by Reverend Jerry Falwell. Falwell wanted to train Christian activists to make their voices "heard in the halls of Congress," and also called on Christians to elect public officials who were "pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-America." The Moral Majority was succeeded by an even larger group, called the Christian Coalition, led by Reverend Pat Robertson.

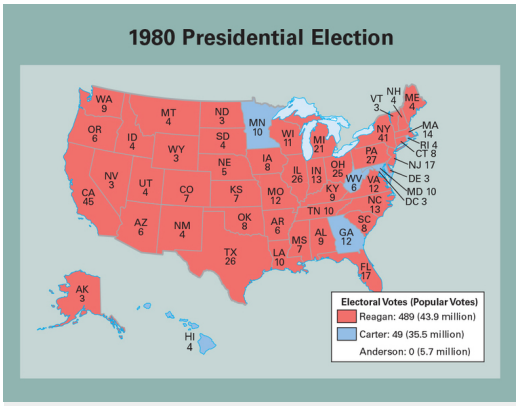
These groups formed part of a political movement known as the **New Right**, which comprised various special-interest groups and activists who supported conservative causes. New Right groups lobbied Congress, raised money for political campaigns, and supported the growth of conservative "think tanks" like the Heritage Foundation, where scholars wrote policy papers and opinion pieces for publication. The New Right influenced public debate on many issues and helped catalyze the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s.

**Reagan Wins the 1980 Election** As the 1980 election drew near, conditions at home and abroad prompted many Americans to seek a change in leadership. The nation faced high inflation and unemployment, in addition to soaring energy prices. Meanwhile, the Iran hostage crisis continued overseas, and the United States seemed to be losing ground to the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

For many voters, Ronald Reagan offered an appealing alternative to President Jimmy Carter. Before he launched his political career, Reagan was a film actor and the host of a popular TV show. He served two terms as governor of California before running for president. On the campaign trail, he demonstrated a talent for public speaking, a skill

that earned him the nickname “the Great Communicator.” He was adept at conveying messages and wielding humor to attack political opponents. One of Reagan’s most memorable jabs targeted Carter’s handling of the economy. “A recession is when your neighbor loses his job,” Reagan said. “A depression is when you lose yours. And recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his.”

During a televised debate with President Carter in October 1980, Reagan delivered the most famous line of his campaign, asking viewers, “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” For millions of Americans, the answer was no. Reagan promised to pull the nation out of its slump and restore its international standing. His optimism appealed to many Americans, restoring their confidence in the nation’s future.



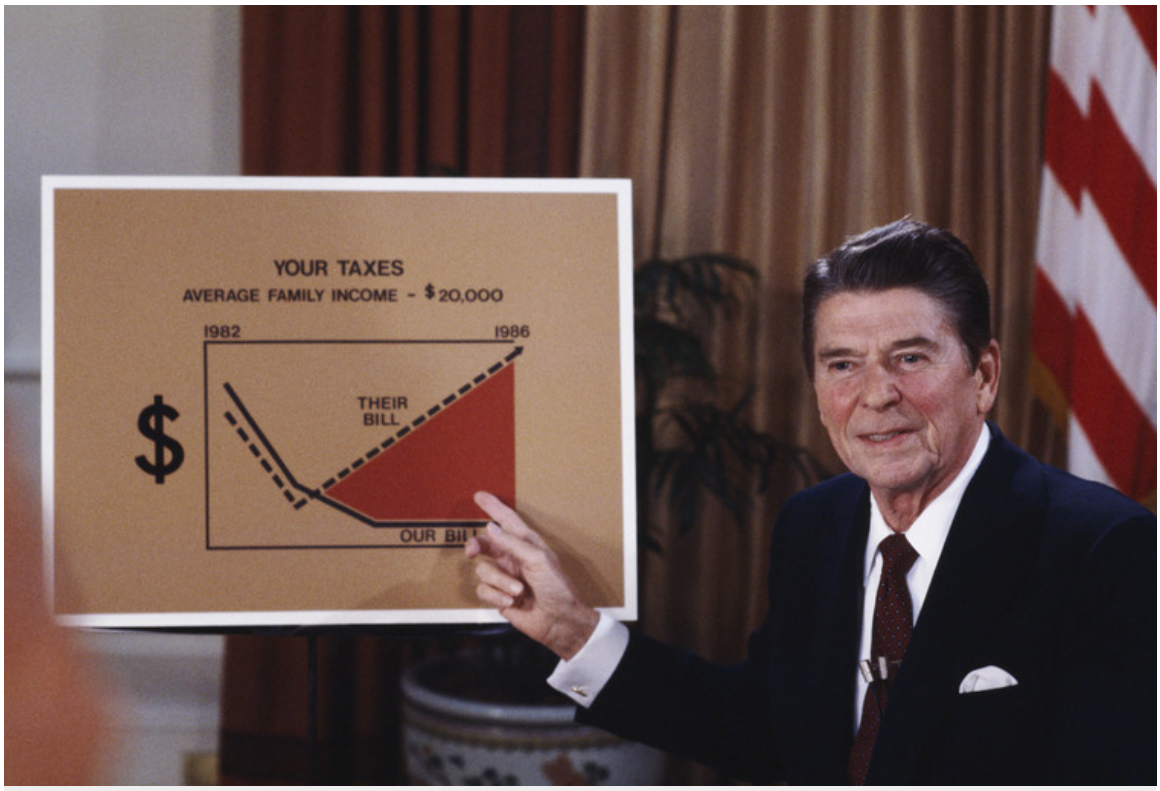

Reagan carried nearly every state in the 1980 election, winning the Electoral College vote by a landslide. He also secured the popular vote by a wide margin. This overwhelming victory bolstered the new president with a strong mandate to enact his policies.

On election day, Reagan defeated Carter by more than 8 million votes. He owed part of his success to the Republican Party’s effective use of databases to identify potential supporters and encourage them to vote. Reagan won the support of the religious right, most Republicans, many business leaders, and many moderate Democrats. Republicans secured control of the Senate for the first time since 1955, and while Democrats

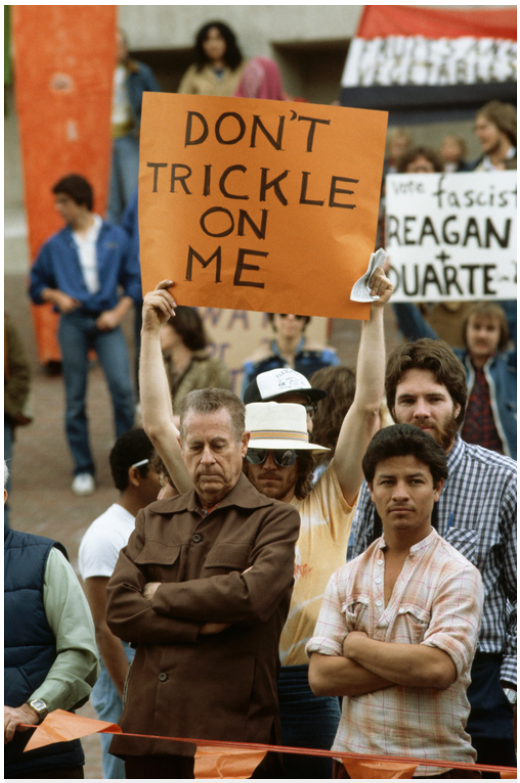
managed to retain their House of Representatives majority, Republicans made significant gains in the House as well.

**Reagan in the White House** In his inaugural speech, Reagan introduced many of the ideals that he would work toward as president. Recognizing that many Americans had become disillusioned with government in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal, he called on his audience to have faith in themselves and in their ability to solve the country's problems. "After all," he said, "why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans." Mere minutes after Reagan was sworn in, Iran released the American hostages as a result of previous negotiations. Across the country, Americans celebrated the hostages' release, giving Reagan's first term an auspicious start.

As president, Reagan used televised and public speeches to amass support for his programs, sometimes referencing scenes from old movies to explain his ideas in a more understandable way. Charming and friendly, he was often liked even by those who disagreed with his policies. Reagan's advisers soon learned, however, that the president rarely involved himself with policy details or the daily tasks of governing. Instead, he provided a general overview of what he wanted done and relied on his advisers and staff to carry out his wishes.




Reagan was a talented orator, and he effectively used public and televised speeches to garner support for his policies. Reagan's charm endeared him to many Americans, even those who did not support his politics. Here, Reagan explains his tax reduction policies in a televised speech that was broadcasted from the Oval Office in 1981.




Tax cut supporters claimed that lower taxes would promote economic growth and create more jobs. In contrast, critics argued that lowering taxes helped only rich Americans, while poor and middle-class Americans had to wait for the benefits to "trickle down" from above. Some critics referred to the theory of supply-side economics, which supports lowering taxes to increase economic revenue, as "voodoo economics."

# 2. Reagan's Economic Policies

Ronald Reagan came into office promising to change government, since he had won the support of voters who resented the federal government for overtaxing and wasting tax funds. Pledging to get the government "off their backs," Reagan aimed to reduce the federal government's power. "Government is not the solution to our problem," he said. "Government is the problem."

**The Evolution of the New Federalism** As part of his assault on "big government," Reagan expanded Richard Nixon's New Federalism policy. Like Nixon, Reagan wanted to shift power from the federal government to the states. However, while Nixon had used revenue sharing to distribute federal tax dollars to the states, Reagan delegated responsibility for many health, education, and welfare programs to the states.

Reagan helped states fund these social programs by issuing block grants from the federal treasury, or lump-sum payments that states could use freely. This system gave the states more flexibility, allowing them to design programs and allocate resources to suit their needs. Because these block grants often provided less funding than the federal programs they replaced, some liberal critics charged that the block grant system was being used to reduce federal spending on social programs.

**Supply-Side Economics Leads to Tax Cuts** When Reagan became president, the economy was burdened by inflation. According to the law of supply and demand, inflation occurs when demand exceeds supply. It often occurs in times of low unemployment, when more workers are purchasing goods and services, thereby raising prices. As president, Reagan faced both inflation and high unemployment, partly the result of soaring oil prices. To address these issues, he promised to stimulate the economy by cutting taxes and promoting private enterprise, an economic plan that was soon named Reaganomics.

Much of Reagan's plan was based on a theory called **supply-side economics**, which states that economic growth depends on increasing the supply of goods and services. The way to increase supply is to cut taxes. Lower tax rates will leave more money in the hands of individuals and businesses, providing an incentive for them to save and invest. Individuals will work harder, save more, and spend more. In turn, companies can hire more workers and increase the supply of goods and services. As businesses create more jobs, new workers will pay taxes, which will replace at least some of the revenue lost through lower tax rates.

Critics called this theory “voodoo economics,” claiming it was unrealistic to believe that lowering tax rates would increase revenue. But Reagan and his advisers believed it was the optimal path to stimulate economic growth. In August 1981, Reagan signed a bill to cut federal taxes by 25 percent over a three-year period. The economy continued to lag for another two years, producing even greater rates of unemployment. Yet inflation gradually began to improve, and by the end of 1983, the economy was making a strong comeback. The following year, the gross national product grew by 7.1 percent, and the stock market rose as well.

President Reagan campaigned for reelection in 1984, easily defeating Democratic challenger Walter Mondale. The president’s election campaign emphasized renewed American optimism and pride. Reagan’s popularity was boosted by the flourishing U.S. economy. At the 1984 Republican Convention, above, Reagan and running mate George H. W. Bush wave to cheering crowds.

The economic recovery created 18.4 million new jobs. Economists still debate the impact of tax cuts on the resurgence, but many agree that increased defense spending was an important factor. Military spending pumped billions of dollars into the economy.

The economic recovery did not benefit all Americans equally. Although personal incomes grew in every economic stratum during the 1980s, the income gap between rich and poor widened considerably. Because incomes of the wealthy increased significantly more than those of lower economic classes, liberals argued that Reaganomics helped the rich and hurt the poor. One economist noted that tax cuts redistributed "income, wealth and power—from government to private enterprise, . . . from poor to rich." A Reagan official claimed that the tax cuts were intended to produce wealth at the upper classes, which would eventually "trickle down" to all Americans.

The economic boom boosted Reagan's popularity during the 1984 election. He centered his campaign around the theme "It's Morning Again in America," suggesting a new era of pride and prosperity. A Reagan adviser remarked on the uphill battle faced by the Democratic challenger, Walter Mondale, saying, "It's like running against America." Reagan won by a landslide.

**Reagan Calls for Deregulation** Another key element of Reagan's economic plan was **deregulation**, or the reduction or removal of government controls on business in order to promote economic efficiency and stimulate free enterprise. Reagan believed deregulation was a viable way to limit the power of government. Like many conservatives, he believed that deregulation would foster businesses' efficiency and competitiveness, which would generate profits transferrable to consumers. Under President Carter in the 1970s, Congress eased restrictions on the airline, railroad, and trucking industries that determined what they could transport, where, and at what price. Reagan believed further deregulation would increase business activity in other industries, thereby boosting the economy.

Some deregulation efforts focused on eliminating laws designed to curb pollution and ensure safety in the workplace because many companies believed such regulations were a costly obstacle. A Reagan deregulation task force delayed and obstructed regulation of companies handling hazardous waste, as well as rules against exposing workers to toxic chemicals. Per Reagan's guidelines, the Environmental Protection Agency began to lower federal standards on air and water quality.

Reagan chose officials who supported deregulation to lead government agencies. For example, Secretary of the Interior James Watt removed many environmental regulations, arguing that these laws prevented industry from creating jobs and expanding the economy. He portioned more national forest land for logging operations and gave oil and gas

companies offshore drilling rights. He also approved cheap public land sales to oil and mining companies.

Many public-interest groups challenged these efforts to revise environmental laws and workplace safety rules, arguing that the proposed changes endangered workers and the general public. In some cases, court decisions and Congressional action delayed efforts by Reagan officials to eliminate environmental regulations.

**Deficits and Debt Grow Under Reagan** Despite Reagan's efforts to minimize government spending, **federal budget deficits** soared during his two terms in office. A budget deficit occurs when government spending exceeds government revenues in a given year. U.S. budget deficits remained below $75 billion before Reagan, but from 1982 to the end of his second term, annual deficits exceeded $100 billion. In 1986, the annual deficit reached a record $221 billion.

These expanding deficits were due in part to Reagan's tax cuts, which considerably decreased government revenue. Another contributing factor was increased military spending—the Department of Defense's annual budget increased nearly 85 percent in Reagan's first term. Budget deficits also grew with the rising costs of Social Security and Medicare.

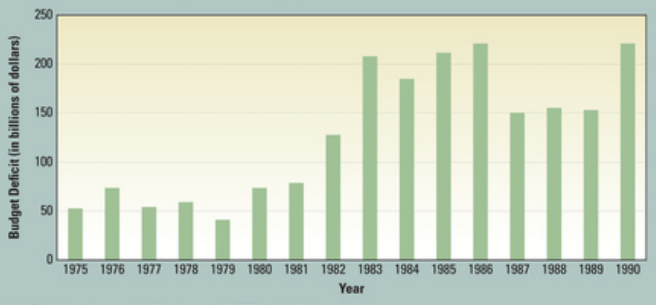
Federal budget deficits caused the **national debt**, or the sum of all loans taken out by the government to finance its annual deficits, to skyrocket. During the Reagan years, the national debt nearly tripled, rising from $908 billion in 1980 to $2.6 trillion in 1988. This sum was far greater than the debt accumulated by all former U.S. presidents combined. The government was forced to borrow hundreds of billions of dollars each year just to pay the debt's interest.

Conservatives and liberals held conflicting views on the deficits and national debt. Although both favored a balanced budget, each said a national debt could be justified for the right reasons. Conservatives believed that low taxes and strong defense were good debt justifications, while Liberals argued that debt was acceptable if it resulted from investing in transportation, education, health care, and other social and economic programs. Analysts called this the "guns or butter" debate, in which conservatives favored "guns," and liberals favored "butter."

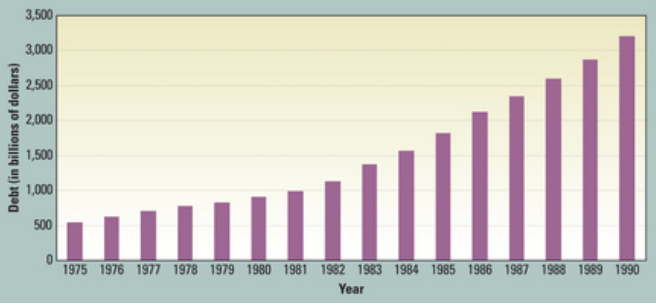
# A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT...

Under Reagan, federal budget deficits skyrocketed. These annual deficits, in turn, caused the national debt to swell. In less than a decade, the United States went from being the world's largest creditor, or lending, nation to one of the world's biggest debtor nations. Democrats had often been called "tax-and-spend liberals." Now liberals called Republicans "borrow-and-spend conservatives."

**U.S. Federal Budget Deficit, 1975–1990**




**U.S. National Debt, 1975–1990**



Panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, which honors people who have died from AIDS, were displayed in New York City in 1988. The quilt included about 2,000 panels at its first exhibit, in Washington, D.C., the year previous. Since then, thousands of panels have been added to the quilt as part of a touring exhibit. These tours have helped raise millions of dollars for AIDS organizations.

# 3. Reagan's Social Policies

Ronald Reagan likened the United States to a "shining city upon a hill," a phrase adapted from a sermon by John Winthrop, founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop hoped the colony would become a model Christian society, or a "city upon a hill" that would serve as an example to the world. In his farewell address, Reagan said,

> The past few days, I've thought a bit of the "shining city upon a hill." . . . In my mind it was a tall, proud city . . . God-blessed and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.

—Ronald Reagan, Farewell Address, January 11, 1989

Did Reagan's social policies help create such a model society? His admirers and critics disagree.

**Social Welfare Spending Is Reduced** Reagan and other conservatives largely opposed government spending on social welfare, believing that social programs stifled personal initiative and produced a dependence on government aid, trapping people in a cycle of poverty. At Reagan's urging, Congress slashed funding for many of Lyndon Johnson's antipoverty programs, including food stamps and federal aid for the elderly, poor, and disabled. Other cuts targeted student loans and subsidized-housing programs that helped low-income families pay rent.

Liberals protested that these cuts forced cities to reduce services to those in need, harming the poor. Cuts severely affected single women with young children, as well as young adults with few job skills and little education. The number of children living in poverty grew by 25 percent during the 1980s, and the amount of homeless people also increased dramatically.

**HIV/AIDS Emerges** In the 1980s, the United States faced a grave health crisis caused by a previously unknown disease called **HIV/AIDS**. This disease attacks the immune system, hindering the body from fighting illness. Many AIDS patients die from infections, like pneumonia, that their weakened immune systems cannot fight.

Many of the first AIDS cases in the United States were among gay men, fostering the mistaken belief that AIDS was largely a "gay disease." In the mid- 1980s, AIDS began to appear in patients who had received blood transfusions, leading to the discovery that AIDS was transmitted mainly through contact with infected blood or other bodily fluids. This form of transmission also explained why many drug users who shared needles contracted AIDS.

At the end of Reagan's first term, there were over 8,700 confirmed AIDS deaths in the United States. Four years later, that number had grown to over 46,000. AIDS activists urged Reagan to address AIDS and fund research of the disease, initiatives that the president resisted. By the end of his second term, Reagan finally addressed the AIDS crisis, declaring it "public health enemy number one." Still, he dedicated little effort to fighting the epidemic.

**The Reagans Urge Americans to "Just Say No" to Drugs** Like

AIDS, drug-related violence in inner-city neighborhoods was also a concern in the 1980s. With his wife, Nancy, the president initiated a "Just Say No" media campaign, urging youths to "just say no to drugs." The Reagan administration also funded a drug education program called Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE), which sent police officers to schools to teach students about the dangers of drug use.


First Lady Nancy Reagan promoted drug and alcohol prevention programs like DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), whose slogan was "Just Say No." The program was designed to educate students on the dangers of drug use. Some critics believed that funding for DARE might have been more effective in drug treatment programs or in efforts to combat drug-related crime.

