26 | The Age of Fracture: The 1970s

National Archives and Records Administration

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 26-1 Evaluate Richard Nixon as president, focusing on his policies in the United States and abroad.
- 26-2 Describe the events of Watergate and its ramifications for the country.
- 26-3 Describe the economic conditions of the 1970s, including stagflation and the end of the post-World War II economic boom, and describe how Presidents Ford and Carter attempted to confront the problem.
- 26-4 Describe the perpetuation of 1960s-style activism and how it transformed into a politics of identity in the 1970s.
- 26-5 Evaluate the reaction to 1960s social movements and describe the rise of the New Right.

AFTER FINISHING THIS CHAPTER GO TO **PAGE 524** **FOR STUDY TOOLS**

The social activism of the late 1960s continued into the 1970s, as Americans continued to seek to bust free from the culture of postwar liberalism, but during the 1970s that activism ran into roadblocks. A variety of minority movements seemed poised to fracture any national unity leftover from the 1960s, as increasing numbers of people went from thinking they were working for the good of the country to working on behalf of their own particular group, or even just themselves. At roughly the same time, the postwar economic boom came to a startling end in 1973, raising poverty and unemployment as contentious and serious issues. American politicians learned the limits of politics' ability to create change, and they simultaneously learned that they could not publicly discuss these limits and expect to be reelected.

This widespread awareness of American limits had many sources. The war in Vietnam ended in 1975, but only after it had increased friction and schisms between Americans and diminished American expectations of imperial power. After Vietnam, it was difficult for anyone to think the United States could willfully dictate events around the world. In addition, the countless fabrications that Johnson and Nixon had fed the public about the progress of the war made many Americans suspicious of their country's leaders. Meanwhile, the civil rights movement had succeeded in winning political rights for African Americans, but it then faced social and economic limits that tested the reality of America's commitment to racial equality. And a series of new social movements—by women, Chicanos, American Indians, and others—that followed in the wake of the civil rights movement seemed to cast African Americans as just another minority group vying for institutional recognition rather than one that has been historically and uniquely wronged. Interest in other causes, such as environmentalism, also exploded during the 1970s.

All this turmoil and diverse social action provoked a backlash from voters, who, by 1980, were willing to overlook one Republican president's shady dealings in order to elect another conservative to the nation's highest office. Many Americans had tired of calls for social justice, and this sheer exhaustion led many to turn inward, contributing to what one writer called the "me generation." The civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" seemed to lose its collective meaning in the 1970s. Few knew who "we" were.

At the same time, while the economy had remained healthy during the 1960s, it soured badly during the 1970s, officially ending the long post-World War II boom. The economic decline lasted the entire decade, casting a pall over the other events of the era. While the causes of the downturn are complex, a significant part was played by the demise of American manufacturing. Companies moved out of the Northeast and Midwest, heading to the South or the West in order to find better weather, cheaper labor, and fewer unions. This demographic and economic shift created "the Sunbelt," a region stretching from Florida to California. As more companies moved to the Sunbelt, American politics and culture took on the traditionally southern cast of anti-elitism and antigovernment individualism. "Get government off our backs" became a staple slogan of the late 1970s—one that epitomized a tax revolt that opened the door for a rightward shift in American politics that Americans still live with today.

26-1 PRESIDENT NIXON

Richard Nixon, who had made his political name as a ruthless anticommunist during the McCarthy years, who had served dutifully as Eisenhower's vice president throughout most of the 1950s, and who had nearly beaten Kennedy in the presidential race of 1960, finally won the office he so ardently sought in 1968. Some historians cite that year as the beginning of "the seventies."

As president, Nixon capitalized on divisions within the Democratic Party over the Vietnam War to beat the Democratic nominee, Hubert Humphrey. Nixon, a son of a California grocer, is considered one of our most complex presidents, reviled by liberals but not necessarily beloved by conservatives either. He was brilliant but unprincipled. Nixon responded to problems with a creativity and drive that stemmed not from concern for social justice, but from a persistent fear of how history would judge him. He was driven by a long-smoldering resentment against what he saw as "the Eastern Establishment," which he defined as the bankers, politicians, and businessmen who had controlled American social, cultural, and political life for years. More than anything though, Nixon hated the Democratic establishment, which he thought was perpetually out to get him. His mistrust and suspicion would

◀◀◀ One of the first visible signs that the post-World War II economic boom was over was long lines during the gasoline shortage of 1973. Suggesting that Americans were going to have to live with limits to what was possible, motorists in this picture line up at a gas station in Oregon, hoping to fill their tanks.

AFP/Getty Images

>> In efforts to redirect the Cold War, Nixon became the first president to visit China, meeting with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai in 1972. With regard to Chinese–Soviet relations, Nixon confided to Zhou that if Moscow marched either east or west, he was ready to "turn like a cobra on the Russians."

score him significant political gains in matters of foreign policy and the environment. But it would also lead to his historic downfall.

26-1a Nixon's Foreign Policy

Nixon's greatest triumphs as president were in foreign policy. As explained in the previous chapter, his Vietnamization plan simultaneously pulled American troops out of Vietnam and increased the American military presence in other nations of Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, by 1972, Vietnamization was in fact removing American troops from the entire region. The last American troops left Vietnam in 1973. Most Americans were relieved to be removed from a situation that was perceived as a stalemated "quagmire," where American soldiers were dying while fighting a war that could not be won.

Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) Sessions held between President Nixon and Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev, in which the two leaders agreed to freeze the number of long-range missile launchers and build certain new missiles only after they had destroyed the same number of older missiles

PING-PONG DIPLOMACY

As Vietnam simmered down as a national issue, Nixon saw that relations between China and the Soviet Union were beginning to break down. The two communist superpowers were at odds about how expansionary the communists should be in Asia, and in an attempt to push the two further apart, Nixon began talks with China. His first step was to accept an invitation to send the American table tennis team to compete in a friendly international event in China. This gave his foreign policy toward China its name: Ping-Pong Diplomacy. The players were the first Americans invited into China since its founding as a communist country in 1949. In 1972, Nixon himself went to China, and the two nations increased trade and cultural exchanges. They also agreed that the Soviet Union should not be allowed to expand farther into Asia. Beginning friendly relations with one of the powerful communist countries in the world was a remarkable step for someone who rose to fame for attacking communism.

SALT AND THE COLD WAR

Increasingly worried about the cost of the arms race, Nixon also made overtures to the Soviet Union. Just months after going to China, Nixon went to Moscow to meet with Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev. During the meeting, Nixon agreed to sell excess American wheat to the Soviets. The fact that their country needed wheat was an early sign that Soviet-style communism was not performing well economically, even though the Soviets attempted to hide this fact. Under the auspices of the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)**, the two leaders also agreed to freeze the number of long-range missile launchers and build certain new missiles only after they had destroyed the same number of older missiles. This did not signify an end to the Cold War, but it did demonstrate that the nations' leaders were beginning to recognize the problems inherent in an unchecked arms race.

Thus, within four years, Nixon, perceived as a hard-nosed anticommunist Republican, had removed the American presence in Vietnam, ceding it to communists,

and made overtures to both China and the Soviet Union. This softened approach toward America's supposed enemies was orchestrated largely by Nixon's assistant for national security affairs and, later, his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger. These more relaxed relations are labeled ***détente*** (a French term meaning "a relaxing" or "an easing").

LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA

While the Cold War cooled with China and the Soviet Union, it heated up in Latin America and Africa. Each time a nation in one of these regions elected a leftist—potentially communist—regime, the United States actively supported coups and the installation of new governments that would support U.S. interests. These new right-wing regimes routinely punished political opponents. For instance, the United States supported the ousting of Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973, opting instead to provide assistance to the authoritarian regime of General Augusto Pinochet. In Africa, the United States tolerated the racist regime of South Africa and sided with anticommunists in the Angolan civil war. But, taking a lesson from Vietnam, Nixon was leery of using American troops in these situations, preferring instead more covert operations.