Reagan's advisers lauded DARE as a success, citing studies that indicated reduced drug use among high school seniors. However, longer-term studies conducted in the mid-1990s concluded that the program had little or no effect. In addition, critics of Reagan's drug-intervention policy cited studies showing increased use of cocaine among urban poor and minority youths.

Although many conservatives supported educating students about the dangers of drug use, these conservatives opposed government

programs that provided treatment for drug addicts. Critics of this viewpoint emphasized the importance of helping people overcome addiction to reduce drug-related crime and unemployment.

The Supreme Court shifted right under Ronald Reagan, who appointed conservative justices Sandra Day O'Connor (pictured here at her confirmation hearings), Antonin Scalia, and Anthony Kennedy. Presidential appointments can greatly influence Court rulings. The conservative-dominated Court ruled against students' privacy rights in *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* and *Vernonia School District v. Acton*.

**Conservatism Dominates the Supreme Court** President Reagan's judicial appointments prompted the Supreme Court in a conservative direction. He appointed three new justices to the Court: Sandra Day O'Connor, the first female justice, and conservatives Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy.

The Court's conservatism was evident in the 1985 case ***New Jersey v. T.L.O.***, which debated the privacy rights of high school students. The case centered on a 14-year-old girl, identified as T.L.O., whose purse was searched at school and found to contain marijuana. She was then charged with delinquency and sent to juvenile court. Her lawyers argued that the evidence against T.L.O. was obtained in violation of the Fourth Amendment's protection against unreasonable search and

seizure. The Supreme Court disagreed, ruling that a search without warrant by school officials did not violate the Fourth Amendment as long as "there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the search will turn up evidence that the student has violated or is violating either the law or the rules of the school."

A decade later, the Court—still dominated by Reagan-era conservatives — ruled against privacy rights in *Vernonia School District v. Acton*. This time, the Court mandated that schools have the right to impose random drug tests on student athletes, despite objections that such tests violate students' rights.


Civil rights leader Jesse Jackson ran for president twice, in 1984 and 1988. Jackson strongly criticized Reagan-era policies that he believed harmed poor and disadvantaged Americans. He formed the National Rainbow Coalition in 1984 in order to fight for progressive reform.

**Civil Rights Groups Feel Alienated** Reagan believed the federal government should be less involved in enforcing civil rights. He was reluctant to support an extension of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, opposed school busing as a means of achieving integration, and called for an end to affirmative action, which he considered reverse discrimination against whites. Supporters claimed that civil rights efforts infringed on the rights of state and local governments. Civil

rights groups contended that Reagan was attempting to appeal to southern white voters by rescinding civil rights legislation.

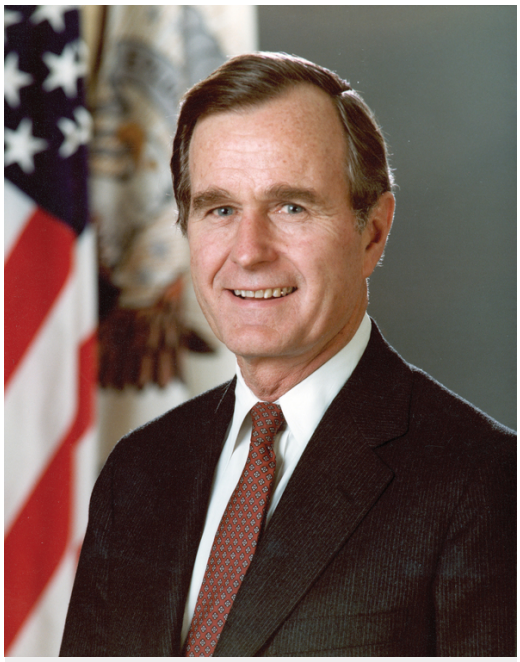
Civil rights activist Jesse Jackson was one of the strongest critics of Reagan's policies, and twice sought the Democratic nomination for president in the 1980s. In 1984, Jackson formed the National Rainbow Coalition, a political organization that advocated social progress and equal rights for people of color, women, and gays and lesbians.

In his 1984 Democratic National Convention speech, Jackson blamed worsening conditions in the inner cities on cuts in social programs for the poor and elderly. Quoting a common saying in economics that "a rising tide lifts all boats," Jackson disputed the claim that Reagan's economic expansion would eventually benefit all Americans. "Rising tides don't lift all boats," he said, "particularly those stuck at the bottom. For the boats stuck at the bottom there's a misery index . . . Under Mr. Reagan, the misery index has risen for the poor." Jackson called for renewed efforts to advance civil rights and aid the poor.

**Reagan Supports Immigration Reform** Another focus of Reagan's domestic policy was immigration reform because the Immigration Act of 1965 had prompted increased immigration. By the 1980s, large numbers of immigrants from Asia and Latin America had arrived in the United States. Some of these people were **undocumented immigrants**, or those who entered the country illegally, without a visa. Many of these undocumented immigrants were Latin Americans who crossed the U.S.–Mexico border. Thus, illegal immigration most impacted the southwestern border states, from Texas to California.

Some Americans protested increased immigration by joining the "English-only movement." Members of this group advocated making English the official language of the United States and limiting the use of other languages by government agencies. Most English-only supporters opposed bilingual education in schools because they believed it prevented immigrants from learning English. In the 1980s, several states passed laws establishing English as the official language.

In 1986, Reagan signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which called for stricter immigration controls on the U.S.–Mexico border and severely penalized employers who hired undocumented workers. At the same time, the law provided amnesty for the 2.8 million immigrants who had entered the country illegally, thus facilitating their path to U.S. citizenship.



When George H. W. Bush became president in January 1989, he already had a notable career in public service. He was the youngest fighter pilot in the Navy during World War II. He later represented Texas in the House of Representatives for two terms, served as ambassador to the United Nations, directed the Central Intelligence Agency, and was Reagan's vice president.

# 4. George H. W. Bush: Continuing Reagan's Policies

The election of 1988 challenged both old and new party loyalties. The Republican candidate was Reagan's vice president, George H. W. Bush, who promised to continue the Reagan Revolution. His campaign appealed to evangelicals and voters who had benefited from Reaganomics. Bush's Democratic opponent, Massachusetts Governor

Michael Dukakis, attempted to unify the fraying Democratic coalition by focusing on weaknesses in the economy. Dukakis appealed to liberals as well as poor and middle-class voters who did not benefit from the economic recovery.

When the votes were tallied on election night, Bush was the clear winner, securing 40 states and 53 percent of the popular vote. Alarming Democratic Party leaders, Bush won key industrial states like Michigan and Ohio.

**Legislative Wins and Losses** In his Republican National Convention acceptance speech, Bush made a number of promises for his presidential campaign. He pledged to expand the economy by creating "30 in 8—Thirty million jobs in the next eight years." He also promised to curb taxes. "Read my lips," he declared, "no new taxes!" Finally, Bush spoke of creating a "kinder, gentler nation," pledging "to do whatever it takes to make sure the disabled are included in the mainstream," because "for too long they've been left out. But they're not gonna be left out anymore."

Bush fulfilled this last campaign promise when Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. This law banned employment discrimination against people with disabilities. It also required employers to make "reasonable accommodation" for disabled employees. This clause could entail building ramps to enable people in wheelchairs to enter a workplace, or ordering special equipment to help workers with limited vision or hearing perform their jobs.

The president was less successful in fulfilling his pledge to create 30 million new jobs. This was due in part to the financial crisis he inherited from the Reagan administration, known as the **savings and loan crisis**. Savings and loan associations, or S&Ls, are financial institutions that were established to provide low-cost home loans to the public. During the Great Depression, the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Company (FSLIC) encouraged people to deposit their money in S&Ls by guaranteeing their deposits up to a fixed amount. In return for this guarantee, S&Ls were limited by regulation to issuing only low-risk loans.

In the 1980s, the Reagan administration deregulated the S&L industry, so some S&Ls began making risky loans as part of their efforts to earn higher profits. More than 1,000 of these S&Ls stumbled into financial troubles and went bankrupt, which slowed lending and home sales and hurt the U.S. economy. By 1990, the nation was moving into a recession, and unemployment rates were increasing as well.

Bush worked with Congress to clean up the S&L mess by repaying depositors who had lost their savings. But the cost of their plan, borne partly by taxpayers, was over $150 billion. The resulting drain on the federal treasury contributed to yet another economic problem—soaring budget deficits.

A man sits on a bicycle in front of burning buildings during the Rodney King riots in April 1992. The violence, arson, and looting that occurred during the riots caused widespread damage in Los Angeles. The unrest was sparked by tensions between Los Angeles police and the African American community in Los Angeles.

In 1990, Bush met with Congressional leaders to negotiate a budget compromise that would reduce the deficit. Congress agreed to cut spending after Bush agreed to raise taxes. This violated Bush's "Read my lips" pledge, upsetting his conservative supporters. Journalist Tom Wicker later wrote,

> [Bush] had broken one of the most ironclad political pledges ever made— offered . . . before a national television audience—a promise without which he might conceivably not have been able to win the presidential election. With that one action . . . the president of the United States brought into question both his personal reliability and his political judgment.
>
> —Tom Wicker, *George Herbert Walker Bush*, 2004

**Economic Problems and Social Tensions Increase** Despite the budget compromise, both the deficit and debt continued to rise. In late 1990, the U.S. economy entered a recession. Economic growth slowed as unemployment rates increased. Working-class Americans were especially affected.

Meanwhile, social tensions were mounting, particularly in urban areas. In April 1992, riots erupted in a poor Los Angeles neighborhood after a jury acquitted four police officers in the videotaped beating of Rodney King, a black resident. The ensuing Rodney King riots spread across the city, causing over 50 deaths and millions of dollars in damages. Smaller riots broke out in other U.S. cities as well. For many Americans, these riots symbolized persistent social and economic tensions in the country.

# Summary

**In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan's political skills and conservative support won him two terms in office. During his presidency, the economy revived, but the federal budget deficit soared. His approach to social problems reflected his conservative ideals.**

**Reagan Revolution** Reagan helped spark a conservative revolution in American politics. He worked to shrink government, promote free enterprise, and reduce spending on social programs. He also called for fewer regulations related to business and the environment.

**The New Right** Reagan's strongest support came from the New Right, a movement of conservative activists and organizations. The New Right included evangelical Christian organizations, such as the Moral Majority.

**Supply-side economics** Reagan's economic plan was rooted in supply-side economics. He cut taxes to stimulate business activity, claiming this would boost the economy. His tax cuts and increased defense spending led to large budget deficits and a massive national debt.

**A conservative Court** The Supreme Court shifted to the right under Reagan. This change was evident in such cases as *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, which limited privacy rights for students.

**George H. W. Bush** In 1988, Bush appealed to Reagan Republicans with his campaign pledges to expand the economy, introduce no new taxes, and create a "kinder, gentler" America. After a costly bailout

necessitated by the savings and loans crisis, Bush broke his no-taxes pledge in an effort to balance the federal budget.

# Ryan White: A Young American Who Made a Difference

This section tells you about Ryan White, a courageous teenager who helped educate Americans about AIDS. He is one of several people who contributed to the growth of the nation's moral character.

Ryan White was born on December 6, 1971, in Kokomo, Indiana. At birth, he was diagnosed with hemophilia. Hemophilia is a genetic disease that causes blood not to clot properly. As a child, Ryan had to go to the hospital at least twice a month to receive extra blood. He was told he couldn't play sports like most children because an injury might cause him to bleed to death.

Just before Ryan was born, a new discovery was made that would change his life. This discovery was called Factor VIII. It was a blood product that combined blood from thousands of donors. Factor VIII included blood from people who could clot normally. Ryan regularly received transfusions of Factor VIII. It allowed him to do what other children his age could do. He learned to ride a bike and even played Little League Baseball for one season.

At the age of 12, Ryan spent the summer with his grandparents. He went fishing with his grandfather. He hung out with his friends. He collected comic books and even had a girlfriend. He also began feeling more and more sick.

Ryan's pediatrician said that Ryan just had a bad case of flu. A few months later, an annual checkup showed that Ryan had a disease called hepatitis. He and his family were relieved. They thought the hepatitis had caused his diarrhea, stomach cramps, and night sweats.

Ryan's 13th birthday arrived, but it wasn't a happy occasion. He spent the weekend coughing, sleeping, and burning up with a high fever. Eventually, he ended up in a children's hospital in Indianapolis. There Ryan learned he had AIDS, a recently discovered and deadly disease. AIDS attacks the body's ability to fight off other diseases. Ryan had gotten it through the very same blood product that had allowed him to be like other kids—Factor VIII.

After months of recovery, Ryan began to feel better. He wanted to return to school, but the school did not want him back. The administrators, teachers, students, and parents at Ryan's school were afraid that he would give everyone AIDS. In the early 1980s, little was known about how AIDS could be transmitted. People thought that even casual contact could pass the terrible disease from person to person. AIDS patients, like Ryan, got caught in the middle of this confusion.

Though Ryan was fighting a deadly condition, he fought hard for the right to go back to school. The people of Kokomo were not accepting of Ryan's AIDS. Newspapers and television stations called his mother unfit because she had “allowed” him to get AIDS. His sister and cousins were harassed at school. Even Ryan's favorite teacher told a reporter that he didn't want Ryan back in school. At church, nobody would shake his hand during the service. One Sunday, Ryan's family returned home to find that a bullet had been shot through their front window.

Ryan got a very different reception outside of his hometown. He began traveling all over the country and even to Italy to speak on television shows about his illness and his fight to return to school. On the streets of Rome, strangers recognized him and gave him warm hugs of support. He was invited to a benefit party for the American Foundation for AIDS Research. There he met many celebrities who praised him for his courage. When singer Elton John found out that he was the entertainer Ryan most wanted to meet, he called Ryan to apologize for not being at the benefit. He promised to make it up to Ryan at his next concert

A court finally ordered the school to allow Ryan to return. He started high school in August of 1986 at the age of 15. Sadly, he faced more harassment. One day some students broke into and vandalized his locker. Ryan wanted to move to a place where he would be respected. His family moved to Cicero, Indiana. The people of Cicero did not let fear get the best of them. Students at his new school, Hamilton High, went through an AIDS education program. They learned that people can't get AIDS by touching others or by sharing a bathroom. Ryan made many friends who would help him through his illness.

Ryan continued to draw public attention. He felt it was important to educate people about the facts of his disease. He spoke before the President's Commission on AIDS about his experience in Kokomo. He helped in the filming of a television movie about his life. He even got to play a small part as Chad, another hemophiliac who had died of AIDS. He got offers to speak to audiences several times per week. One of his most memorable appearances came before a convention of the

National Education Association in New Orleans. More than 10,000 teachers gave Ryan a standing ovation.

Just before his 18th birthday, Ryan began to feel sicker. He stopped going to school, though he did plan to go to his prom with his good friend Heather. He went into the hospital in the spring of 1990. Elton John flew in to be near Ryan's bedside and help his family.

On April 8, 1990, Ryan White died. His funeral was the largest Indiana had ever seen. Besides family and friends, the funeral was attended by celebrities and strangers who had been touched by Ryan's work. Over 50,000 cards were sent to Ryan's family.

In 2009, President Obama signed amendments to the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Extension Act. It represents ongoing commitment to ensuring access to HIV/AIDS care and treatment. Ryan's mother Jeanne White-Ginder is pictured on the right side of the photo.

Since Ryan's death, there has been much more education about AIDS. His mother continues Ryan's work to educate people about the facts. She has spoken before many audiences. She spends hours on the phone with other children who have AIDS and their parents. She worked with Senators Edward Kennedy and Orrin Hatch to lobby Congress for the Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act. The bill passed, allowing AIDS patients and their families to get full medical care.

Ryan White inspired others with both his deeds and his words. This is his testimony to the President's Commission on AIDS in 1988:

*Thank You, Commissioners:*

*My name is Ryan White. I am sixteen years old. I have hemophilia, and I have AIDS.*

*When I was three days old, the doctors told my parents I was a severe hemophiliac, meaning my blood does not clot. Lucky for me, there was a product just approved by the Food and Drug Administration. It was called Factor VIII, which contains the clotting agent found in blood.*

*While I was growing up, I had many bleeds or hemorrhages in my joints which make it very painful. Twice a week I would receive injections or IV's of Factor VIII which clotted the blood and then broke it down. A bleed occurs from a broken blood vessel or vein. The blood then had nowhere to go so it would swell up in a joint. You could compare it to trying to pour a quart of milk into a pint-sized container of milk.*

*The first five to six years of my life were spent in and out of the hospital. All in all I led a pretty normal life. Most recently my battle has been against AIDS and the discrimination surrounding it. On December 17, 1984, I had surgery to remove two inches of my left lung due to pneumonia. After two hours of surgery the doctors told my mother I had AIDS. I contracted AIDS through my Factor VIII which is made from blood. When I came out of surgery, I was on a respirator and had a tube in my left lung. I spent Christmas and the next thirty days in the hospital. A lot of my time was spent searching, thinking and planning my life.*

*I came face to face with death at thirteen years old. I was diagnosed with AIDS: a killer. Doctors told me I'm not contagious. Given six months to live and being the fighter that I am, I set high goals for myself. It was my decision to live a normal life, go to school, be with my friends, and enjoying day to day activities. It was not going to be easy.*

*The school I was going to said they had no guidelines for a person with AIDS. The school board, my teachers, and my*

*principal voted to keep me out of the classroom even after the guidelines were set by the I.S.B.H., for fear of someone getting AIDS from me by casual contact. Rumors of sneezing, kissing, tears, sweat, and saliva spreading AIDS caused people to panic.*

*We began a series of court battles for nine months, while I was attending classes by telephone. Eventually, I won the right to attend school, but the prejudice was still there. Listening to medical facts was not enough. People wanted one hundred percent guarantees. There are no one hundred percent guarantees in life, but concessions were made by Mom and me to help ease the fear. We decided to meet them halfway:*

- *Separate restrooms*
- *No gym*
- *Separate drinking fountains*
- *Disposable eating utensils and trays*

*Even though we knew AIDS was not spread through casual contact. Nevertheless, parents of twenty students started their own school. They were still not convinced. Because of the lack of education on AIDS, discrimination, fear, panic, and lies surrounded me:*

- *I became the target of Ryan White jokes*
- *Lies about me biting people*
- *Spitting on vegetables and cookies*
- *Urinating on bathroom walls*
- *Some restaurants threw away my dishes*
- *My school locker was vandalized inside and folders were marked FAG and other obscenities*

*I was labeled a troublemaker, my mom an unfit mother, and I was not welcome anywhere. People would get up and leave so they would not have to sit anywhere near me. Even at church, people would not shake my hand.*

*This brought on the news media, TV crews, interviews, and numerous public appearances. I became known as the AIDS boy. I received thousands of letters of support from all around the world, all because I wanted to go to school. Mayor Koch, of New York, was the first public figure to give me support. Entertainers, athletes, and stars started giving*

*me support. I met some of the greatest like Elton John, Greg Louganis, Max Headroom, Alyssa Milano (my teen idol), Lyndon King (Los Angeles Raiders), and Charlie Sheen. All of these plus many more became my friends, but I had very few friends at school. How could these people in the public eye not be afraid of me, but my whole town was?*

*It was difficult, at times, to handle; but I tried to ignore the injustice, because I knew the people were wrong. My family and I held no hatred for those people because we realized they were victims of their own ignorance. We had great faith that with patience, understanding, and education, that my family and I could be helpful in changing their minds and attitudes around. Financial hardships were rough on us, even though Mom had a good job at G.M. The more I was sick, the more work she had to miss. Bills became impossible to pay. My sister, Andrea, was a championship roller skater who had to sacrifice too. There was no money for her lessons and travel. AIDS can destroy a family if you let it, but luckily for my sister and me, Mom taught us to keep going. Don't give up, be proud of who you are, and never feel sorry for yourself.*

*After two and a half years of declining health, two attacks of pneumocystis, shingles, a rare form of whooping cough, and liver problems, I faced fighting chills, fevers, coughing, tiredness, and vomiting. I was very ill and being tutored at home. The desire to move into a bigger house, to avoid living AIDS daily, and a dream to be accepted by a community and school, became possible and a reality with a movie about my life, “The Ryan White Story.”*

*My life is better now. At the end of the school year (1986-87), my family and I decided to move to Cicero, Indiana. We did a lot of hoping and praying that the community would welcome us, and they did. For the first time in three years, we feel we have a home, a supportive school, and lots of friends. The communities of Cicero, Atlanta, Arcadia, and Noblesville, Indiana, are now what we call "home." I'm feeling great. I am a normal happy teenager again. I have a learner's permit. I attend sports functions and dances. My studies are important to me. I made the honor roll just recently, with 2 A's and 2 B's. I'm just one of the kids, and all because the students at Hamilton Heights High School listened to the facts, educated their parents and*

*themselves, and believed in me.*

*I believe in myself as I look forward to graduating from Hamilton Heights High School in 1991.*

*Hamilton Heights High School is proof that AIDS EDUCATION in schools works.*

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Ryan White's Testimony before the President's Commission on AIDS, 1988.