26-1b Nixon the Accidental Liberal

While Nixon's foreign policies often represented significant breakthroughs, his domestic policies were even more transformative, although not always in the way Nixon's supporters had hoped. Upon entering office, Nixon claimed to be a typical small-government Republican. But in reality, Nixon's relentless preoccupation with and fear of being defeated for reelection led him to advocate many goals of the left and of the Democratic Party. Cagily, however, while Nixon sought to increase budgets for liberal causes, he made these increases contingent upon greater local control. This put Democrats in a tough political position, because they could not reject funds for causes they had long advocated, but they could not control how those funds were spent locally. In this way, Nixon became an advocate of many liberal causes, but he did so while weakening the supposed Eastern Establishment he despised.

INCREASING THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT

For instance, in 1970 Nixon signed into law the National Environmental Policy Act, which paved the way for him to establish the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) later that year. He endorsed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which sought to make workplaces safer. He doubled the budgets of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Nixon also became the first president to embrace affirmative action, as discussed later in the chapter.

But each of these progressive developments came at a cost to the liberals who had long advocated them. For instance, Nixon's increases to the National Endowment for the Humanities were earmarked for popular artists in Middle America or for local museums, instead of the large museums in New York and Boston, which championed abstract art that was appreciated mostly by the well educated and affluent. Politically, Democrats could not reject his proposal to increase funding for the arts. It was a stroke of political genius: Nixon got credit for being an advocate of the arts, at the same time draining support from his nemesis, the eastern liberal elite.

26-2 WATERGATE

Before Nixon could do more, though, he became mired in scandal. During his successful reelection bid in 1972, five men were arrested breaking into the Democratic National Committee offices at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. One of the burglars worked directly for Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP), a fact that did not impede Nixon's landslide victory in the election. But print journalists, spurred by the investigative reporting of the *Washington Post*'s Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, continued to follow the story and discovered that orders for the break-in had been issued from high up in the Nixon White House. The Senate convened hearings, which were televised nationally. It seemed to many Americans that Nixon had possibly ordered a break-in of his opponent's Washington offices. If proven, this would be a tremendous breach of public trust and a dangerous attempt to use the power of the federal government to illegally stifle his political opposition. It was potentially a threat to the very nature of democracy.

The televised testimony captivated millions, and, although the testimony never revealed whether or

détente French term meaning "a relaxing" or "an easing"; refers to more relaxed relations with America's supposed enemies, China and the Soviet Union

"I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President, I must put the interest of America first."

—Richard M. Nixon, resignation speech, 1974

not Nixon himself had ordered the break-in, what did become clear were Nixon's suspicious nature and his other attempts to spy illegally on Americans. Watergate became an investigation about much more than a simple break-in; it became a portentous glimpse inside the mind of the president. The Senate learned that the president had traded favors, spoken offensively about many of the nation's minority groups, and, most damningly, taped nearly every conversation that had happened in the White House. When the Senate demanded to see the tapes, Nixon fired the special prosecutor leading the Senate's investigation, prompting a series of sympathy resignations from members of his own administration.

As the scandal mushroomed, Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, admitted to tax evasion and bribery. He resigned and President Nixon, following the advice of Congressional leaders, chose the Republican leader of the House, Gerald Ford, to replace him. The credibility of the entire administration was under attack.

Americans watched the scandal with alarm. It seemed to confirm many people's beliefs that American leaders were untrustworthy. After the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to turn over the White House tapes, it was evident he was going to be impeached. Nixon instead chose to resign from office, which he did after a dramatic televised speech to the nation on August 9, 1974. His new vice president, Gerald Ford, became president. To understand the reasons why Watergate was so pivotal to the 1970s political culture, see "The Reasons Why . . ." box.

26-3 THE TROUBLED ECONOMY AND POLITICS ADRIFT

The backdrop for all this political commotion was an economic recession that officially ended the great post-World War II economic boom. The conditions that had made the American economy the most powerful in the world after World War II vanished quickly in the 1970s. The two presidents that succeeded Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, had little success in solving this large structural problem.

Everett Collection/Newscom

>> Americans were understandably transfixed at the prospect of a president calling it quits. But that's exactly what Richard Nixon did, after a scandal surrounding a 1972 break-in at the Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel led to numerous revelations of presidential abuse.

The Reasons Why...

There were at least four reasons why the Watergate scandal was so pivotal in American life:

The death of political idealism. The disclosures of Watergate put the nail in the coffin of the political idealism of the early 1960s. During that earlier period, social movements like the civil rights movement turned to the federal government and the American system of law to advocate change. After the frustrations of the civil rights movements and a decade of lies about the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal validated many Americans' darkest suspicions that a politician's first priority was not to serve the public, but simply to get reelected.

Americans turn inward. These suspicions led many Americans to turn away from politics, often choosing to search for answers to large social problems through the individual groups that gave them their identity. This, in turn, helped lead to the rise of identity politics, an effort to ensure benefits for one's own group rather than ponder what might be best for the nation as a whole. American national politics seemed corrupt.

The irony. One major irony of the Watergate scandal was that it served Republican ends. Since at least the New Deal, Republicans had been advocating a smaller role for government. The disaffection toward politics inspired by Nixon, a Republican, was a long-term boon to the Republican Party. After Watergate, many people began to see government as part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and thus they too began advocating for smaller government.

New political scrutiny. Meanwhile, before Watergate, presidents were usually given a wide berth by the media and forgiven their personal flaws, which frequently went unreported. After Watergate, every dimension of a politician's life was deemed newsworthy. President Ford, who became president after Nixon resigned, was a talented athlete and former college football star at the University of Michigan, but he was widely portrayed as a goof and a bumbling klutz because every stumble he made was televised and reported on. Where there once had been deference and respect, now there was cynicism and ire.

26-3a Economic Woes

In the late 1960s, Vietnam, the Great Society, and the costs of the arms race had diverted a lot of money from federal coffers, and Johnson had refused to raise taxes to pay for these expensive ventures. Furthermore, by the early 1970s, America's industrial sector was weakening due to foreign competition and decreasing demand for American goods. The economy was cooling off after its long period of post-World War II growth. With the United States having to maintain its tremendous expenditures during a time of declining tax receipts, it had to borrow tremendous amounts of money to balance its budget. This led the value of the dollar to decrease, meaning it took more dollars to pay for the same goods. This condition is called inflation.

Nixon did not really know what to do to control the problem. First, he made it more difficult to borrow money, which, he hoped, would lower the amount of investments and keep dollars spare. However, all this did was constrict the economy even more, leading to an economic recession.

In 1971, facing reelection, Nixon initiated the first-ever peacetime wage and price freeze. He also accepted large federal deficits. These initiatives reversed the direction of the economy long enough for him to win reelection in 1972, but his economic plan was erratic and short term, confidence remained low, and the American industrial sector was beginning to decline in the face of cheaper prices on imported foreign goods.

OIL EMBARGO

The whole problem was compounded by matters in the Middle East. The establishment of Israel in 1948 as a haven for the world's Jews after the atrocities of the Holocaust was perpetually contested by many of the Islamic nations of the Middle East, whose religious differences with the Jews were compounded by the imposition of a political state on land they claimed as their own. Egypt, Syria, and other nations of the Middle East fought numerous battles against Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, and Israel won each of them with the help of

the United States and several countries of Europe. After yet another confrontation, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the oil-rich nations of the Middle East sought to punish the United States for supporting Israel by placing an embargo on oil sold to the United States.