Entire Selection: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ryan_White's_Testimony_before_the_Presid

Accessed March, 2017

# Ending the Cold War

What were the effects of Ronald Reagan's and George H. W. Bush's foreign policy actions?

## Introduction


In 1987, Reagan delivered his famous "tear down this wall" speech in front of West Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. The 200-year-old gate was closed in 1961 when the Berlin Wall was built. Just before he spoke, Reagan learned that East German police had forcibly removed a crowd of East Germans gathered on the other side of the wall to hear his speech.

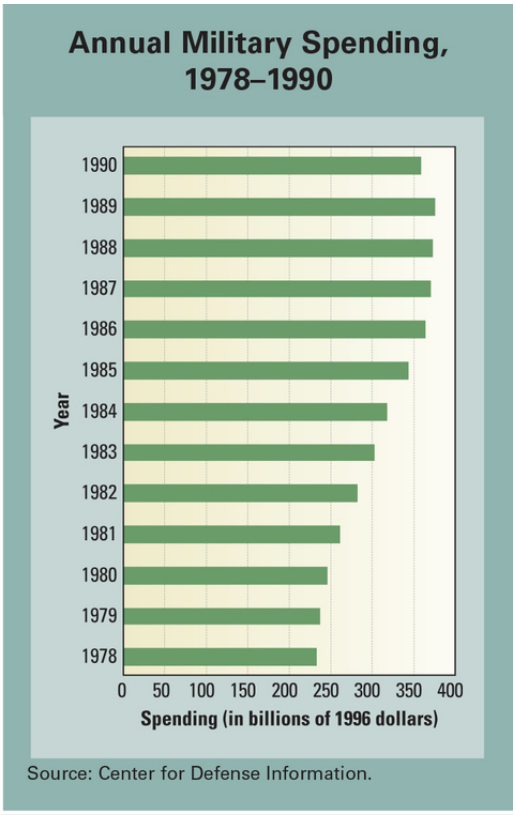
On June 12, 1987, President Ronald Reagan stood on a platform in front

of the Berlin Wall. Behind him loomed the Brandenburg Gate, which symbolized the divided German capital. The president was visibly angry since he had just been informed that police had dispersed the East German crowd gathering on the other side of the wall to hear Reagan's address. "General Secretary Gorbachev," Reagan spoke, knowing that his words would eventually reach the Soviet leader in Moscow. "If you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate!" Reagan continued, emphatically commanding: "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

With this statement, Reagan issued a ringing challenge from one superpower to the other. The wall was the most infamous symbol of the Cold War— at 12 feet tall and over 100 miles long, it encircled West Berlin. Thousands of well-armed guards, equipped with hundreds of tracking dogs, patrolled the wall with orders to shoot anyone who attempted to escape to the West. Despite these risks, as many as 10,000 East Germans tried to cross the border during the Cold War. Around half succeeded, while the others were captured or lost their lives. Some died jumping out of windows, some were shot, and some drowned as they tried to swim across lakes or rivers at the border.

On the night of November 9, 1989, a little over two years after Reagan's speech, the gates of the Berlin Wall finally opened. As the news spread, hundreds of thousands of people rushed to the wall. Strangers hugged and kissed, while others cheered, danced, and lit fireworks. The crowd then began to dismantle the wall by hand. The noise of the crowd grew "louder and louder," reported one journalist, "as hundreds of hammers and chisels attack[ed] the wall, taking it down chip by chip." It was a celebration of freedom after decades of anxiety, fear, and oppression. As one young East German stated, "I don't feel like I'm in prison anymore."


Crowds celebrate the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 10, 1989.




Defense spending increased considerably during Reagan's two terms in office. This increase was designed to counter the Soviet military threat and undermine the Soviet economy. In 1983, Reagan introduced a new arms program, called the Strategic Defense Initiative, to create an effective "missile shield" against the Soviets.

# 1. Anticommunism Guides Reagan's Foreign Policy

Reagan staunchly emphasized the dangers of communism, and

believed that the Soviet Union posed an ongoing threat to freedom and democracy. In a March 1983 speech, he described the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." Reagan's tough stance pleased conservatives, but alarmed Americans who feared an escalation of Cold War tensions.

**An Ardent Cold Warrior** Reagan believed that the Soviet Union was committed to world domination. To counter the Soviet threat and undermine communism, he increased defense spending, generating the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history.

In 1983, Reagan announced plans for a new arms program, called the **Strategic Defense Initiative** (SDI). This program was founded to create a "missile shield" that would protect the United States from nuclear attack. To create this shield, SDI would construct land-based and space-based weapons, which were theoretically capable of destroying incoming missiles. Reagan argued that SDI would be a deterrent to war and would make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete."

Critics of the SDI program nicknamed it "Star Wars" after the popular science-fiction movie. They claimed that SDI would provoke another arms race and undermine arms control agreements. Many scientists expressed doubts that an effective missile shield could be constructed, while members of Congress voiced concerns about SDI's enormous cost. The program went ahead anyway, despite technical problems that hampered its development.

To further undermine the Soviets, Reagan called for the United States to openly support anticommunist insurgents and movements worldwide. Under this policy, which became known as the **Reagan Doctrine**, the United States provided aid to rebels fighting Soviet-backed governments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Reagan called these rebel groups "freedom fighters."

In his February 1985 State of the Union address, President Reagan declared that it was the United States' responsibility to "nourish and defend freedom and democracy" throughout the world. To do this, Reagan proposed that the United States actively support anticommunist movements in foreign countries. This policy became known as the Reagan Doctrine.

In the 1980s, the United States armed and trained Contra rebels fighting to oust Nicaragua's leftist government. Reagan praised the Contras as "the moral equivalent of our Founding Fathers." In 1984, Congress voted to halt all military aid to the Contras.

## Battling Communism in Central America and the Caribbean

Central America became one of the Reagan Doctrine's first tests. In Nicaragua, leftist rebels called **Sandinistas** overthrew the country's dictator, Anastasio Somoza, in 1979. The Sandinista government then acquired Soviet arms and forged close ties with communist Cuba.

Reagan viewed these events in Nicaragua, along with a growing insurgency in El Salvador, as Soviet and Cuban efforts to spread communism throughout Central America and the Western Hemisphere. In a speech to Congress in 1983, the president asserted that these events threatened U.S. interests. "The national security of all the

Americas is at stake in Central America," President Reagan warned Congress. "If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere."

In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration began to fund covert operations to overthrow the Sandinista government. In Nicaragua, U.S. advisers armed and trained over 10,000 Nicaraguan rebels. This U.S.-backed force, known as the **Contras**, attacked the Sandinistas from bases in neighboring countries.

Congress debated Reagan's policy. After lawmakers learned in 1984 that the CIA was illegally planting mines in Nicaraguan harbors, they banned further U.S. military aid to the Contras. Covert operations continued, however, later embroiling the Reagan administration in its most serious scandal.

Meanwhile, the Reagan administration was also providing economic and military aid to El Salvador, which was battling its own leftist rebellion. Reagan argued that U.S. aid would counter communist influence and support the country's struggling democratic government. Yet most U.S. aid went to the Salvadoran military, which compiled a brutal human rights record. The ensuing civil war lasted for 12 years, leaving at least 70,000 Salvadorans dead, before its end in 1992.

The Reagan Doctrine also prompted the United States to invade the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada. In 1983, a military coup placed a communist leader in power. He invited Cuban workers to the island and signed military agreements with several communist countries. Alarmed by these events, Reagan sent an invasion force of U.S. Marines to Grenada to oust the regime, expel the Cubans, and install a new government. The people of Grenada and nearby islands supported the U.S. invasion, but many countries worldwide condemned the U.S. action as unlawful interference in another nation's affairs.

Although the United States saw its troops as peacekeepers, the troops' presence angered Israeli radicals and incited terrorist bombings. In April 1983, terrorists attacked the U.S. embassy in Beirut. Here, U.S. marines work with members of a multinational peacekeeping force in the aftermath of the bombing.

# 2. On Shaky Ground in the Middle East

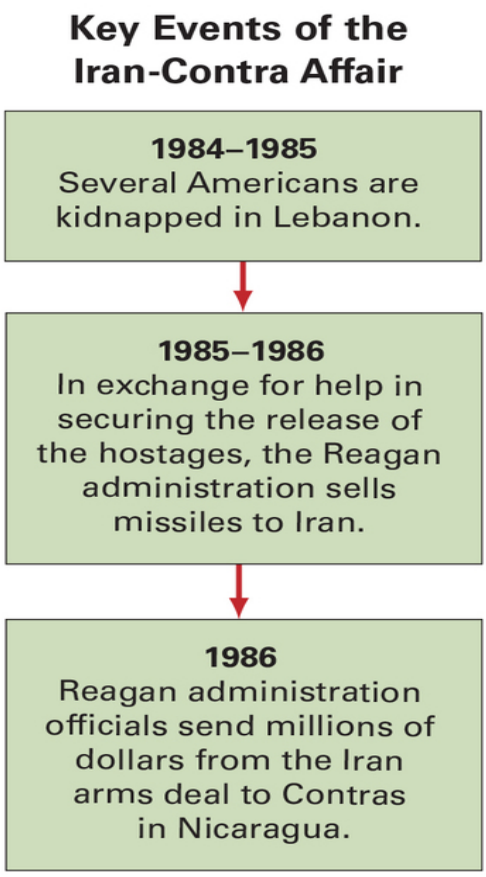
The United States became involved in the Middle East during the Reagan administration by providing aid to Israel and to moderate Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. In 1975, civil war broke out in Lebanon when various ethnic and religious groups, both Christian

and Muslim, began to struggle for power. This conflict involved factions tied to Syria and Iran, as well as groups from the **Palestine Liberation Organization** (PLO), an organization fighting for an Arab Palestinian state that would include land claimed by Israel. In the early 1980s, the United States intervened in this war in an effort to engender peace.

**Hopes of Peace in Lebanon Shattered** As the United States prepared to invade Lebanon, the conflict worsened. Angered by repeated PLO raids from southern Lebanon, Israel set out to secure its northern border. In June 1982, Israeli troops crossed into Lebanon, destroying PLO bases. Through heavy fighting, they drove the PLO north to Beirut, Lebanon's capital. Syria condemned the Israeli invasion, sending its own troops to Lebanon to support the PLO.

Reagan feared that Syria's involvement in the conflict might lead to a broader Middle Eastern war. Hoping to subdue the conflict, Reagan sent a diplomat to Beirut to negotiate a settlement. The agreement that was reached entailed building a multinational force of troops from the United States, France, and Italy. These troops would enforce a cease-fire in Lebanon and grant the PLO time to withdraw from Beirut, after which Israel would leave as well.

The United States viewed its troops as peacekeepers, but many Muslim groups believed otherwise. The U.S. presence in Lebanon angered Islamic radicals and provoked terrorist attacks against U.S. forces. In April 1983, terrorists bombed the U.S. embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people, 17 of whom were American.




The following September, Israel began withdrawing its troops from Lebanon. This did not bring peace, however, and on October 23, a suicide bombing occurred at the marine barracks at Beirut International Airport. The suicide bomber drove a truck filled with explosives into the barracks, killing 241 Americans. A few miles away, a similar explosion killed at least 58 French troops. Unwilling to further risk American lives, Reagan withdrew all U.S. troops from Lebanon in February 1984, a grim setback for U.S. peacekeeping efforts in the Middle East. French and Italian troops withdrew from the region as well.

Despite the U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon, terrorist attacks targeting Americans continued. In June 1985, Lebanese terrorists hijacked an airliner flying out of Athens, Greece because most of the 153 passengers were American. The plane landed in Beirut, after which one passenger was killed, and another 39 passengers were held captive in Lebanon for 17 days before they were released. This incident, combined with other events in the Middle East, underscored a growing trend in Third World conflicts. Increasingly, insurgent groups with little political power employed terrorism to advance their efforts.

**The Iran-Contra Affair** One year later, in 1986, Reagan faced the most serious crisis of his presidency in a scandal called the **Iran-Contra Affair**. In November, a Lebanese magazine reported that the United States had been secretly selling arms to Iran. The public then learned that the weapons had been sold to Iran to help secure the release of U.S. hostages being held by Iranian-backed terrorists in Lebanon.

This news shocked Americans because Reagan had repeatedly vowed that he would "never deal with terrorists." Yet his administration supplied arms to Iran, a country that had held Americans hostage and was known to support terrorism. When the weapon sales were uncovered, more than 1,500 missiles had been shipped to Iran. Moreover, the weapons deal did not protect Americans in Lebanon. Three U.S. hostages were freed, only to be replaced by three others. Secretary of State George Schulz called the exchange "a hostage bazaar."

**The Iran-Contra Affair: A Crisis for the Reagan Administration**

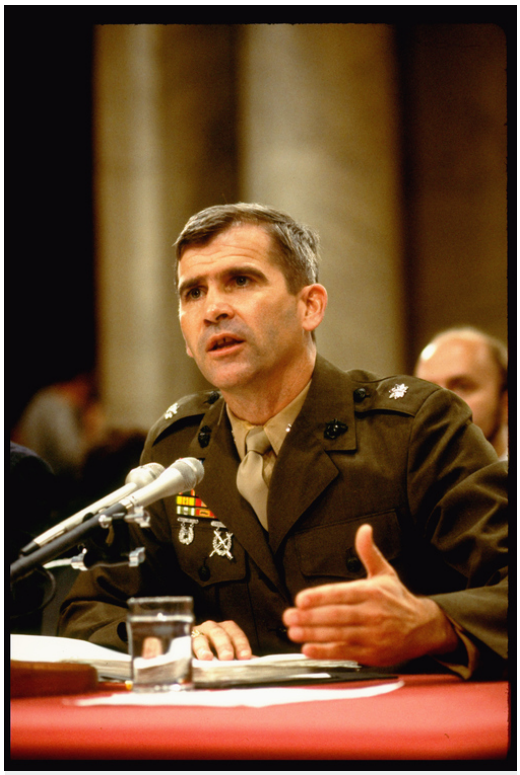
Why was the Iran-Contra Affair damaging to Reagan's presidency?

**Broken promise** Despite Reagan's vows to "never deal with terrorists," his officials sold weapons to Iranian-backed terrorists.

**Illegal funding** Ignoring a congressional ban, Reagan officials sent money from arms sales to the Contras in Nicaragua.

**Lying to Congress** Administration officials tried to cover up illegal activities during congressional investigations.

**Abuse of executive power** These actions violated the constitutional separation of powers and system of checks and balances between the executive and legislative branches of government.



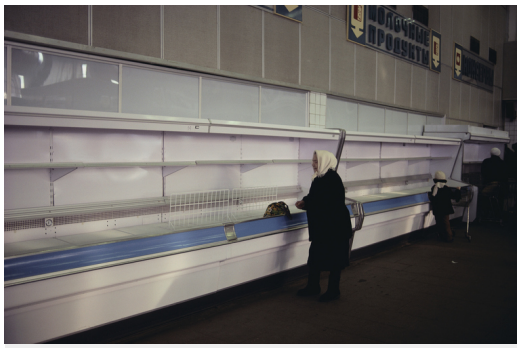
Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North testified before Congress about his role in the Iran-Contra Affair. A decorated Vietnam veteran, North ran the covert operation that funneled millions of dollars to the Contras. North defended his actions, claiming that he was following orders. Some Americans hailed him as a patriot, while others deemed him a criminal.

The scandal widened over the following months, when investigations by Congress and a special commission appointed by Reagan discovered that millions of dollars from the Iranian arms sales had been passed to the Contras in Nicaragua, in violation of U.S. law. Investigators learned that top administration officials had supported this operation and lied to Congress.

The “point man” for the Iran-Contra operation was Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a staff member at the National Security Council. During special Congressional hearings, North informed investigators that his superiors at the NSC had approved his actions, even though they violated the 1984 law that banned aiding the Contras. He further admitted that he had helped to mislead Congress by making statements that were “evasive and wrong.” North’s boss, Admiral John Poindexter, justified such deception as necessary to avoid “leaks” of information to the press. Both men were convicted of crimes related to the Iran-Contra Affair, but their convictions were later overturned on appeal for technical reasons.

The Tower Commission, an independent group formed to investigate the Iran- Contra Affair, later found that Reagan “did not seem to be aware” of the illegal operation. However, the commission concluded that the president’s disengagement from White House affairs had enabled the deception. It also found fault with the president’s failure to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed.”

Reagan’s approval ratings dropped sharply as a result of the Iran-Contra Affair, and some wondered whether his presidency would survive. Ultimately, the scandal did not “stick” to the president, and his popularity eventually rebounded.



As the Soviet economy declined in the 1980s, many Soviet citizens suffered great hardship. Beginning in the mid-1980s, economic mismanagement of the Soviet planned economy created shortages of consumer goods. Store shelves were often empty, as in the Moscow grocery store shown here.

# 3. The Cold War Winds Down

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the head of the Soviet Union—at 54 years old, he was the youngest Soviet leader in decades. The son of peasants, Gorbachev rose rapidly to the top echelon of the Communist Party. Energetic and confident, Gorbachev and his bold plans for reform would help bring the Cold War to an end.

**A Changing Soviet Union** By the time Gorbachev came to power, the Soviet economy was in crisis. Farm and factory production was declining, as centralized planning gave local managers little freedom to increase output and improve the quality of goods. Soviet workers, in turn, had few incentives to work harder and produce more.

The Soviet Union faced various shortages, including that of consumer goods like shoes, clothing, and soap. Many food products were also scarce, so families sometimes spent hours in line waiting to purchase necessities. When goods did appear in stores, shoppers often bought as much as they could afford. This hoarding exacerbated shortages to the

point that rationing was eventually imposed on many products. The Soviet Union also faced a severe housing crisis, especially in cities. Many families had to wait for years to obtain a tiny, cramped apartment.

Gorbachev realized the necessity of reforming the Soviet economy, so shortly after taking office, he introduced an economic reform program called *perestroika*, or restructuring. He closed many unprofitable state-run factories and allowed some private businesses to operate. He also cut the defense budget to dedicate more funding to domestic needs.

In addition to economic reforms, Gorbachev announced a policy of *glasnost*, or openness, which called for honest discussion of the nation's political and social problems. He allowed the Soviet media greater freedom to criticize the government in the hope that this new climate of openness would generate public support for his reforms. However, Gorbachev emphasized that he did not intend to abolish the communist system.

**Negotiating with the "Evil Empire"** When Gorbachev took office, the Cold War was intensifying. In the early 1980s, both the Soviet Union and the United States increased their quantities of nuclear missiles deployed in Europe. This arms buildup, along with the Reagan administration's hostile references to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," revived fears of nuclear war.

In the United States and Western Europe, these fears spurred the **nuclear freeze movement**, which called for a moratorium, or "freeze," on the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons by both superpowers. Freeze advocates held parades and rallies, lobbied Congress, and raised money for antinuclear political candidates.