The result was that oil prices in the United States quadrupled. Gas became hard to find, and long lines of drivers were seen waiting at filling stations. Other sources of energy were not immediately available. Beyond the daily frustrations of expensive gas at the pump, the oil embargo raised the cost of making goods and moving them from one place to another. Prices of all consumer goods went up. Thus, the American economy entered a complicated cycle in which prices kept going up (inflation) but the economy began losing jobs (or stagnating). Economists called this unique condition **stagflation**.

Stagflation is notoriously difficult to fight, because most of the tools the government has to control the economy—such as regulating the interest it charges banks to borrow money from the Federal Reserve banks—are primarily designed to either slow growth and end inflation, or increase growth and boost inflation. Tools to lower inflation while growing the economy do not exist. The economy would continue to perform badly throughout the 1970s, bringing to an abrupt halt the almost consistent economic growth the country had enjoyed since 1946.

THE DECLINE OF CITIES

Another force compounded these economic pressures. Since the Second World War, Americans had been leaving cities at alarming rates, heading to the suburbs, where good schools, bigger homes, and larger spaces beckoned. Stagflation slowed the American economy down, especially the manufacturing sector that was overwhelmingly based in large Northeastern and Midwestern cities like Chicago and Philadelphia. As these sectors declined in productivity, many Americans lost their jobs and left the industrial cities of the North in search of work in the South or Southwest. As businesses left, the tax base left with them, making the 1970s the roughest time in the history of most American cities. For instance, during the 1970s, more than 1 million residents left New York City and the city tottered on the brink of bankruptcy; it took the city nearly two decades to make up that population loss. American cities, which had once symbolized America's embrace of modern life, now gained a reputation for being dangerous places one should avoid if they could afford to.

stagflation Economic cycle in which prices keep going up (inflation) while the economy is losing jobs (or stagnating)

26-3b President Ford

After Watergate and the Vietnam War had discredited the role that government might play in solving deep social problems, the two presidents who followed Nixon appeared rudderless and without confidence that the American people would listen to, much less enact, their attempts to solve the country's problems. For his part, President Ford was the first president to have never been elected president or vice president, having assumed the vice presidency when Spiro Agnew resigned, and risen to the presidency after Nixon's decline. A good-natured, well-liked man who self-effacingly admitted he was "a Ford, not a Lincoln," Gerald Ford weathered the wrath of the American public in the aftermath of Watergate. And one of his first acts as president did not generate widespread goodwill: Ford offered Nixon a full presidential pardon. This action ended the possibility of criminal proceedings and, perhaps, of finding out whether or not Nixon had ordered the Watergate break-in. But the pardon did allow the nation to move beyond political scandal in order to focus on the dire problems of the economy and the Cold War. Unfortunately, Ford was unable to take complete control of either.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Ford's chief domestic problem was stagflation, but, like Nixon, Ford had little luck tackling it. At first, he encouraged Americans to save rather than spend their money. Then he offered a large tax cut. Neither measure worked to improve the sagging economy. With little national support, Ford regularly vetoed congressional bills, only to have his vetoes overridden.

FOREIGN POLICY

Ford had better luck overseas. He laid the basis of another arms agreement with the Soviets, which was finalized as SALT II a few years later, under President Carter. Ford's secretary of state Henry Kissinger negotiated between Israel and Egypt, leading to a short-term break in hostilities in the Middle East.