Despite these efforts, the probability of thawing U.S.-Soviet relations seemed slim during Reagan's first term. When Gorbachev assumed power, however, the prospects for ending the Cold War began to improve. Gorbachev believed that a continuing arms race would jeopardize his economic reform efforts. The Soviet economy had already been weakened further by a lengthy war in Afghanistan, where Soviet forces were fighting a rebellion against the country's Soviet-backed government. Gorbachev also feared that the development of SDI and other U.S. weapons systems would increase the Soviet Union's vulnerability. As a result, he was prepared to negotiate new arms control agreements with the United States.

Surprising both his supporters and his critics, Reagan agreed to meet with Gorbachev in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1985—the first of four summit meetings between the two leaders. In Geneva, the two leaders made little progress on arms control, but developed mutual admiration. Reagan later described Gorbachev as having “warmth in his face and his style, not the coldness bordering on hatred I’d seen in most senior Soviet officials.”

In 1986, the two leaders met in Reykjavik, Iceland, to discuss removing missiles from Europe and reducing nuclear stockpiles. The talks stalled when Gorbachev insisted that Reagan cancel the SDI program, a demand that Reagan refused outright.

Negotiations resumed the following year, when Gorbachev agreed to discuss missile reductions without ending SDI. At a Washington summit in December 1987, the two leaders signed the **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty**, more commonly referred to as the **INF Treaty**. Through this treaty, both men agreed to remove and destroy all European missiles within a range of 300 and 3,400 miles, thus becoming the first arms treaty to require both sides to destroy missiles. The treaty also allowed the superpowers to inspect each other’s missile bases in order to verify that the weapons had been removed and destroyed.

The fourth and final summit occurred in Moscow five months later, by which time the two leaders had become friends. In his farewell address in 1989, Reagan told Americans that the United States had “forged a satisfying new closeness with the Soviet Union.” This was a far cry from the anti-Soviet views Reagan voiced just a few years before.

Reagan and Gorbachev held four summit meetings to negotiate arms control, developing a warm friendship in the process. At their final meeting in Moscow, a reporter asked Reagan if he still believed that the Soviet Union was an evil empire. “No,” the president replied, “I was talking about another time, another era.”

Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein amassed one of the most powerful armies in the Middle East. After he invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States formed an international coalition to force Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait. Although Iraq suffered defeat in the Persian Gulf War, Saddam remained in power.

# 4. Confronting Dictators

As the Cold War drew to a close, the United States organized several military actions against foreign dictators. Previously, fear of inciting a superpower conflict or losing an anticommunist ally might have inhibited such action. Now, with the Cold War ending, the United States had more freedom to intervene.

**Removing a Dictator in Panama** The first of these U.S. military interventions occurred in Panama, where General Manuel Noriega had ruled since 1983. Although Noriega was a ruthless dictator, he had close ties to the United States, and had supported the Reagan administration by aiding the Contras in Nicaragua.

U.S. relations with Noriega soured under Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush. In 1988, before Bush took office, the United States indicted Noriega on drug trafficking charges. The following year, Panamanians protested Noriega when he voided national elections. Bush subsequently withdrew U.S. support from Noriega in order to emphasize Noriega's violations of both human rights and democratic rule.

Bush eventually decided to intervene, sending an invasion force of more than 20,000 U.S. troops to Panama on December 20, 1989. Two weeks later, the U.S. troops captured Noriega and transported him to Miami. A few years after Noriega's capture, in 1992, a U.S. federal court convicted Noriega of drug trafficking and sentenced him to prison.

**Halting Iraqi Aggression** After Panama, Bush faced a crisis in the Middle East when Iraq invaded Kuwait, its much smaller southern neighbor, in August 1990. Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein coveted Kuwait's reserves of oil, and justified his invasion by claiming that Kuwait was rightfully part of Iraq. Shortly after Iraq's invasion, Saddam announced plans to annex Kuwait.

President Bush condemned the invasion, calling for an international coalition to force Saddam out of Kuwait. Thirty-four countries, including most of the Arab nations, joined the UN-sponsored coalition. The Soviet Union agreed to collaborate with the coalition despite the country's previously friendly relations with Iraq.

The coalition initially sent a force of nearly 700,000 troops to Saudi Arabia's border with Kuwait, which included more than 400,000 U.S. soldiers. The United Nations also imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, hoping to peacefully force Saddam's withdrawal. Saddam refused to withdraw, so on January 12, Congress approved the use of "all necessary means" to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

Four days later, the **Persian Gulf War** began. The first phase of the war consisted of six weeks of air strikes against Iraq, before the ground war commenced on February 24. Coalition forces chasing Saddam's fleeing troops into Iraq encountered little resistance, and Iraq agreed to a cease-fire only four days later, on February 28.

Although the coalition chose not to oust Saddam Hussein from power, the Persian Gulf War was a success for the United States and its allies. They had demonstrated that international cooperation could be marshaled against a common enemy for the purpose of countering aggression.

# 5. The Soviet Union Falls While Communism Struggles On

In August 1991, crowds in Moscow's Lubyanka Square cheered as an enormous bronze statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, founder of the Soviet Union's hated secret police, the KGB, toppled to the ground. Millions of startled Soviet citizens watched on television as protestors used giant cranes to pull the statue down. This incident became a symbol of the Soviet Union's collapse.

**The Breakup of the Soviet Bloc** The Soviet economy was in tatters by the late 1980s, casting the future of Soviet communism into doubt. As Glasnost's newfound openness increased Soviet citizens' awareness of the success of freemarket economies and the failure of central planning, many demanded greater freedom and independence.

In 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would no longer interfere in other communist countries' internal affairs. "Any nation," he said, "has the right to decide its fate by itself." Without the threat of Soviet invasion, communism collapsed across Eastern Europe.

Most communist governments fell peacefully, when leaders either resigned or agreed to reforms. One exception was Romania, where an angry mob drove dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife from power. In East Germany, desperate communist officials attempted to retain power by opening the Berlin Wall and promising other reforms, but East German citizens protested for democratic rule. Free elections followed, and in October 1990, East and West Germany were reunited.

In August 1991, Boris Yeltsin called for resistance against the communist hardliners leading a coup against Gorbachev. Here, Yeltsin (holding paper) rallies a crowd in front of the Russian Parliament building against the coup. When the coup attempt failed a few days later, Yeltsin emerged as the most powerful political figure in the country, and led Russia's transition from communism to a free-market system.

The Soviet Union weakened as power shifted from its central government to its constituent republics. In July 1991, Eastern European leaders disbanded the Warsaw Pact. These signs of Soviet collapse angered communist hardliners, who attempted to overthrow Gorbachev by taking him prisoner in August 1991. The coup failed after just four days, shifting the political outlook toward democratic rule and introducing a new leader, Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin, the president of the Russian republic, defied coup leaders and instead called for Gorbachev's return to power. Standing on top of army tanks in front of the Russian parliament building in Moscow, he rallied the Soviet people against the coup. Yeltsin continued to gain influence and power over the following months as the Soviet Union dissolved.

In June 1989, Chinese authorities suppressed pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. One protester risked his life by standing in front of army tanks as they rolled through the city. His action was a symbolic gesture of defiance against China's communist state.

By the fall of 1991, the Baltic republics of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania achieved independence, followed by Ukraine and the other Soviet republics. All 15 Soviet republics became separate **nation-states**, or independent countries populated mainly by citizens who share a common culture, history, and language. Most of the former Soviet bloc republics shifted from their Soviet past toward the West. In December, Gorbachev resigned as the Soviet leader and formally declared the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Finally, the Cold War was officially over.

**Communism Survives in Other Countries** As communism disappeared in Eastern Europe, the communist governments of Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, and China retained power. But with the fall of the Soviet Union, most communist countries lost a key ally. Because Cuba had relied on the Soviet Union for trade and economic aid for decades, the USSR's dissolution jeopardized Cuba's economy. Nevertheless, Cuba's communist government remained in power.

In the late 1980s, Vietnam's communist government began to enact reforms, allowing some private businesses to operate, and also sought foreign investment to boost the country's economy. By the 1990s, Vietnam's **mixed economy**— combining elements of free enterprise and central planning—was growing rapidly, providing more

opportunities for the Vietnamese people. The country's relations with the United States and other Western nations also improved.

Unlike Vietnam, communist North Korea remained isolated. After the fall of the Soviet bloc, during which North Korea lost a major source of economic support, the country turned increasingly to China as an ally and enforced a closed, rigidly controlled communist society.

The political changes that rocked Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union also affected China. The Chinese were already pursuing economic reforms—by the mid-1980s, the country was moving toward a market-oriented economy with a robust private sector. However, the fall of Soviet communism prompted many Chinese to call for greater political freedom in addition to economic reform. In May 1989, thousands of students participated in pro-democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. After several weeks of demonstrations, Chinese leaders sent government troops and tanks into the square to crush the protest on June 3 and 4. The protesters were dispersed, and an unknown number were killed in the process. By repressing the protest, the Chinese government signaled that it was not willing to accept political change.

# Summary

**Reagan's foreign policy emphasized anticommunism and support for democracy and freedom. His efforts to undermine Soviet power, along with changes in the Soviet Union itself, helped end the Cold War. The winding down of the Cold War allowed Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, more freedom to confront dictators.**

**Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)** Reagan increased military spending to counter the Soviet threat. One program, known as the Strategic Defense Initiative, was designed to create a "missile shield" to defend the United States from nuclear attack.

**Reagan Doctrine** The president supported anticommunist movements worldwide through the Reagan Doctrine. He provided aid to rebels like the Contras, who fought to overthrow the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

**Middle East policy** Reagan sent U.S. forces to Lebanon, ostensibly as peacekeepers. These troops helped secure the withdrawal of the Palestine Liberation Organization, but terrorist attacks forced Reagan to pull the soldiers out.

**Iran-Contra Affair** The Reagan administration faced a scandal over selling arms to Iran and diverting funds to the Contras. Several top officials were convicted of illegal actions in the Iran-Contra Affair.

**Nuclear freeze movement** Rising tensions with the Soviet Union increased fears of nuclear war. The nuclear freeze movement called for an end to accumulating, testing, and deploying nuclear weapons.

**Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty** Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, reducing nuclear missiles in Europe. Economic and political problems in the Soviet Union, combined with U.S. pressure, eventually caused the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

**Persian Gulf War** The United States fought alongside other nations to force Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.

# U.S. Domestic Politics at the Turn of the 21st Century

How have recent presidents tried to fulfill their domestic policy goals?

## Introduction

Barack Obama (left), Bill Clinton (center), George W. Bush (right), and Donald Trump (not pictured) each strived to meet their own unique domestic policy goals during their terms as president of the United States.

George H. W. Bush did not serve a second term as president, losing the 1992 election to Bill Clinton. Clinton won, in part, by focusing on economic issues. The recession that had begun in 1990 ended less than a year later, but the sluggish economy still worried Americans. Clinton believed that promoting economic growth should be his main theme. A sign posted in his campaign headquarters said, “It’s the economy, stupid.”

The economy has always been a major political issue. Modern presidents know that to be successful, they must steadily guide the economy. But doing so has proved to be a difficult task.

The economy boomed under Clinton. The stock market climbed to record heights,

thanks largely to the computer revolution. Internet-based businesses, often called dot-coms, multiplied rapidly. Economists refer to the too-rapid expansion of a sector of the economy as a "bubble." A year before George W. Bush, son of George H. W. Bush, took office in 2001, the dot-com bubble burst. Stock prices plunged, and the economy went into a recession.

The economy roared back early in Bush's second term, only to take a nosedive again late in 2007. Home prices had soared, thanks in part to questionable lending practices. When the housing bubble burst, home prices fell, and the economy fell with them. In 2009, when Barack Obama took office as president, the nation's economy faced serious problems.

The economy is a key domestic issue. But it has never been the only one. All three of these presidents came into office with several goals. In a country deeply divided in its party loyalties, none of them would accomplish all they had hoped. In this lesson, you will examine how Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump have tried to meet their domestic policy goals after entering the Oval Office.

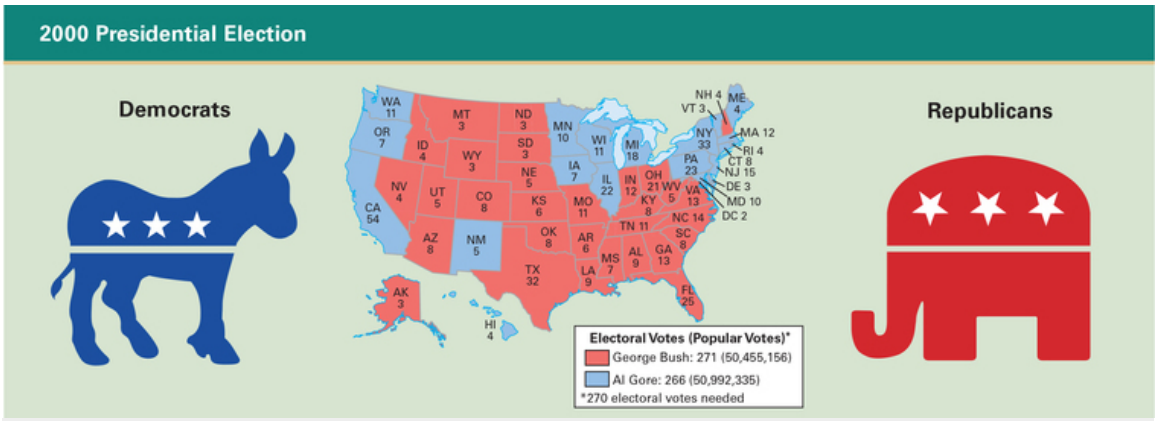
On January 20, 2017, President Donald Trump, accompanied by First Lady Melania Trump, was sworn in to office.

# 1. Parties and Politics at the Turn of the Century

At the turn of the 21st century, American politics was taking a new shape. Many observers believed that the nation had splintered politically into two main camps. On election night in 2000, the major television networks gave this split a color code, using the same two colors to shade their election maps. Red represented states in which a majority voted for Republican George W. Bush. Blue signified states that favored Democrat Al Gore. By evening's end, there seemed to be two Americas—red and blue. However, a closer look at recent elections reveals a more complex picture.

**Red America vs. Blue America** Voters in red states in the 2000 election

generally supported a conservative agenda. They believed in reducing the size of government, lowering taxes, maintaining a strong military, and promoting traditional social values. This agenda appealed to many evangelical Christians and people living in small towns. It also attracted many blue-collar workers, veterans, and businesspeople. These groups made up the Republican Party's **political base**, or core of supporters.




The terms red state and blue state originated with the 2000 presidential election map. Red states are states in which the majority votes Republican. In blue states, the majority votes Democratic. Although the red states cover more territory, the blue states are usually more densely populated. The result was a very close election in 2000.

The voters in blue states in the 2000 election included those who had long been loyal to the party—liberals, African Americans, immigrants, and union members. They were united by their belief in government's power to improve life for ordinary people.

Not everyone was willing to accept the red vs. blue split. Both parties had a large group of moderates who favored welfare reform, a balanced budget, and a tough stand on crime. In a speech delivered at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, a state senator from Illinois named Barack Obama said,

> [T]here's not a liberal America and a conservative America—there's the United States of America. There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America—there's the United States of America. The pundits [self-appointed experts] like to slice-and-dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I've got news for them, too. . . . We are one people, all of us pledging

allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.

—Barack Obama, speech at the Democratic National Convention, 2004


A young supporter of the Green Party holds a sign for candidate Ralph Nader in the 2000 presidential election. The Green Party platform focused on the need for universal health care, environmental and consumer protections, and campaign finance reform. The Green Party failed to attract a significant number of people away from the traditional two-party system and won only 2.7 percent of the vote in the 2000 election.

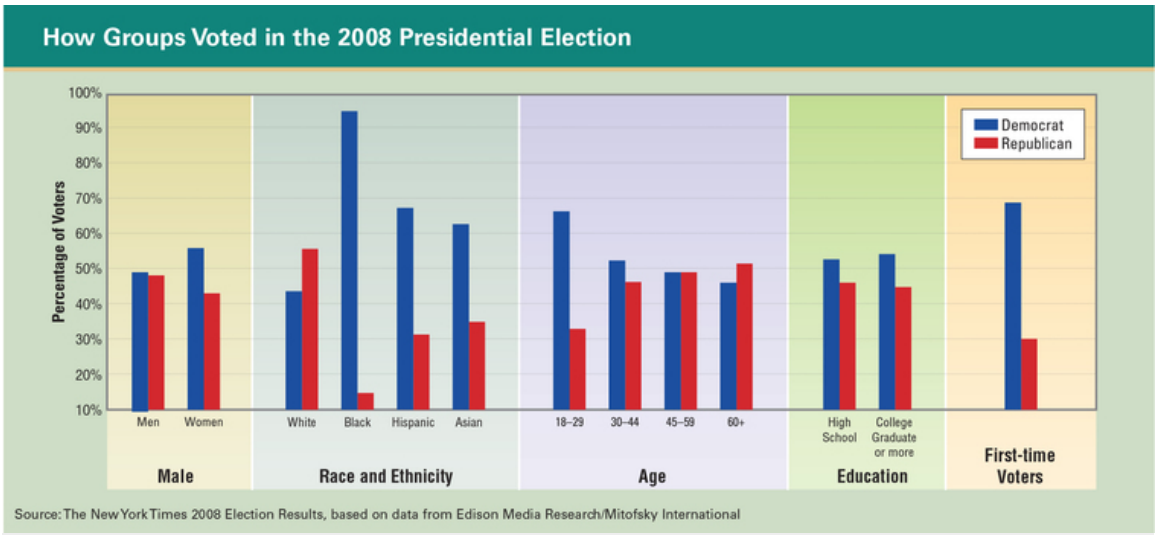
Obama's stirring speech brought him national recognition. It was the first step on the road that would lead him to the presidency five years later.

**Neither Red Nor Blue: Independents and Third-Party Voters** About 42 percent of registered voters define themselves as independents. As a result, neither Democrats nor Republicans can claim that their party represents a majority of the **electorate**, or the officially qualified voters. To win elections, both parties must also appeal to independent voters.

This new political arithmetic drove Bill Clinton's decision in 1992 to campaign as a moderate, or what Democratic party leaders called a **New Democrat**. It also helped motivate Republican George W. Bush in 2000 to promote more caring social policies, which he called "compassionate conservatism." Even so, in both of those elections, millions of voters rejected the major party nominees. Instead, they cast their ballots for third-party presidential candidates.

The most successful third-party candidate in recent elections was Texas billionaire Ross Perot. In 1992, Perot ran for president as an independent candidate. On election day, Perot received 19 percent of the votes cast. This was the best showing for a third-party candidate since Theodore Roosevelt ran for president as a Progressive in 1912.

In 2000, consumer advocate Ralph Nader ran for president on the Green Party ticket. The roughly 2.9 million votes cast for Nader amounted to only 2.7 percent of the national vote. But that election was so close that many Democrats accused Nader of acting as a "spoiler" whose campaign cost their candidate, Al Gore, the White House.




The Republican and Democratic parties have always appealed to different groups of voters. In the early 21st century, however, both parties struggled to adapt to a decrease in party loyalty and an increase in independent voters.

In 1992, Ross Perot became the first third-party candidate to participate in televised presidential debates. “Look at all three of us,” Perot advised viewers. “Decide who you think will do the job, pick that person in November, because believe me, as I’ve said before, the party’s over, and it’s time for the cleanup crew.”

# 2. Bill Clinton: A New Democrat in the White House

As Democrats approached the 1992 presidential election, they had to confront some unpleasant realities. The New Deal coalition was broken. The Reagan Revolution had moved the nation to the right. And George H. W. Bush, running for a second term, began the campaign with high approval ratings. To overcome

these obstacles, the party needed an appealing candidate with a fresh message. It found both traits in the young, five-term governor of Arkansas: Bill Clinton.