26-3c President Carter

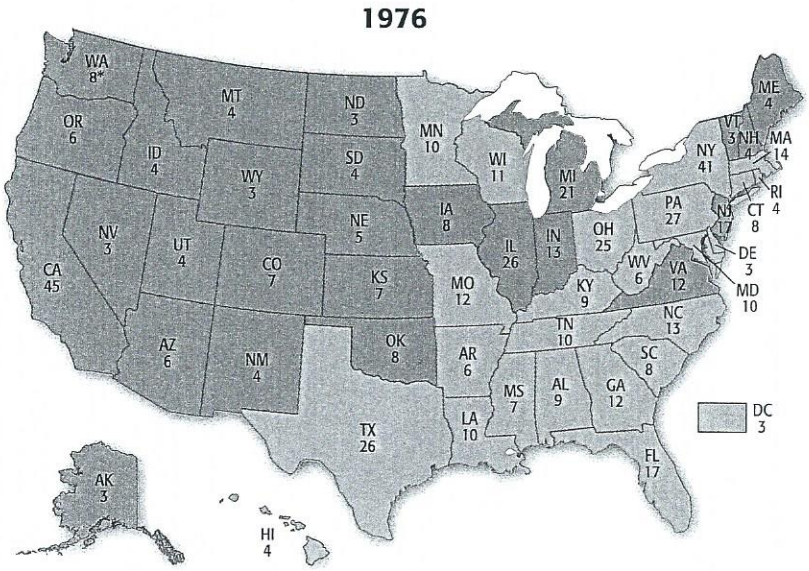
In 1976, Ford stood little chance of reelection. Affable and open as he was, even within his party he faced a

strong challenge from California's former governor, Ronald Reagan, a symbol of the new Sunbelt conservatism that would dominate the 1980s and 1990s.

THE ELECTION OF 1976

The Democrats, for their part, took a chance and won. They nominated a little-known, one-term Georgia governor named Jimmy Carter. Carter struck a note with the electorate because he appeared to be honest, was a "born again" Christian, was progressive on issues of poverty and treatment of minorities, and was a southerner capable of talking to the demographically growing southern half of the nation (Map 26.1). Carter won the election, in which he competed against the ghost of Nixon as much as against Ford.

Map 26.1 Election of 1976



Candidate (Party)	Electoral Vote		Popular Vote	
Carter (Democrat)	297	55.2%	40,830,763	50.1%
Ford (Republican)	240*	44.6%	39,147,793	48.0%

*One Ford elector in Washington voted for Republican Ronald Reagan of California.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Domestically, Carter faced the same economic conditions that Nixon and Ford had: stagflation. Carter could not manage it either, and when he proposed to increase government spending to create jobs (à la the New Deal), inflation skyrocketed. He then made the ultimate political blunder when he asked the nation to sacrifice on behalf of the "common purpose" and offered a list of small and specific proposals as to how that might be done. These modest proposals did not capture the public's imagination, and his political inexperience in Washington, D.C., contributed to his making several gaffes, which repeatedly made him look weak and ineffectual.

Carter was further burdened by the nationwide energy crisis, which had surged after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and had not subsided since. By 1977, elementary and high schools were forced to close because there was not enough energy to heat them. Carter's ambitious plan to remedy the crisis combined higher taxes and a vigorous search for alternative fuels. This plan was met with general disapproval by Congress and did not pass. Making matters worse, the meltdown of a nuclear reactor at **Three Mile Island**, Pennsylvania, in 1979 discredited nuclear power, a potentially viable alternative to oil. With an economy this troubled, Carter could not advocate any of the plans he had for expanding American social justice.

FOREIGN POLICY

Carter made more progress abroad. His longest-lasting achievement in foreign policy was in establishing human rights as an element of American policy. Doing so energized him to (1) call for the end of apartheid in South Africa, (2) give up control of the Panama Canal, and (3) cite human rights considerations as a factor in the granting of American aid. In the Middle East, Carter oversaw a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, called the **Camp David Accords**, in late 1978.

But this accomplishment was overshadowed just six months later when Islamic militants took fifty-two hostages from the American Embassy in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The militants were part of a coup in

Three Mile Island Nuclear reactor in Pennsylvania that suffered a meltdown in 1979

Camp David Accords 1978 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, brokered by President Carter

Dirck Halstead/The Life Images Collection/Getty Images

>> President Jimmy Carter, wearing the kind of sweater he urged all Americans to wear in order to reduce their consumption of energy.

which fundamentalist Islamists seized power from the American-supported dictatorship, in place since 1953. The terrorists held the American hostages for more than a year. Each day that went by, Carter seemed more and more unable to handle the problem. But the inability to bring together the nation was not Carter's doing alone.