**The Election of 1992 Leaves Clinton Without a Mandate** Clinton reached out to voters as a New Democrat who cared deeply about the struggles and concerns of ordinary Americans. When he accepted the Democratic nomination, he spoke of creating a new style of government, which he described as

> a government that is leaner, not meaner; a government that expands opportunity, not bureaucracy; a government that understands that jobs must come from growth in a vibrant and vital system of free enterprise. . . . We offer opportunity. We demand responsibility. We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal. In many ways, it is not even Republican or Democratic. It is different. It is new. And it will work.
>
> —Bill Clinton, speech accepting the nomination for president at the Democratic National Convention, 1992

Opportunity, responsibility, and community became the central themes of Clinton's campaign.

Two factors helped Clinton overcome Bush's early lead. The first was the recession that began in 1990. As the months passed and the economy continued to limp along, Bush's popularity sank. Clinton gained ground by focusing on how to get the economy moving again. The second factor was the third-party candidacy of Ross Perot. The Texas billionaire promised to restore prosperity by balancing the federal budget and reducing the national debt. His frank talk about the economy attracted voters who felt dissatisfied by the two main parties. Many of Perot's supporters opposed the two established candidates and mounted a successful grassroots effort to put him on the ballot in all 50 states.

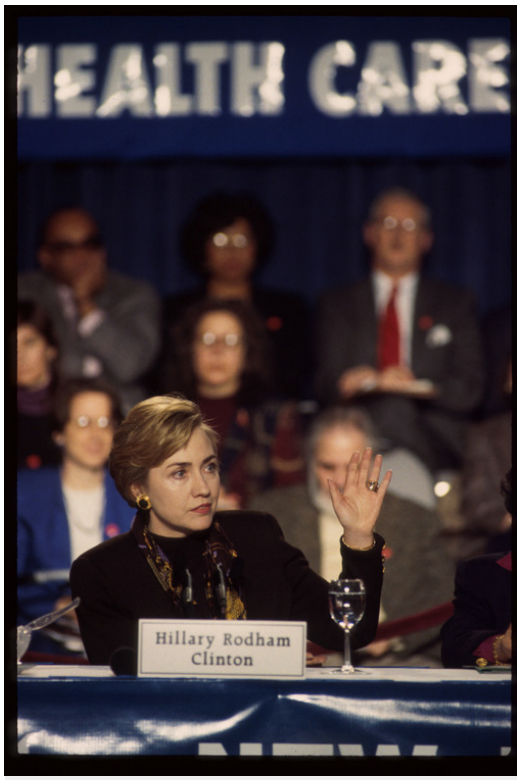
On election day, Clinton won 32 of 50 states. But owing to Perot's strong showing at the polls, Clinton received only 43 percent of the popular vote—the lowest percentage for a winning presidential candidate since 1912.

**Legislative Wins and Losses** Clinton took office with a Democratic majority in both houses of Congress. With this support, he won several legislative victories, including passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act. This law allowed workers to take time off for the birth or adoption of a child or family emergencies without

risking their jobs.

However, Clinton failed to reform the nation's health insurance system. Since the end of World War II, most working Americans received health insurance through their employers. The creation of Medicare and Medicaid in the 1960s provided health insurance to retirees and the poor. Even so, when Clinton took office in 1993, millions of Americans had no health insurance.




President Clinton appointed his wife, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, to lead a committee charged with developing a plan for universal health care, but the resulting proposal was widely criticized and died in Congress. Several years later, Hillary Clinton would first represent New York as a U.S. senator, move to serve as President Obama's first secretary of state, and then become the Democratic presidential candidate in the 2016 election.

In 1993, Clinton sent to Congress a plan for sweeping reform of the nation's health care system. The plan sought to provide **universal health care**, or health care for all Americans. But the plan proved overly complex, and it faced fierce criticism by Republicans. Many health care providers opposed it, fearing increased government regulation. After much debate, Congress failed to act on

the plan. When Clinton left office in 2000, about 40 million Americans still lacked health insurance.

**Republicans Take Control of Congress** Every two years, congressional elections take place. Since they occur in the middle of a president's term, they are known as **midterm elections**. As the 1994 midterm elections approached, Republicans aimed to gain control of Congress. Led by Georgia Representative Newt Gingrich, Republican candidates appealed to voters with a 10-point plan called the **Contract with America**. The contract promised that, if elected, Republicans would strive to balance the federal budget, combat crime, reform the welfare system, cut taxes, create jobs, and minimize lawsuits. The contract captured many voters' imaginations. In 1995, Republicans had gained a majority in both the House and the Senate for the first time since the mid 1950s.

House Republicans set out to balance the federal budget. They called for major cutbacks in government spending on education, welfare, and Medicare. Clinton rejected their plan, claiming the reductions were too steep. Both sides refused to alter their stances. Without a budget to authorize expenditures, the government prepared to close down in mid-November 1995. On the eve of the shutdown, Clinton met with Republican leaders. "I am not going to sign your budget," he told them. "It is wrong. It is wrong for the country."

The next day, a large part of the federal government came to a standstill. Most Americans blamed Congress for the shutdown. The government did not fully reopen until early 1996, after Congress approved a budget that Clinton would accept.

**Reforming the Welfare System** Republicans in Congress next turned to welfare reform. The U.S. welfare system included a federal program known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Initiated during the Depression as part of the Social Security system, this program gave money to unemployed single mothers. By 1996, nearly 5 million women and 9 million children were receiving public assistance under AFDC.

Critics of the welfare system charged that instead of serving as a temporary safety net to help families through hard times, AFDC had created a culture of poverty that continued from one generation to the next. They pointed out that if welfare recipients married or found work, they would lose their welfare benefits. Such eligibility rules, they claimed, discouraged mothers from making changes that might help them gain economic stability. The program's opponents also observed

that children raised in homes with no working parent were more likely to need welfare as adults.

During his 1992 campaign, Clinton had pledged to "end welfare as we know it." Some Democrats took this to mean reforming AFDC. Instead, the Republican-controlled Congress abolished AFDC and created a new system, called **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families** (TANF). TANF limited the amount of time a family could receive welfare payments to five years. Its goal was to get mothers off welfare and into the workforce as quickly as possible.

Despite protests from Democrats that the new law would increase poverty and hunger, Clinton signed the welfare reform bill. It soon made a significant impact. Employment of single mothers increased dramatically. As it did, the child poverty rate decreased from 20.2 percent in 1995 to 15.8 percent in 2001.

**A Balanced Budget and an Economic Boom** Clinton's support for welfare reform, coupled with an improving economy, boosted his popularity as president. In 1996, he easily won reelection. The victory made Clinton the first Democratic president since Franklin Roosevelt to secure a second term.

Clinton began his second term determined to avoid another budget impasse. Over the next year, Republicans and Democrats worked together to craft a tax-cut bill and the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. "This legislation represents an historic compromise," said Clinton, "a monument to the progress that people of goodwill can make when they put aside partisan [political party] interests to work together for the common good and our common future."

In 1998, the federal budget ran its first surplus in nearly 30 years. A **budget surplus** occurs when the government takes in more money than it spends. Clinton's efforts to slow federal spending contributed to the surplus. A surge in tax revenues, however, had an even greater impact.

By 1998, the country was enjoying a period of prosperity. It was largely driven by new business opportunities related to the Internet. By linking computers all over the world, the Internet gave businesses instant access to distant markets. It made today's global economy possible. The Internet also gave rise to a host of online businesses. Their Web addresses ended in .com—short for *commercial*. As the dot-com boom continued, unemployment dropped to around 4 percent, the lowest it had been in 30 years. Inflation also remained low, while stock prices soared.

In 1998, President Clinton lied under oath about his relationship with a White House intern. The House of Representatives impeached Clinton for perjury and obstruction of justice. The Senate, however, chose not to remove him from office.

As the amount of money people earned, spent, and invested increased, tax revenues poured into the federal treasury, helping put the federal budget in surplus. The budget surplus continued through the year 2001. “If we maintain our fiscal discipline,” Clinton declared, “America will entirely pay off the national debt by 2015.” Republicans argued that the government should return some of the surplus to taxpayers in the form of tax cuts.

**Surviving Scandal and Impeachment** Rumors of scandals dogged Clinton from the start of his presidency. The primary charge was that he had illegally profited from an investment in an Arkansas real estate development called Whitewater. Accusations also surfaced of his having had numerous affairs while he was governor of Arkansas. In May 1994, a former Arkansas state employee filed a lawsuit accusing Clinton of sexual harassment.

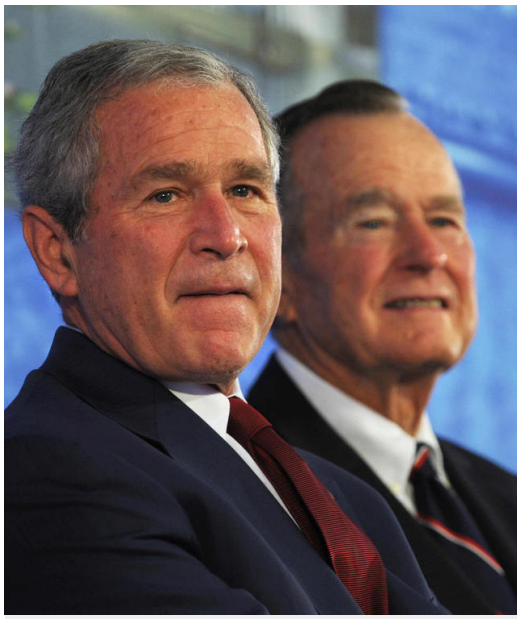
An independent panel appointed lawyer Kenneth Starr to investigate the Whitewater claims. In January 1998, Starr also obtained evidence that Clinton had engaged in an affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, which contradicted Clinton’s sworn testimony in the Arkansas sexual harassment case. In September, Starr submitted to Congress a report that accused the president of committing perjury, or lying under oath. The report also recommended that Clinton be impeached.

On December 19, 1998, the House voted along party lines to impeach President Clinton on two counts: (1) he had committed perjury, and (2) he had obstructed justice by lying under oath. In January 1999, the Senate tried Clinton on both counts. At the close of the trial, senators voted largely along party lines. As a result, the votes on both charges fell far short of the two-thirds needed to remove Clinton from office. After the trial Clinton asserted, "I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and on the American people."

Clinton not only survived the scandal but also ended his presidency around a remarkably high 65 percent approval rating. This was the best "end-of-career" showing of any president since the end of World War II.

**Bill Clinton's Domestic Agenda**

| Issue | Goals | Progress and Setbacks |
|---|---|---|
| **Crime** | Increase public safety and reduce gun violence | **Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994** Banned sales of some assault weapons, increased penalties for many crimes against women, and funded the hiring of 100,000 new police officers |
| | | **Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993** Required a waiting period and background check before purchase of a handgun |
| | | **Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 1999** Expanded hate crimes to include those based on gender, sexual orientation, or disability (supported by Clinton but failed to pass Congress) |
| **Trade** | Expand trade across U.S. borders | **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA; 1992)** Reduced trade barriers, such as tariffs, among the United States, Canada, and Mexico |
| **Civil Rights** | Continue Affirmative Action | **"Mend it, don't end it"** Fought off attempt to end affirmative action while improving how it works |
| | Promote equal rights for homosexuals | **Appointments of gays** Appointed more than 150 openly gay men and women to key executive and judicial positions |
| | | **"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Policy** Allowed homosexuals to serve in the military as long as they kept their sexual preference a secret |
| **Education** | Improve education and job opportunities for young people | **Corporation for National and Community Service (1993)** Launched AmeriCorps, which put young people to work on community projects in exchange for financial aid to help pay for college |
| | | **School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994)** Funded state programs designed to help high school students develop job skills |
| **Liberal Values** | Create a more liberal Supreme Court | **Supreme Court** Appointed Stephen Breyer and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, both liberals, to the Supreme Court |



George W. Bush was the 43rd president, and his father, George H. W. Bush, was the 41st. They are the second father-and-son pair to win the White House. The first was John Adams and John Quincy Adams.

# 3. George W. Bush: Conservatism in Action

To win the presidential election of 2000, Republicans needed a candidate who could unite Republicans while appealing to swing independent voters. That task fell to the governor of Texas, George W. Bush, son of former president George H. W. Bush. He would face Vice President Al Gore, a strong and seasoned campaigner. Gore could point to a soaring economy and years of peace as Democratic achievements. Some thought Bush's chances of beating him seemed slim at first. But as the months passed, Bush's theme of "compassionate conservatism" attracted voters. His promise of a more caring Republican Party became a central issue of his campaign.

**The Supreme Court Decides the 2000 Presidential Election** On election night

in 2000, Americans were stunned to see how close the presidential vote was. Gore led Bush in the popular vote by one half of 1 percent. The all-important Electoral College vote came out similarly close. With 270 votes needed to win, Gore had 266 and Bush 246. Florida's 25 electoral votes would decide the election. But the Florida vote proved too close to call. An initial count had Bush ahead by 1,784 votes. The next week, a recount by machine reduced his lead to just 327 votes.

In some counties, officials raised questions about confusing ballots or ballots that may not have been properly counted by voting machines. It was eventually demanded that those counties recount their votes by hand. To stop the recount, Bush filed a lawsuit known as ***Bush v. Gore***. When the Florida Supreme Court ruled against Bush, he appealed its decision to the Supreme Court. On December 12, 2000, the Court voted 5–4 to stop the recount. The majority reasoned that without clear legal standards for evaluating the ballots in question, a hand recount violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. This decision gave Florida's 25 electoral votes to Bush. On January 20, 2001, George W. Bush took the oath of office as the 43rd U.S. president.

The Supreme Court decision cast a cloud of doubt over Bush's **legitimacy**, or right to exercise power, as president. These doubts were largely dispelled when he won reelection in 2004. That year he became the first winning candidate since his father in 1988 to win more than 50 percent of the popular vote.

**Legislative Wins and Losses** For six of Bush's eight years in office, the Republicans had a majority in Congress. With this support, he was able to enact much, but not all, of his domestic agenda. This included passage of an education reform bill known as the **No Child Left Behind Act** (NCLB). Bush outlined the need for such reform in his speech accepting the Republican nomination in 2000:

> Too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade-to-grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge. This is discrimination, pure and simple—the soft bigotry of low expectations. . . . When a school district receives federal funds to teach poor children, we expect them to learn.
>
> —George W. Bush, speech accepting the nomination for president at the Republican National Convention, 2000


Many Florida voters in 2000 did not punch a tiny rectangle, called a “chad,” completely off their ballots. As a result, voting machines may not have counted their ballots. During a March 2001 election, the Palm Beach County supervisor of elections posted this information in polling places throughout the county to help voters avoid hanging chads. Subsequently, most local governments adopted different technology.

NCLB ushered in a new era in which **accountability** would become a key issue in public education. Accountability is based on the principle that individuals or organizations are responsible for their actions and should be able to show how well they are doing at achieving their goals. The next president would also create a federal education program called Race to the Top. While the two programs approached education reform in different ways, both contained provisions stating that it was necessary to make educators and school districts accountable. In practice, this meant testing students on a regular basis to determine their knowledge.

Bush's efforts to reform the Social Security system were less successful. Many political leaders agreed that the system was heading for trouble. With baby boomers moving into retirement, there would soon be too few workers to support the growing number of retirees at the current levels of benefits.

Bush proposed reforming the system by allowing workers to invest part of their Social Security tax payments in retirement accounts. He argued that personal accounts would provide workers with better pensions than the current system. It would also leave them with funds to pass on to their children. Critics complained that Bush's proposal could leave some workers worse off. Also, it would be an expensive approach. His plan never generated widespread support. By the end of 2005, Bush had dropped Social Security reform from his domestic agenda.

**Reviving the Economy with Tax Cuts** Bush had made cutting taxes a key element of his 2000 campaign. His pledge took on new urgency because the dot-com bubble began to burst in 2000. To spur an economic recovery, Bush pushed through Congress a plan that cut income tax rates for most Americans. But the economy received a second shock in 2001. Terrorists attacked the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon on September 11, or what became known as **9/11**. Unsure of what would happen next, Americans sharply reduced their spending. By the end of 2003, the U.S. economy had suffered a loss of more than 2 million jobs.


George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act increased federal funds to public schools. In exchange for these funds, schools were expected to show that their students were learning basic reading and math skills.

Bush responded by pushing Congress to reduce tax rates on earnings from savings and investments. Lower tax rates would hopefully encourage people to work harder, save more, and invest in new enterprises. His opponents charged that his tax cuts would mainly enrich the wealthy. They predicted that cutting tax rates would reduce tax revenues and create a string of budget deficits.

The federal budget did fall from a surplus of $128 billion in 2001 to a deficit of $158 billion in 2002. But the shift from surplus to deficit was not entirely due to the recession and tax cuts. The events of 9/11—which you will read more about in the next lesson—also played a part. In response to the attacks, Bush persuaded Congress to create a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to protect the country from terrorists. He also launched a war on terrorism in Afghanistan and, later, in Iraq. As spending to fight terrorism soared, so did budget deficits, surpassing $400 billion by 2004.

Some sources suggest Bush's the tax cuts helped stimulate an economic recovery, while others disagree. Regardless, as the economy rebounded, tax

revenues rose rapidly. To the surprise of Bush's critics, tax revenues in 2005 were higher than in any year since the peak of the dot-com boom in 2000. In addition, the share of income taxes paid by the wealthiest taxpayers was on the rise.


Large, new housing developments, which generated great wealth during the housing bubble, were especially affected by the downturn in the real estate market. In some areas, such as this development outside Las Vegas, Nevada, multiple homes on each street were repossessed by banks. Some homes were simply abandoned by owners who could no longer afford to pay for them.

**Start of the Great Recession** The economic expansion did not last long, due to a sharp decline in the housing market. For many years, house prices had been

increasing rapidly. From 1985 to 2006, the average sale price of a house rose from $100,000 to $300,000, and it was still climbing. A housing bubble had formed. A financial bubble occurs when investors bid up prices to unrealistic levels, often purchasing with borrowed money. In 2006, the bubble burst.

Owning a home has long been part of the American dream. But for many people, that dream turned into a nightmare. The government was partly to blame, and so were builders and bankers. Federal policies encouraged people to buy homes. Construction firms built too many houses. Banks approved too many subprime mortgages. A mortgage is a loan used to finance the purchase of a house. A subprime mortgage is a loan made to someone who may not be able to repay the loan.

Home values first jumped forward and then crashed. Many homeowners now owed more money to their mortgage lender than their house was worth. Foreclosures followed. A foreclosure is the legal process by which a bank can take over a mortgaged property when the borrower cannot pay back the loan.

The housing slump led to a severe economic downturn beginning in December 2007. Shocked by their homes' falling values, homeowners slowed their spending. With sales decreasing, businesses laid off workers. Rising unemployment cut consumption further. The downturn—the nation's worst since the Great Depression—would become known as the Great Recession.

Meanwhile, many big banks and other financial institutions had poured money into what are called mortgage-backed securities. These often included bundles of subprime mortgages. Banks believed that these risky investments would bring great profits in the booming housing market. When the boom went bust, so did their investments. Suddenly, a number of the nation's largest and richest firms were facing bankruptcy. By 2008, the entire financial system was on the brink of collapse.

**Bailouts** The federal government was forced to respond. President Bush and Congress crafted legislation to bail out the banks and other huge investment firms. Financial institutions like banks do business constantly with each other—cashing checks, handling transfers—and are always in debt to each other. Those firms were declared "too big to fail." If any one of these institutions went bankrupt, it could start a domino effect that would topple even those firms that were financially sound. The rescue package was called the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP. Congress allocated $700 billion to the program.

The Treasury Department used TARP funds to make loans to banks and also to buy from banks their “toxic assets.” These included mortgage-backed securities and other investments that had lost money and that nobody else was willing to buy. Using TARP funds, the Treasury Department also bought shares in the nation’s nine largest banks. The government—and therefore the people of the United States—thus became part owners of those banks.

The federal government also bailed out the American auto industry.  Bush approved the use of TARP funds to loan some $17 billion to auto makers General Motors and Chrysler. Additional funds went to auto parts suppliers and other sectors of the industry.

Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, especially the Ninth Ward section, shown here. The Bush administration took a lot of blame for the slow response to the catastrophe. A House bipartisan committee investigating preparation for and response to the disaster identified failures at all levels of government. It also stated bluntly, “Critical elements of the National Response Plan were executed late, ineffectively, or not at all.”

**Falling Approval Ratings**  After 9/11, the nation rallied behind President Bush. His approval rating soared to 90 percent. However, during his second term, Americans’ opinions of the president began to plummet. The economic crisis was just one of the factors that contributed to Bush’s falling popularity.

Another was the federal government's reaction to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The hurricane devastated New Orleans and other Gulf Coast towns, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. Yet the response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) seemed slow and disorganized.

A third factor was the war on terrorism. Some Americans believed that the expansive powers given to the Department of Homeland Security undermined their civil liberties. Probably most importantly, hundreds of Americans were dying each year in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wars were also sapping the Treasury, adding to mounting budget deficits.

During the 2006 midterm elections, many voters used their ballots to express dissatisfaction with Bush's policies. For the first time since 1994, Democrats won control of the House and the Senate. As you will learn in the next section, voters would also elect a Democratic president in 2008.

**George W. Bush's Domestic Agenda**

| Issue | Goals | Progress and Setbacks |
|---|---|---|
| **Social Welfare** | Encourage community and faith-based groups to help the needy | **Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (2001)** Assisted religious and community groups seeking federal funds to combat social problems such as homelessness and drug addiction |
| **Immigration** | Secure borders, create a guest worker program, and provide a path for undocumented immigrants to earn citizenship | **Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act** Proposed reforms in line with Bush's goals (approved by the House but rejected by the Senate)<br>**Secure Fence Act of 2006** Authorized construction of hundreds of miles of fencing to reduce illegal immigration from Mexico |
| **Health** | Help elderly pay for drugs and protect the sanctity of life | **Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit (2003)** Helped retirees and people with disabilities pay for needed prescription drugs<br>**Embryonic stem cell research ban** Limited federal funding of stem cell research to halt the use of human embryos in medical research |
| **Conservative Values** | Strengthen and support marriage and families | **"Marriage penalty"** Ended income tax provisions, resulting in some married people paying more taxes than if they had remained single<br>**Federal marriage amendment** Defined marriage as "the union of a man and a woman" (not approved by Congress) |
| | Create a more conservative Supreme Court | **Supreme Court** Appointed John Roberts and Samuel Alito, both conservatives, to the Supreme Court |


Many Americans, especially young people and minorities, were inspired by Barack Obama's run for president and his theme of bringing change to the established political system. Obama attracted enthusiastic crowds throughout his campaign. His personal charisma and stirring speeches helped him win the presidency.

# 4. Barack Obama: Working for Change

The election of 2008 pitted a young Democratic senator from Illinois, Barack Obama, against a much more experienced senator from Arizona, John McCain. Obama called for change. He criticized President Bush's tax-cut policies and his pursuit of the war in Iraq. Obama's campaign slogan "Yes, we can!" inspired Americans with aspirations for a greater country.

**Voters Are Drawn to Obama's Vision of Change** In 2008, in the midst of the election campaign, Barack Obama released a book. The book laid out the candidate's plan for restoring the economy and America's leadership position in the world. In it, he said,

> We stand at a moment of great challenge and great opportunity. All across America, a chorus of voices is swelling in a demand for

> change. The American people want the simple things that—for eight years—Washington hasn't delivered: an economy that honors the efforts of those who work hard, a national security policy that rallies the world to meet our shared threats and makes America safer, a politics that focuses on bringing people together across party lines to work for the common good. It's not too much to ask for. It is the change that the American people deserve.
>
> —Barack Obama, *Change We Can Believe In*, 2008

Voters responded favorably to Obama's ideas. He won the presidency with 365 electoral votes to McCain's 173, becoming the nation's first African American president. This landslide victory gave Obama a mandate to pursue his plan for moving the country in a new direction. Once in office, however, Obama would discover that real change can be difficult to bring about.

**The Great Recession Continues** Polls conducted before and after the election made it clear that the economy was the most important issue in the minds of voters. They had good reason to be concerned. The financial system, centered on investment firms, was still unstable. Home sales—a key indicator of economic health—remained sluggish, and housing prices slipped steadily lower. Companies continued to lay off workers. The recession showed no signs of ending.

Soon after his election, Obama began working with the Democratic leaders of Congress on ways to bring about an economic recovery. One result was an economic stimulus package. A **stimulus** is an attempt by the government to inject money into the economy to encourage growth. With a vote that was overwhelmingly along party lines and supported by only a few Republican lawmakers, the Democrats pushed the package through Congress. The final bill, passed in February 2009, contained $787 billion in spending and tax cuts. It included money for public works projects and tax credits for middle-class families. In March, Obama announced a second auto bailout to prevent the auto industry from collapsing. The government provided some $60 billion in aid to General Motors and Chrysler.

The recession officially ended in June 2009, five months after Obama took the oath of office. The economy began to grow again, but very slowly. Some economists credit the TARP bailout, begun under President Bush, with breathing life back into the banking system. They also agree that Obama's economic stimulus and auto bailout saved jobs and gave the economy a needed boost.

By the end of Barack Obama's presidency, his administration had added a total of 11.3 million jobs to the U.S. economy. The unemployment rate had stabilized just below 6 percent for the last three years of his presidency. The job market also saw an increase in the number of Americans doing part-time work or so-called "gig" jobs, like driving for ride-sharing services.

**Health Care Reform** In September 2009, President Obama outlined his plan for overhauling the nation's health care system. Some 40–50 million Americans had no health insurance at the time. Most others worried about the steadily rising cost of health care. Obama's plan sought to lower health costs, secure and stabilize health care for those who already had health insurance, and expand coverage to the millions who had none. A key element of Obama's plan was the "individual mandate"—a requirement that all Americans must buy health insurance.

The president urged Congress—where Democrats held a majority in both houses—to work out the details together, in a bipartisan way. That did not happen. Democrats made a few compromises to try to fashion a bill acceptable to Republicans, who disagreed with the president's approach. But in the end, the Affordable Care Act passed with only a single Republican vote in favor of it. On March 23, 2010, Obama signed the bill into law.

Republicans called the reform law a government takeover of health care. They claimed that its estimated $930 billion cost over 10 years was too high and that it would add to budget deficits. Referring to the law as "Obamacare," they vowed to repeal it. In 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in a 6–3 decision that tax credits available to those who were enrolled in either federal or state health insurance marketplaces was constitutional. This ruling meant that the Affordable Care Act would continue to function as President Obama intended. But debate about and attempts to repeal the law would continue for years.


House Republican Jim Jordan of Ohio is one of the founding members of the Freedom Caucus. Members of this caucus were often at odds with their moderate Republican colleagues during an unsuccessful attempt to repeal and replace the Afforable Care Act in 2017.

**The Tea Party** One of the groups that harshly criticized the Affordable Care Act was a new force on the political scene called the Tea Party. Taking its namesake from the Boston Tea Party of 1773, the group had no official leaders. It was a conservative, populist protest movement that arose in reaction to what it saw as too much government involvement in the economy.

The Tea Party never became an organized, separate political party, but it enjoyed a significant political influence within the Republican Party. In January 2015, nine members of the House formed the Freedom Caucus. Many more Republican members in the House have joined over time. One of the group's main goals is to move Republicans in Congress toward more conservative views on fiscal and social issues. Many in the caucus have ties to the original Tea Party movement.

**Gridlock** During the early part of 2010, President Obama and Congress agreed to raise the **debt ceiling**. The debt ceiling is the maximum amount of debt that the federal government is, by law, allowed to accumulate. In the 2010 midterm elections, Republicans won the House, and Democrats narrowly held onto their majority in the Senate. Soon, the president and lawmakers found themselves engaged in repeated episodes of **gridlock**—the inability to make progress—as they worked to lead and govern the nation.


Federal areas and lands, like monuments and parks, were closed to the public during the government shutdown in 2013. This image shows an empty National Mall with the Washington Monument in the background.

In 2013, the United States once again reached the nation's debt ceiling. Some conservative Republican lawmakers had blocked the passage of a new federal budget in order to prevent funding for the Affordable Care Act. This gridlock resulted in a shutdown of the federal government that lasted 16 days. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees were **furloughed**—told to take a mandatory leave of absence from their jobs without pay. As the shutdown dragged on and politicians argued, the Treasury Department announced that it would run out of money within days. If that happened, the United States would be unable to pay its debts, which would affect both the nation's economy and the global economy as well.

Faced with such a serious warning, the House and the Senate both agreed to work with the president to develop a package of long-term tax and spending policies that would cover the next decade. The debt ceiling was raised, and the government reopened. This episode exposed that there was not only continuing gridlock and division within the national government, but there also appeared to be gridlock and division within the Republican Party. Conservatives bitterly

conceded that their strategy had failed. Other Republicans expressed frustration that their conservative colleagues had focused on the health care law instead of on larger ideas, such as how the federal government funded programs and borrowed money. One Republican lawmaker lamented “Goose egg, nothing, we got nothing.”

**A Sudden Death Ignites a Political Battle** Throughout history, Supreme Court rulings have often led to vigorous division and debate in the United States. In early 2016, however, it was not a Supreme Court ruling that would politically divide Republicans and Democrats, but the very composition of the Court itself.

In a ceremony held in the White House Rose Garden on March 16, 2016, President Obama announced U.S. Court of Appeals judge Merrick Garland as his nomination to succeed Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court. Although Garland did meet informally with almost 50 senators, several of whom were Republicans, he never received a full Senate hearing on his nomination.

On February 13, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died unexpectedly while on vacation. President Reagan had appointed Scalia, who was perhaps the Court’s leading conservative. His death created an opening on the Court with under a year remaining in Barack Obama’s presidency. According to the Constitution, the president has the authority to nominate candidates for the Supreme Court, but the Senate is responsible for meeting with nominees,

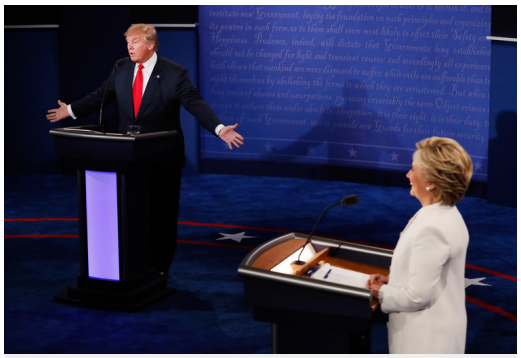
debating their qualifications, and confirming them as Supreme Court justices.

To fill the vacancy, President Obama nominated Merrick Garland, a judge in the U.S. Court of Appeals. Garland was respected by both Democrats and Republicans, and considered to be qualified to serve on the Supreme Court. However, Republicans controlled the Senate, and they hoped a Republican candidate would win the presidency later that year. With the ability to select a nominee for the Supreme Court also now up for grabs along with control of the White House, Republican leaders saw the chance for a major political opportunity.

Mitch McConnell, the Senate Majority Leader, announced that Republicans believed the next president should be the one to nominate the candidate to fill Scalia's position. Therefore, the Senate would not take any formal action on Merrick Garland's status as a Supreme Court nominee. Democratic lawmakers were outraged, and President Obama was also frustrated by the partisan nature of the Senate's decision. In the end, the Republican decision to use this delay action was a successful tactic. The next president would indeed be the one to nominate the next person to serve on the Court.

**Barack Obama's Domestic Agenda**

| Issue | Goals | Progress and Setbacks |
|---|---|---|
| **Education** | Provide a high-quality education for all children to enable them to succeed in a global economy | **"Race to the Top"** Offered grants to states and school districts that made notable advances in educational reform and innovation<br>**"Education to Innovate"** Aimed at improving the participation and performance of students in science and technology |
| **Energy and the Environment** | Reduce dependence on oil, promote energy efficiency, and invest in a clean energy future | **Cap and trade** Effort to reduce greenhouse gases and thus global warming by setting a cap, or limit, on carbon emissions (approved by the House but rejected by the Senate)<br>**New national fuel efficiency standards** Aimed at raising average fuel economy to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025 |
| **Health** | Find cures to various diseases and conditions | **Embryonic stem cell research** Removed barriers that prevented the federal funding of scientific research involving human stem cells |
| **Liberal Values** | Create a more liberal Supreme Court | **Supreme Court** Appointed Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, both liberals, to the Supreme Court |



Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton debated each other in Las Vegas, Nevada, on October 19, 2016. By this point in the campaign, tensions between the two candidates were so palpable that they did not shake hands before or after this debate.

# 5. Donald Trump: Focusing on America First

With President Obama's second term as president coming to an end, the divide between the two sides of the American political spectrum continued to increase drastically. This division only grew more tangible during the 2016 presidential election. After her victory in the Democratic primary election, the Democratic Party nominated Hillary Clinton as its presidential candidate in 2016. After a primary season where the Republican field briefly numbered as many as 17 candidates, Donald Trump emerged with the Republican nomination for president.

**The 2016 Presidential Candidates** As the Democratic presidential candidate in 2016, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama's former secretary of state and wife of former President Bill Clinton, was attempting to become the first female president of the United States. Her policies were similar to those of Barack Obama. She supported ideas like maintaining the Affordable Care Act and working together as a nation to create racial and economic equality.

However, Clinton faced challenges during her campaign. She often had difficulties

expressing her vision for the nation and how her potential presidency would be different from President Obama's time in office. In addition, her campaign was challenged by an ongoing federal investigation that was being conducted regarding her use of a private e-mail server instead of a government server to fulfill her duties as secretary of state.

Some compared Donald Trump to Andrew Jackson because Trump had a populist message that sought to shake up the political world and Jackson had challenged the political establishment of his day. Trump supported policies that placed the interests of the United States ahead of international concerns or its relationships with other nations. This included a call to increase security along the country's southern border with Mexico by constructing a physical wall. Additionally, he wanted to replace the Affordable Care Act, vowing to repeal the law and substitute it with legislation that would offer quality health care at a lower cost.


Artist Scott Reeder installed this "Real Fake" sculpture outside of Trump International Hotel and Tower in Chicago, Illinois, as a comment on Trump's dismissal of the media's criticisms as "fake news." Trump's campaign was filled with controversy and sparked people to protest in various ways.

Trump used social media to connect with voters, underscoring the importance of social media during the 2016 presidential election. One expert stated that Donald Trump had used Twitter to his advantage by embracing the immediate moment, using unvarnished expression, and taking risks. Another researcher who also

studied social media and the election found that 62 percent of U.S. adults had relied on various social media platforms as sources for news information.

This intersection of increased social media use and news gave rise to a new term: "fake news." "**Fake news**" is defined as any type of news that is intentionally designed to mislead and can be verified as false information. Research that was conducted after the election found that "fake news" articles about politics had a significant presence on some social media sites. During the election campaign, experts also saw a decline in the level of trust that some American voters had in the mainstream media. This was particularly true among Republican voters.


During Donald Trump's presidential campaign, supporters rallied around his slogan, "Make America Great Again," which emphasized Trump's "America First" agenda. Other Americans criticized Trump's campaign as a resurgence of nativism, or the policy of favoring the interests of native-born Americans over those of immigrants.

Trump was a controversial candidate. Many who opposed him thought he was undignified and unsuitable to be president. Support for this perspective intensified in early October 2016 when *The Washington Post* released a 2005 interview that Trump participated in. An open, or "hot," microphone had recorded him joking and

making comments about the manner in which he claimed he could treat women. Many believed that his remarks were offensive, inappropriate, and vulgar. Speculation swirled that he might drop out of the presidential race in favor of his vice-presidential candidate, Mike Pence. However, Trump pledged to be "a better man tomorrow," and his campaign, as well as the controversy surrounding it, rolled on.

In his inaugural address, President Trump emphasized the power of the American people.

**Reactions to the Election** Hillary Clinton won the popular vote in the 2016 election, but Donald Trump won more delegates in the Electoral College. In his inaugural address, President Trump spoke of the power that the American people held.

> It belongs to everyone gathered here today and everyone watching all across America. This is your day. This is your celebration. And this, the United States of America, is your country. What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people. January 20th 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again.
>
> —Inaugural Address of President Donald J. Trump, January 20, 2017

In their analysis of the 2016 presidential election, some people theorized that Trump's win signaled a strong rejection of U.S. immigration and trade policies at the time, a growing resentment toward globalization, and an increased weariness with the concept of "political correctness," or the need to refrain from using

language that people might consider insensitive due to its references to politics, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Some researchers declared that social media provided the main vehicle for Trump's political success, but others have urged caution about suggesting such a definite cause-effect relationship.

On January 21, 2017, hundreds of thousands of Americans gathered in Washington, D.C., and in many other U.S. cities. They assembled to support racial and gender equality, as well as women's issues. Known as the Women's March, the event was considered an organized protest against Trump's election.

The day after President Trump's inauguration, hundreds of thousands of women and men participated in the nationwide Women's March. In Washington, D.C., crowds of protesters flooded the

**The Trump Presidency** With legislative power in both the House and the Senate now firmly in their grasp thanks to the 2016 election, Congressional Republicans set out to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act.

Conservatives wanted any new health care bill to make drastic cuts to Medicaid. Moderates opposed such deep reductions, fearing many Americans would lose their health insurance. Even President Trump called one potential piece of legislation "mean" and urged Republicans to compromise. In a quirk of fate, Senator John McCain, Obama's opponent in the 2008 presidential election, cast the deciding "no" vote during a repeal and replace effort in 2017.

With Donald Trump in office, the Republican Senate's gamble to make the nomination for the Supreme Court had paid off. Neil Gorsuch, a U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judge known for his conservative views, was confirmed as President Trump's appointment to the Supreme Court.

**Donald Trump's Domestic Agenda**

| Issue | Goals | Progress and Setbacks |
|---|---|---|
| **Border Security and Travel Ban** | Improve the nation's border security and the enforcement of immigration laws | **Executive Order** Signed on January 25, 2017 to direct federal funding for the construction of a wall along the border with Mexico, call for the hiring of more Border Patrol agents, and seek to end the practice of releasing undocumented immigrants awaiting court hearings<br>**Executive Order** Signed on January 27, 2017 to suspend or prohibit the entry of immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries into the United States. Full implementation of several different versions of the travel ban faced numerous legal challenges. |
| **Deregulation** | Reduce regulation and regulatory costs | **Executive Order** Signed on January 30, 2017 to require executive departments and agencies to cut two regulations for every new one that was proposed. Any needed regulatory costs had to be offset with cuts of existing expenses. |
| **Health** | Study the federal response to combating drug addiction and addressing the national opioid crisis | **Executive Order** Signed on March 29, 2017 to establish a commission to study the effectiveness of the federal government's response to the issues of drug addiction and the opioid crisis |
| **Conservative Values** | Create a more conservative Supreme Court | **Supreme Court** Appointed Neil Gorsuch, a conservative, to the Supreme Court |

# Summary

**Each U.S. president since 1992 has struggled to meet his domestic policy goals.**

**Bill Clinton** As a moderate New Democrat, Clinton breathed new life into the Democratic coalition. One of his main legacies is welfare reform. Clinton failed to enact universal health care, however. In his second term, Clinton was impeached but not removed from office.

**Contract with America** In the 1994 midterm elections, Republicans won control of Congress with their 10-point Contract with America.

***Bush v. Gore*** In the 2000 election, Al Gore led George W. Bush in the popular vote by a very thin margin. The Supreme Court decided the outcome of the election, denying Gore's demand for a recount in Florida.

**George W. Bush** As a candidate, Bush reached out to moderates with his compassionate conservatism. One of his main legacies is education reform. However, Bush failed to reform the Social Security system.

**Barack Obama** Faced with a slow-growing economy and high unemployment, Obama pushed an economic stimulus package through Congress. However, his jobs bill faced tough Republican opposition, as did his comprehensive health-care reform law.

**Donald Trump** A populist message that pledged to reduce illegal immigration and government regulation helped Trump score an unlikely political upset.

# *Shelby County v. Holder*, 2013

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to address state and local laws that prevented African Americans from voting, such as literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses. Sections 4 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act required states that had enabled voter suppression in the past to get federal approval for any proposed changes to their voting laws. The formula to determine which states were subject to preclearance was outlined in Section 4(b) of the act, making any state that had voting tests in place in November, 1964, and had less than 50% turnout in the 1964 presidential election. In 2006, Congress voted to extend the Voting Rights Act—including Sections 4 and 5—for another 25 years.

Because of its history of voter suppression, Shelby County, Alabama, was subject to the restrictions placed by Sections 4 and 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Shelby County fought against those restrictions, arguing that these sections of the Voting Rights Act violated Article 4 of the Constitution and the Tenth Amendment. Article 4 guarantees each state the right to self-government. The Tenth Amendment reserves for the states all powers that are not expressly delegated to the federal government. The federal government argued that these sections were within Congress's powers under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees every person's right to due process of law, and the Fifteenth Amendment protects the right to vote regardless of racial background.

Shelby County v. Holder came before the Supreme Court in 2013. The Court ruled 5-4 that Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional, violating Article 4 and the Tenth Amendment. Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote the majority opinion, which you can find below.

### *Shelby County v. Holder*, 2013

Chief Justice Roberts delivered the opinion of the Court.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 employed extraordinary measures to address an extraordinary problem. Section 5 of the Act required States to obtain federal permission before enacting any law related to voting—a drastic departure from basic principles of federalism. And §4 of the Act applied that requirement only to some States—an equally dramatic departure from the principle that all States enjoy equal sovereignty. This was strong medicine, but Congress determined it was needed to address entrenched racial discrimination in voting, "an insidious and pervasive evil which had been perpetuated in certain parts of our country through unremitting and ingenious defiance of the Constitution." South Carolina v. Katzenbach, 383 U. S. 301, 309 (1966). As we explained in upholding the law, "exceptional conditions can justify legislative measures not otherwise appropriate." Id., at 334. Reflecting the unprecedented nature of these measures, they were scheduled to expire after five years. See Voting Rights Act of 1965, §4(a), 79Stat. 438.

Nearly 50 years later, they are still in effect; indeed, they have been made more stringent, and are now scheduled to last until 2031. There is no denying, however, that the conditions that originally justified these measures no longer characterize voting in the covered jurisdictions. By 2009, "the racial gap in voter registration and turnout [was] lower in the States originally covered by §5 than it [was] nationwide." Northwest Austin Municipal Util. Dist. No. One v. Holder, 557 U. S. 193 –204 (2009). Since that time, Census Bureau data indicate that African-American voter turnout has come to exceed white voter turnout in five of the six States originally covered by §5, with a gap in the sixth State of less than one half of one percent. See Dept. of Commerce, Census Bureau, Re-ported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and His-panic Origin, for States (Nov. 2012) (Table 4b).

At the same time, voting discrimination still exists; no one doubts that. The question is whether the Act's extraordinary measures, including its disparate treatment of the States, continue to satisfy constitutional requirements. As we put it a short time ago, "the Act imposes current burdens and must be justified by current needs."

Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 203.

I

A

The Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870, in the wake of the Civil War. It provides that "[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," and it gives Congress the "power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

"The first century of congressional enforcement of the Amendment, however, can only be regarded as a failure." Id., at 197. In the 1890s, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia began to enact literacy tests for voter registration and to employ other methods designed to prevent African-Americans from voting. Katzenbach, 383 U. S., at 310. Congress passed statutes outlawing some of these practices and facilitating litigation against them, but litigation remained slow and expensive, and the States came up with new ways to discriminate as soon as existing ones were struck down. Voter registration of African-Americans barely improved. Id., at 313–314.

Inspired to action by the civil rights movement, Congress responded in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act. Section 2 was enacted to forbid, in all 50 States, any "standard, practice, or procedure . . . imposed or applied . . . to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." 79Stat. 437. The current version forbids any "standard, practice, or procedure" that "results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color." 42 U. S. C. §1973(a). Both the Federal Government and individuals have sued to enforce §2, see, e.g., Johnson v. De Grandy, 512 U. S. 997 (1994) , and injunctive relief is available in appropriate cases to block voting laws from going into effect, see 42 U. S. C. §1973j(d). Section 2 is permanent, applies nationwide, and is not at issue in this case.

Other sections targeted only some parts of the country. At the time

of the Act's passage, these "covered" jurisdictions were those States or political subdivisions that had maintained a test or device as a prerequisite to voting as of November 1, 1964, and had less than 50 percent voter registration or turnout in the 1964 Presidential election. §4(b), 79Stat. 438. Such tests or devices included literacy and knowledge tests, good moral character requirements, the need for vouchers from registered voters, and the like. §4(c), id., at 438–439. A covered jurisdiction could "bail out" of coverage if it had not used a test or device in the preceding five years "for the purpose or with the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color." §4(a), id., at 438. In 1965, the covered States included Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. The additional covered subdivisions included 39 counties in North Carolina and one in Arizona. See 28 CFR pt. 51, App. (2012).

In those jurisdictions, §4 of the Act banned all such tests or devices. §4(a), 79Stat. 438. Section 5 provided that no change in voting procedures could take effect until it was approved by federal authorities in Washington, D. C.—either the Attorney General or a court of three judges. Id., at 439. A jurisdiction could obtain such "preclearance" only by proving that the change had neither "the purpose [nor] the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color." Ibid.

Sections 4 and 5 were intended to be temporary; they were set to expire after five years. See §4(a), id., at 438; Northwest Austin, supra, at 199. In South Carolina v. Katzenbach, we upheld the 1965 Act against constitutional challenge, explaining that it was justified to address "voting discrimination where it persists on a pervasive scale." 383 U. S., at 308.

In 1970, Congress reauthorized the Act for another five years, and extended the coverage formula in §4(b) to jurisdictions that had a voting test and less than 50 percent voter registration or turnout as of 1968. Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970, §§3–4, 84Stat. 315. That swept in several counties in California, New Hampshire, and New York. See 28 CFR pt. 51, App. Congress also extended the ban in §4(a) on tests and devices nationwide. §6, 84Stat. 315.

In 1975, Congress reauthorized the Act for seven more years, and extended its coverage to jurisdictions that had a voting test and less than 50 percent voter registration or turnout as of 1972. Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1975, §§101, 202, 89Stat. 400, 401. Congress also amended the definition of "test or device" to include the practice of providing English-only voting materials in places where over five percent of voting-age citizens spoke a single language other than English. §203, id., at 401–402. As a result of these amendments, the States of Alaska, Arizona, and Texas, as well as several counties in California, Flor-ida, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and South Da-kota, became covered jurisdictions. See 28 CFR pt. 51, App. Congress correspondingly amended sections 2 and 5 to forbid voting discrimination on the basis of membership in a language minority group, in addition to discrimination on the basis of race or color. §§203, 206, 89Stat. 401, 402. Finally, Congress made the nationwide ban on tests and devices permanent. §102, id., at 400.

In 1982, Congress reauthorized the Act for 25 years, but did not alter its coverage formula. See Voting Rights Act Amendments, 96Stat. 131. Congress did, however, amend the bailout provisions, allowing political subdivisions of covered jurisdictions to bail out. Among other prerequisites for bailout, jurisdictions and their subdivisions must not have used a forbidden test or device, failed to receive preclearance, or lost a §2 suit, in the ten years prior to seeking bailout. §2, id., at 131–133.

We upheld each of these reauthorizations against constitutional challenge. See Georgia v. United States, 411 U. S. 526 (1973) ; City of Rome v. United States, 446 U. S. 156 (1980) ; Lopez v. Monterey County, 525 U. S. 266 (1999) .

In 2006, Congress again reauthorized the Voting Rights Act for 25 years, again without change to its coverage formula. Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and [Amendments] Act, 120Stat. 577. Congress also amended §5 to prohibit more conduct than before. §5, id., at 580– 581; see Reno v. Bossier Parish School Bd., 528 U. S. 320, 341 (2000) (Bossier II); Georgia v. Ashcroft, 539 U. S. 461, 479 (2003) . Section 5 now forbids voting changes with "any

discriminatory purpose" as well as voting changes that diminish the ability of citizens, on account of race, color, or language minority status, "to elect their preferred candidates of choice." 42 U. S. C. §§1973c(b)–(d).

Shortly after this reauthorization, a Texas utility district brought suit, seeking to bail out from the Act's [coverage] and, in the alternative, challenging the Act's constitutionality. See Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 200–201. A three-judge District Court explained that only a State or political subdivision was eligible to seek bailout under the statute, and concluded that the utility district was not a political subdivision, a term that encompassed only "counties, parishes, and voter-registering subunits." Northwest Austin Municipal Util. Dist. No. One v. Mukasey, 573 F. Supp. 2d 221, 232 (DC 2008). The District Court also rejected the constitutional challenge. Id., at 283.

We reversed. We explained that " 'normally the Court will not decide a constitutional question if there is some other ground upon which to dispose of the case.' " Northwest Austin, supra, at 205 (quoting Escambia County v. McMillan, 466 U. S. 48, 51 (1984) (per curiam)). Concluding that "underlying constitutional concerns," among other things, "compel[led] a broader reading of the bailout provision," we construed the statute to allow the utility district to seek bailout. Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 207. In doing so we expressed serious doubts about the Act's [continued] constitutionality.

We explained that §5 "imposes substantial federalism costs" and "differentiates between the States, despite our [historic] tradition that all the States enjoy equal sovereignty." Id., at 202, 203 (internal quotation marks omitted). We also noted that "[t]hings have changed in the South. Voter turnout and registration rates now approach parity. Blatantly discriminatory evasions of federal decrees are rare. And minority candidates hold office at [unprecedented] levels." Id., at 202. Finally, we questioned whether the problems that §5 meant to address were still "concentrated in the jurisdictions singled out for preclearance." Id., at 203.

Eight Members of the Court subscribed to these views, and the remaining Member would have held the Act unconstitutional.

Ultimately, however, the Court's construction of the bailout provision left the constitutional issues for another day.

B

Shelby County is located in Alabama, a covered jurisdiction. It has not sought bailout, as the Attorney General has recently objected to voting changes proposed from within the county. See App. 87a–92a. Instead, in 2010, the county sued the Attorney General in Federal District Court in Washington, D. C., seeking a declaratory judgment that sections 4(b) and 5 of the Voting Rights Act are facially unconstitutional, as well as a permanent injunction against their enforcement. The District Court ruled against the county and upheld the Act. 811 F. Supp. 2d 424, 508 (2011). The court found that the evidence before Congress in 2006 was sufficient to justify reauthorizing §5 and continuing the §4(b) coverage formula.

The Court of Appeals for the D. C. Circuit affirmed. In assessing §5, the D. C. Circuit considered six primary categories of evidence: Attorney General objections to voting changes, Attorney General requests for more information regarding voting changes, successful §2 suits in covered jurisdictions, the dispatching of federal observers to monitor elections in covered jurisdictions, §5 preclearance suits involving covered jurisdictions, and the deterrent effect of §5. See 679 F. 3d 848, 862–863 (2012). After extensive analysis of the record, the court accepted Congress's conclusion that §2 litigation remained inadequate in the covered jurisdictions to protect the rights of minority voters, and that §5 was therefore still necessary. Id., at 873.

Turning to §4, the D. C. Circuit noted that the evidence for singling out the covered jurisdictions was "less robust" and that the issue presented "a close question." Id., at 879. But the court looked to data comparing the number of successful §2 suits in the different parts of the country. Coupling that evidence with the deterrent effect of §5, the court concluded that the statute continued "to single out the jurisdictions in which discrimination is concentrated," and thus held that the coverage formula passed constitutional muster. Id., at 883.

Judge Williams dissented. He found "no positive [correlation] between inclusion in §4(b)'s coverage formula and low black registration or turnout." Id., at 891. Rather, to the extent there was any correlation, it actually went the other way: "condemnation under §4(b) is a marker of higher black registration and turnout." Ibid… Judge Williams also found that "[c]overed jurisdictions have far more black officeholders as a proportion of the black population than do uncovered ones." Id., at 892. As to the evidence of successful §2 suits, Judge Williams disaggregated the reported cases by State, and concluded that "[t]he five worst uncovered jurisdictions . . . have worse records than eight of the covered jurisdictions." Id., at 897. He also noted that two covered jurisdictions—Arizona and Alaska—had not had any successful reported §2 suit brought against them during the entire 24 years covered by the data. Ibid. Judge Williams would have held the coverage formula of §4(b) "irrational" and unconstitutional. Id., at 885.

We granted certiorari. 568 U. S. ___ (2012).

II

In Northwest Austin, we stated that "the Act imposes current burdens and must be justified by current needs." 557 U. S., at 203. And we concluded that "a departure from the fundamental principle of equal sovereignty requires a showing that a statute's disparate geographic coverage is sufficiently related to the problem that it targets." Ibid. These basic principles guide our review of the question before us. [ 1 ]

A

The Constitution and laws of the United States are "the supreme Law of the Land." U. S. Const., Art. VI, cl. 2. State legislation may not contravene federal law. The Federal Government does not, however, have a general right to review and veto state enactments before they go into effect. A proposal to grant such authority to "negative" state laws was considered at the Constitutional Convention, but rejected in favor of allowing state laws to take effect, subject to later challenge under the Supremacy Clause. See 1 Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, pp. 21, 164–168 (M.

Farrand ed. 1911); 2 id., at 27–29, 390–392.

Outside the strictures of the Supremacy Clause, States retain broad autonomy in structuring their governments and pursuing legislative objectives. Indeed, the Constitution provides that all powers not specifically granted to the Federal Government are reserved to the States or citizens. Amdt. 10. This “allocation of powers in our federal system preserves the integrity, dignity, and residual sovereignty of the States.” Bond v. United States, 564 U. S. ___, ___ (2011) (slip op., at 9). But the federal balance “is not just an end in itself: Rather, federalism secures to citizens the liberties that derive from the diffusion of sovereign power.” Ibid. (internal quotation marks omitted).

More specifically, “ ‘the Framers of the Constitution intended the States to keep for themselves, as provided in the Tenth Amendment, the power to regulate elections.’ ” Gregory v. Ashcroft, 501 U. S. 452 –462 (1991) (quoting Sugarman v. Dougall, 413 U. S. 634, 647 (1973) ; some internal quotation marks omitted). Of course, the Federal Government retains significant control over federal elections. For instance, the Constitution authorizes Congress to establish the time and manner for electing Senators and Representatives. Art. I, §4, cl. 1; see also Arizona v. Inter Tribal Council of Ariz., Inc., ante, at 4–6. But States have “broad powers to determine the conditions under which the right of suffrage may be exercised.” Carrington v. Rash, 380 U. S. 89, 91 (1965) (internal quotation marks omitted); see also Arizona, ante, at 13–15. And “[e]ach State has the power to prescribe the qualifications of its officers and the manner in which they shall be chosen.” Boyd v. Nebraska ex rel. Thayer, 143 U. S. 135, 161 (1892) . Drawing lines for congressional districts is likewise “primarily the duty and responsibility of the State.” Perry v. Perez, 565 U. S. ___, ___ (2012) (per curiam) (slip op., at 3) (internal quotation marks omitted).

Not only do States retain sovereignty under the Constitution, there is also a “fundamental principle of equal sovereignty” among the States. Northwest Austin, supra, at 203 (citing United States v. Louisiana, 363 U. S. 1, 16 (1960) ; Lessee of Pollard v. Hagan, 3 How. 212, 223 (1845); and Texas v. White, 7 Wall. 700, 725–726

(1869); emphasis added). Over a hundred years ago, this Court explained that our Nation "was and is a union of States, equal in power, dignity and authority." Coyle v. Smith, 221 U. S. 559, 567 (1911) . Indeed, "the constitutional equality of the States is essential to the harmonious operation of the scheme upon which the Republic was organized." Id., at 580. Coyle concerned the admission of new States, and Katzenbach rejected the notion that the principle operated as a bar on differential treatment outside that context. 383 U. S., at 328–329. At the same time, as we made clear in Northwest Austin, the fundamental principle of equal sovereignty remains highly pertinent in assessing subsequent disparate treatment of States. 557 U. S., at 203.

The Voting Rights Act sharply departs from these basic principles. It suspends "all changes to state election law—however innocuous—until they have been precleared by federal authorities in Washington, D. C." Id., at 202. States must beseech the Federal Government for permission to implement laws that they would otherwise have the right to enact and execute on their own, subject of course to any injunction in a §2 action. The Attorney General has 60 days to object to a preclearance request, longer if he requests more information. See 28 CFR §§51.9, 51.37. If a State seeks preclearance from a three-judge court, the process can take years.

And despite the tradition of equal sovereignty, the Act applies to only nine States (and several additional counties). While one State waits months or years and expends funds to implement a validly enacted law, its neighbor can typically put the same law into effect immediately, through the normal legislative process. Even if a noncovered jurisdiction is sued, there are important differences between those proceedings and preclearance proceedings; the preclearance proceeding "not only switches the burden of proof to the supplicant jurisdiction, but also applies substantive standards quite different from those governing the rest of the nation." 679 F. 3d, at 884 (Williams, J., dissenting) (case below).

All this explains why, when we first upheld the Act in 1966, we described it as "stringent" and "potent." Katzenbach, 383 U. S., at 308, 315, 337. We recognized that it "may have been an uncommon exercise of congressional power," but concluded that "legislative

measures not oth-erwise appropriate" could be justified by "exceptional con-ditions." Id., at 334. We have since noted that the Act "authorizes federal intrusion into sensitive areas of state and local policymaking," Lopez, 525 U. S., at 282, and represents an "extraordinary departure from the traditional course of relations between the States and the Federal Government," Presley v. Etowah County Comm'n, 502 U. S. 491 –501 (1992). As we reiterated in Northwest Austin, the Act constitutes "extraordinary legislation otherwise unfamiliar to our federal system." 557 U. S., at 211.

B

In 1966, we found these departures from the basic features of our system of government justified. The "blight of racial discrimination in voting" had "infected the electoral process in parts of our country for nearly a century." Katzenbach, 383 U. S., at 308. Several States had enacted a variety of requirements and tests "specifically designed to prevent" African-Americans from voting. Id., at 310. Case-by-case litigation had proved inadequate to prevent such racial discrimination in voting, in part because States "merely switched to discriminatory devices not covered by the federal decrees," "enacted difficult new tests," or simply "defied and evaded court orders." Id., at 314. Shortly before enactment of the Voting Rights Act, only 19.4 percent of African-Americans of voting age were registered to vote in Alabama, only 31.8 percent in Louisiana, and only 6.4 percent in Mississippi. Id., at 313. Those figures were roughly 50 percentage points or more below the figures for whites. Ibid.

In short, we concluded that "[u]nder the compulsion of these unique circumstances, Congress responded in a permissibly decisive manner." Id., at 334, 335. We also noted then and have emphasized since that this extra-ordinary legislation was intended to be temporary, set to expire after five years. Id., at 333; Northwest Austin, supra, at 199.

At the time, the coverage formula—the means of linking the exercise of the unprecedented authority with the problem that warranted it—made sense. We found that "Congress chose to limit

its attention to the geographic areas where immediate action seemed necessary." Katzenbach, 383 U. S., at 328. The areas where Congress found "evidence of actual voting discrimination" shared two characteristics: "the use of tests and devices for voter registration, and a voting rate in the 1964 presidential election at least 12 points below the national average." Id., at 330. We explained that "[t]ests and devices are relevant to voting discrimination because of their long history as a tool for perpetrating the evil; a low voting rate is pertinent for the obvious reason that widespread disenfranchisement must inevitably affect the number of actual voters." Ibid. We therefore concluded that "the coverage formula [was] rational in both practice and theory." Ibid. It accurately reflected those jurisdictions uniquely characterized by voting discrimination "on a pervasive scale," linking coverage to the devices used to effectuate discrimination and to the resulting disenfranchisement. Id., at 308. The formula ensured that the "stringent remedies [were] aimed at areas where voting discrimination ha[d] been most flagrant." Id., at 315.

C

Nearly 50 years later, things have changed [dramatically]. Shelby County contends that the preclearance [requirement], even without regard to its disparate coverage, is now unconstitutional. Its arguments have a good deal of force. In the covered jurisdictions, "[v]oter turnout and registration rates now approach parity. Blatantly discriminatory evasions of federal decrees are rare. And minority candidates hold office at unprecedented levels." Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 202. The tests and devices that blocked access to the ballot have been forbidden nationwide for over 40 years. See §6, 84Stat. 315; §102, 89Stat. 400.

Those conclusions are not ours alone. Congress said the same when it reauthorized the Act in 2006, writing that "[s]ignificant progress has been made in eliminating first generation barriers experienced by minority voters, including increased numbers of registered minority voters, minority voter turnout, and minority representation in Congress, State legislatures, and local elected offices." §2(b)(1), 120Stat. 577. The House Report elaborated that "the number of African-Americans who are registered and who turn

out to cast ballots has increased significantly over the last 40 years, particularly since 1982," and noted that "[i]n some circumstances, minorities register to vote and cast ballots at levels that surpass those of white voters." H. R. Rep. No. 109–478, p. 12 (2006). That Report also explained that there have been "significant increases in the number of African-Americans serving in elected offices"; more specifically, there has been approximately a 1,000 percent increase since 1965 in the number of African-American elected officials in the six States originally covered by the Voting Rights Act. Id., at 18.

The following chart, compiled from the Senate and House Reports, compares voter registration numbers from 1965 to those from 2004 in the six originally covered States. These are the numbers that were before Congress when it reauthorized the Act in 2006:

| Voter Registration Numbers | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1965 | | | 2004 | | |
| | White | Black | Gap | White | Black | Gap |
| Alabama | 69.2 | 19.3 | 49.9 | 73.8 | 72.9 | 0.9 |
| Georgia | 62.[6] | 27.4 | 35.2 | 63.5 | 64.2 | -0.7 |
| Louisiana | 80.5 | 31.6 | 48.9 | 75.1 | 71.7 | 4.0 |
| Mississippi | 69.9 | 6.7 | 63.2 | 72.3 | 76.1 | -3.8 |
| South Carolina | 75.7 | 37.3 | 38.4 | 74.4 | 74.4 | 3.3 |
| Virginia | 61.1 | 38.3 | 22.8 | 68.2 | 68.2 | 10.8 |

See S. Rep. No. 109–295, p. 11 (2006); H. R. Rep. No. 109–478, at 12. The 2004 figures come from the Census Bureau. Census Bureau data from the most recent election indicate that African-American voter turnout exceeded white voter turnout in five of the six States originally covered by §5, with a gap in the sixth State of less than one half of one percent. See Dept. of Commerce, Census Bureau, Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States (Table 4b). The preclearance statistics are also illuminating. In the first decade after enactment of §5, the

Attorney General objected to 14.2 percent of proposed voting changes. H. R Rep. No. 109–478, at 22. In the last decade before reenactment, the Attorney General objected to a mere 0.16 percent. S. Rep. No. 109–295, at 13.

There is no doubt that these improvements are in large part because of the Voting Rights Act. The Act has proved immensely successful at redressing racial discrimination and integrating the voting process. See §2(b)(1), 120Stat. 577. During the "Freedom Summer" of 1964, in Philadelphia, Mississippi, three men were murdered while working in the area to register African-American voters. See United States v. Price, 383 U. S. 787, 790 (1966) . On "Bloody Sunday" in 1965, in Selma, Alabama, police beat and used tear gas against hundreds marching in [support] of African-American enfranchisement. See Northwest Austin, supra, at 220, n. 3 (Thomas, J., concurring in judgment in part and dissenting in part). Today both of those towns are governed by African-American mayors. Problems remain in these States and others, but there is no denying that, due to the Voting Rights Act, our Nation has made great strides.

Yet the Act has not eased the restrictions in §5 or narrowed the scope of the coverage formula in §4(b) along the way. Those extraordinary and unprecedented features were reauthorized—as if nothing had changed. In fact, the Act's unusual remedies have grown even stronger. When Congress reauthorized the Act in 2006, it did so for another 25 years on top of the previous 40—a far cry from the initial five-year period. See 42 U. S. C. §1973b(a)(8). Congress also expanded the prohibitions in §5. We had previously interpreted §5 to prohibit only those redistricting plans that would have the purpose or effect of worsening the position of minority groups. See Bossier II, 528 U. S., at 324, 335–336. In 2006, Congress amended §5 to prohibit laws that could have favored such groups but did not do so because of a discriminatory purpose, see 42 U. S. C. §1973c(c), even though we had stated that such broadening of §5 coverage would "exacerbate the substantial federalism costs that the preclearance procedure already exacts, perhaps to the extent of raising concerns about §5's constitutionality," Bossier II, supra, at 336 (citation and internal quotation marks omitted). In addition, Congress expanded §5 to

prohibit any voting law "that has the purpose of or will have the effect of diminishing the ability of any citizens of the United States," on account of race, color, or language minority status, "to elect their preferred candidates of choice." §1973c(b). In light of those two amendments, the bar that covered jurisdictions must clear has been raised even as the conditions justifying that requirement have dramatically improved.

We have also previously highlighted the concern that "the preclearance requirements in one State [might] be unconstitutional in another." Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 203; see Georgia v. Ashcroft, 539 U. S., at 491 (Kennedy, J., concurring) ("considerations of race that would doom a redistricting plan under the Fourteenth Amendment or §2 [of the Voting Rights Act] seem to be what save it under §5"). Nothing has happened since to alleviate this troubling concern about the current application of §5.

Respondents do not deny that there have been improvements on the ground, but argue that much of this can be attributed to the deterrent effect of §5, which dissuades covered jurisdictions from engaging in discrimination that they would resume should §5 be struck down. Under this theory, however, §5 would be effectively immune from scrutiny; no matter how "clean" the record of covered jurisdictions, the argument could always be made that it was deterrence that accounted for the good behavior.

The provisions of §5 apply only to those jurisdictions singled out by §4. We now consider whether that coverage formula is constitutional in light of current conditions.

III

A

When upholding the constitutionality of the coverage formula in 1966, we concluded that it was "rational in both practice and theory." Katzenbach, 383 U. S., at 330. The formula looked to cause (discriminatory tests) and [effect] (low voter registration and turnout), and tailored the remedy (preclearance) to those jurisdictions exhibiting both.

By 2009, however, we concluded that the "coverage formula raise[d] serious constitutional questions." Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 204. As we explained, a statute's "current burdens" must be justified by "current needs," and any "disparate geographic coverage" must be "sufficiently related to the problem that it targets." Id., at 203. The coverage formula met that test in 1965, but no longer does so.

Coverage today is based on decades-old data and eradicated practices. The formula captures States by reference to literacy tests and low voter registration and turnout in the 1960s and early 1970s. But such tests have been banned nationwide for over 40 years. §6, 84Stat. 315; §102, 89Stat. 400. And voter registration and turnout numbers in the covered States have risen dramatically in the years since. H. R. Rep. No. 109–478, at 12. Racial disparity in those numbers was compelling evidence justifying the preclearance remedy and the coverage formula. See, e.g., Katzenbach, supra, at 313, 329–330. There is no longer such a disparity.

In 1965, the States could be divided into two groups: those with a recent history of voting tests and low voter registration and turnout, and those without those characteristics. Congress based its coverage formula on that distinction. Today the Nation is no longer divided along those lines, yet the Voting Rights Act continues to treat it as if it were.

B

The Government's defense of the formula is limited. First, the Government contends that the formula is "reverse-engineered": Congress identified the jurisdictions to be covered and then came up with criteria to describe them. Brief for Federal Respondent 48–49. Under that reasoning, there need not be any logical relationship [between] the criteria in the formula and the reason for coverage; all that is necessary is that the formula happen to capture the jurisdictions Congress wanted to single out.

The Government suggests that Katzenbach sanctioned such an approach, but the analysis in Katzenbach was quite different. Katzenbach reasoned that the coverage formula was rational because the "formula . . . was relevant to the problem": "Tests and

devices are relevant to voting discrimination because of their long history as a tool for perpetrating the evil; a low voting rate is pertinent for the obvious reason that widespread disenfranchisement must inevitably affect the number of actual voters." 383 U. S., at 329, 330.

Here, by contrast, the Government's [reverse-engineering] argument does not even attempt to demonstrate the continued relevance of the formula to the problem it targets. And in the context of a decision as significant as this one—subjecting a disfavored subset of States to "extraordinary legislation otherwise unfamiliar to our federal system," Northwest Austin, supra, at 211—that failure to establish even relevance is fatal.

The Government falls back to the argument that because the formula was relevant in 1965, its continued use is permissible so long as any discrimination remains in the States Congress identified back then—regardless of how that discrimination compares to discrimination in States unburdened by coverage. Brief for Federal Respondent 49–50. This argument does not look to "current political conditions," Northwest Austin, supra, at 203, but instead relies on a comparison between the States in 1965. That comparison reflected the different histories of the North and South. It was in the South that slavery was upheld by law until uprooted by the Civil War, that the reign of Jim Crow denied African-Americans the most basic freedoms, and that state and local governments worked tirelessly to disenfranchise citizens on the basis of race. The Court invoked that history—rightly so—in sustaining the disparate coverage of the Voting Rights Act in 1966. See Katzenbach, supra, at 308 ("The constitutional propriety of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 must be judged with reference to the historical experience which it reflects.").

But history did not end in 1965. By the time the Act was reauthorized in 2006, there had been 40 more years of it. In assessing the "current need[ ]" for a preclearance system that treats States differently from one another today, that history cannot be ignored. During that time, largely because of the Voting Rights Act, voting tests were abolished, disparities in voter registration and turnout due to race were erased, and African-Americans attained political office in record numbers. And yet the coverage formula that

Congress reauthorized in 2006 ignores these developments, keeping the focus on decades-old data rel-evant to decades-old problems, rather than current data reflecting current needs.

The Fifteenth Amendment commands that the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race or color, and it gives Congress the power to enforce that command. The Amendment is not designed to punish for the past; its purpose is to ensure a better future. See Rice v. Cayetano, 528 U. S. 495, 512 (2000) ("Consistent with the design of the Constitution, the [Fifteenth] Amendment is cast in fundamental terms, terms transcending the particular controversy which was the immediate impetus for its enactment."). To serve that purpose, Congress—if it is to divide the States—must identify those jurisdictions to be singled out on a basis that makes sense in light of current conditions. It cannot rely simply on the past. We made that clear in Northwest Austin, and we make it clear again today.

C

In defending the coverage formula, the Government, the intervenors, and the dissent also rely heavily on data from the record that they claim justify disparate coverage. Congress compiled thousands of pages of evidence before reauthorizing the Voting Rights Act. The court below and the parties have debated what that record shows—they have gone back and forth about whether to compare covered to noncovered jurisdictions as blocks, how to disaggregate the data State by State, how to weigh §2 cases as evidence of ongoing discrimination, and whether to consider evidence not before Congress, among other issues. Compare, e.g., 679 F. 3d, at 873–883 (case below), with id., at 889–902 (Williams, J., dissenting). Regardless of how to look at the record, however, no one can fairly say that it shows anything approaching the "pervasive," "flagrant," "widespread," and "rampant" discrimination that faced Congress in 1965, and that clearly distinguished the covered jurisdictions from the rest of the Nation at that time. Katzenbach, supra, at 308, 315, 331; Northwest Austin, 557 U. S., at 201.

But a more fundamental problem remains: Congress did not use the

record it compiled to shape a coverage formula grounded in current conditions. It instead reenacted a formula based on 40-year-old facts having no logical relation to the present day. The dissent relies on "second-generation barriers," which are not impediments to the casting of ballots, but rather electoral arrangements that affect the weight of minority votes. That does not cure the problem. Viewing the preclearance requirements as targeting such efforts simply highlights the irrationality of continued reliance on the §4 coverage formula, which is based on voting tests and access to the ballot, not vote dilution. We cannot pretend that we are reviewing an updated statute, or try our hand at updating the statute ourselves, based on the new record compiled by Congress. Contrary to the dissent's contention, see post, at 23, we are not ignoring the record; we are simply recognizing that it played no role in shaping the statutory formula before us today.

The dissent also turns to the record to argue that, in light of voting discrimination in Shelby County, the county cannot complain about the provisions that subject it to preclearance. Post, at 23–30. But that is like saying that a driver pulled over pursuant to a policy of stopping all redheads cannot complain about that policy, if it turns out his license has expired. Shelby County's claim is that the coverage formula here is unconstitutional in all its applications, because of how it selects the jurisdictions [subjected] to preclearance. The county was selected based on that formula, and may challenge it in court.

D

The dissent proceeds from a flawed premise. It quotes the famous sentence from McCulloch v. Maryland, 4 Wheat. 316, 421 (1819), with the following emphasis: "Let the end be legitimate, let it be within the scope of the constitution, and all means which are appropriate, which are plainly adapted to that end, which are not prohibited, but consist with the letter and spirit of the constitution, are constitutional." Post, at 9 (emphasis in dissent). But this case is about a part of the sentence that the dissent does not emphasize—the part that asks whether a legislative means is "consist[ent] with the letter and spirit of the constitution." The dissent states that "[i]t cannot tenably be maintained" that this is an issue with regard to the

Voting Rights Act, post, at 9, but four years ago, in an opinion joined by two of today's dissenters, the Court expressly stated that "[t]he Act's preclearance requirement and its coverage formula raise serious constitutional questions." Northwest Austin, supra, at 204. The dissent does not explain how those "serious constitutional questions" became untenable in four short years.

The dissent treats the Act as if it were just like any other piece of legislation, but this Court has made clear from the beginning that the Voting Rights Act is far from ordinary. At the risk of repetition, Katzenbach indicated that the Act was "uncommon" and "not otherwise appropriate," but was justified by "exceptional" and "unique" conditions. 383 U. S., at 334, 335. Multiple decisions since have reaffirmed the Act's "extraordinary" nature. See, e.g., Northwest Austin, supra, at 211. Yet the dissent goes so far as to suggest instead that the preclearance requirement and disparate treatment of the States should be upheld into the future "unless there [is] no or almost no evidence of unconstitutional action by States." Post, at 33.

In other ways as well, the dissent analyzes the [question] presented as if our decision in Northwest Austin never happened. For example, the dissent refuses to [consider] the principle of equal sovereignty, despite Northwest Austin's emphasis on its significance. Northwest Austin also emphasized the "dramatic" progress since 1965, 557 U. S., at 201, but the dissent describes current levels of discrimination as "flagrant," "widespread," and "pervasive," post, at 7, 17 (internal quotation marks omitted). Despite the fact that Northwest Austin requires an Act's "disparate geographic coverage" to be "sufficiently related" to its targeted problems, 557 U. S., at 203, the dissent maintains that an Act's limited coverage actually eases Congress's burdens, and suggests that a fortuitous relationship should suffice. Although Northwest Austin stated definitively that "current burdens" must be justified by "current needs," ibid., the dissent argues that the coverage formula can be justified by history, and that the required showing can be weaker on reenactment than when the law was first passed.

There is no valid reason to insulate the coverage [formula] from review merely because it was previously enacted 40 years ago. If

Congress had started from scratch in 2006, it plainly could not have enacted the present coverage formula. It would have been irrational for Congress to distinguish between States in such a fundamental way based on 40-year-old data, when today's statistics tell an entirely different story. And it would have been irrational to base coverage on the use of voting tests 40 years ago, when such tests have been illegal since that time. But that is exactly what Congress has done.

***

Striking down an Act of Congress "is the gravest and most delicate duty that this Court is called on to perform." Blodgett v. Holden, 275 U. S. 142, 148 (1927) (Holmes, J., concurring). We do not do so lightly. That is why, in 2009, we took care to avoid ruling on the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act when asked to do so, and instead resolved the case then before us on statutory grounds. But in issuing that decision, we expressed our broader concerns about the constitutionality of the Act. Congress could have updated the coverage formula at that time, but did not do so. Its failure to act leaves us today with no choice but to declare §4(b) unconstitutional. The formula in that section can no longer be used as a basis for subjecting jurisdictions to preclearance.

Our decision in no way affects the permanent, nationwide ban on racial discrimination in voting found in §2. We issue no holding on §5 itself, only on the coverage formula. Congress may draft another formula based on current conditions. Such a formula is an initial prerequisite to a determination that exceptional conditions still exist justifying such an "extraordinary departure from the traditional course of relations between the States and the Federal Government." Presley, 502 U. S., at 500–501. Our country has changed, and while any racial discrimination in voting is too much, Congress must ensure that the legislation it passes to remedy that problem speaks to current conditions.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals is reversed.

It is so ordered.

# The Murrah Federal Building Bombing

On April 19, 1996, a truck filled with explosives detonated outside of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, 19 of whom were children, and injuring hundreds more. More than 300 buildings nearby were damaged or destroyed. At the time, it was the largest terrorist attack to occur in the United States. Investigations began immediately. More than 28,000 interviews were conducted, and nearly three-and-a-half tons of evidence were collected. On April 21, an eyewitness account led authorities to arrest and charge anti-government and former U.S. Army soldier Timothy McVeigh.

Timothy McVeigh had grown suspicious of the U.S. federal government as the military began to downsize following the Cold War. McVeigh, and his accomplice, Terry Nichols, were additionally radicalized by the Waco siege in April 1993, where members of the Branch Davidian religious sect perished. It was the two year anniversary of the Waco siege when McVeigh parked the explosive truck outside of the Murrah Building.

McVeigh was convicted on June 2, 1997. On August 14 of that year, the death penalty was imposed, and, four years later, McVeigh was put to death. After the bombing, the Murrah Building was demolished. In its place was built the Oklahoma City National Memorial Museum, which honors the victims, survivors, rescuers, and all who were affected by the bombing.

# Ongoing Issues in Domestic Politics

As you read, President Barack Obama overhauled the United States healthcare system during his time in office. Obama's new health care plan aimed to lower health care costs and expand health care coverage nationwide. This new health care plan became known as the Affordable Care Act.

Under the Obama administration, large immigration reforms also occurred. Established in 2012, DACA, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, allows individuals living illegally in the United States after being brought into the country as children to receive a renewable two-year period in which they are protected from deportation. These individuals also have the ability to apply for a work permit in the United States. DACA was created after the recognition that "DREAMers," or undocumented child immigrants, have been raised almost fully in the United States and should thus have an opportunity to become citizens. The first attempts at a program similar to DACA occured in 2001 with the DREAM Act. This act would have provided a path to permanent residency for illegal immigrants in the United States. However, the DREAM Act and various subsequent versions of the bill failed to pass Congress. This failure was seen as a driving force behind the push for DACA. In 2014 following the implementation of DACA, Obama proposed a further expansion of DACA to additional illegal immigrants. However, 26 states sued the U.S. District Court in Texas, asking the court to prohibit the DACA expansion. An injunction was then issued, which prevented the expansion of DACA. Meanwhile, the lawsuit turned Supreme Court case, Texas v. United States, was heard in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court left the injunction in place, thus blocking the planned DACA expansion.

As of August 2018, more than 699,350 individuals living in the United States under DACA. However, DACA was recently rescinded by the Trump Administration in 2017, though some state courts still continue to recognize the program. It is unknown how political changes under the current administration and future administration will affect the repeal of the program.

Current changes under the new administration include a reevaluation and subsequent lowering of tax rates. In 2017, President Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The goal of this act was to decrease individual income tax rates, as well as eliminate personal exemptions. The result of this would be an increased tax deduction for taxpayers. The act would also lower the corporate tax rate. However, there continues to be controversy over Trump's tax policy, with some arguing that the policy instead protects the upper-class and large corporations. It is unclear the lasting effects of the current tax policy.