identity politics A view of politics premised on how one identifies oneself within a nation, usually based on some sense of belonging to a minority group eager to win greater parity with the national majority

26-4 THE RISE OF IDENTITY POLITICS

One historian has described the social movements of the 1960s as a "coming together" of sorts, when large gestures—the civil rights movement, the War on Poverty—were intended to create a more unified and inclusive nation. The 1970s, however, served as a spin cycle, scattering the social energy of the sixties in a thousand different directions. Without a magnetic social vision to unify the populace, the 1970s came to be characterized as a time of turning inward or, to use a term from the era, a celebration of the culture of narcissism. People's interest in pet causes flourished, as did a variety of new faiths, most of which prioritized personal renewal or an individual relationship with God. If the latter 1960s represented a busting free from the culture created in postwar America, the 1970s might best be interpreted as a time when liberal demands for increased freedom battled against conservative demands for freedom.

26-4a Identifying with a Group

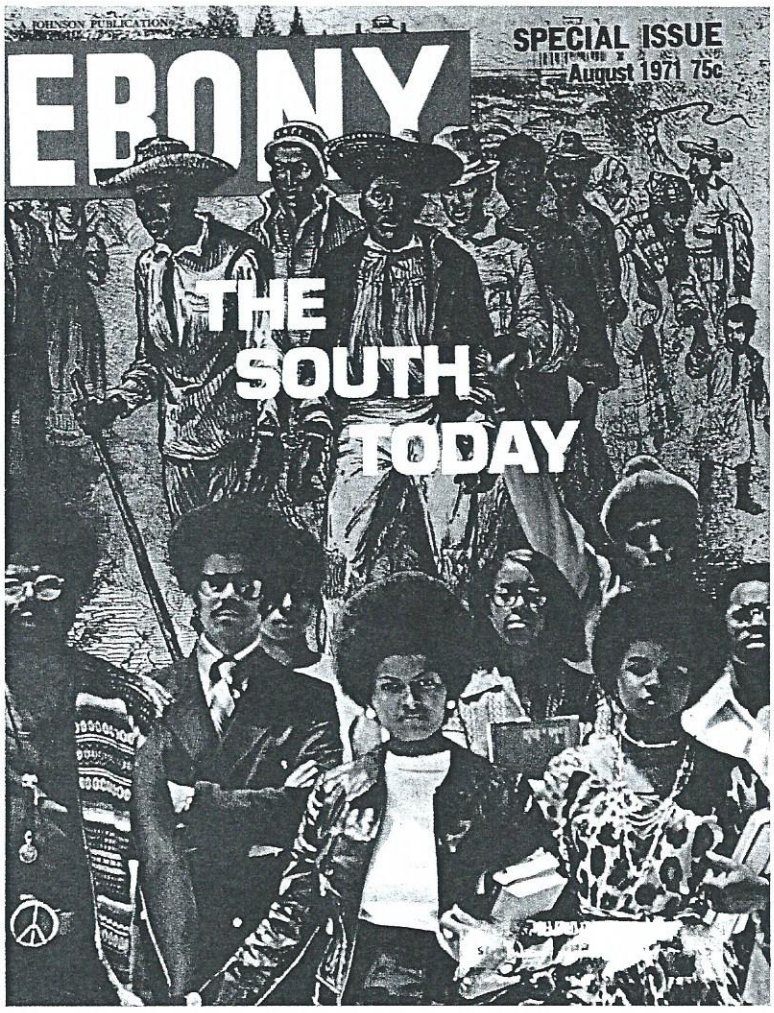
One of the most contentious and transformative sociopolitical events of the decade was the codification and resurgence of identity politics. **Identity politics** can be defined as a politics premised on how one identifies oneself within a nation, usually based on some sense that one belongs to a minority group eager to win greater parity with the national majority. Identity politics had been made both politically potent and divisive by African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and others following the civil rights movement, especially in the militancy that emerged in the late 1960s.

AFRICAN AMERICAN ACTIVISM

America's black population was the first to embrace this brand of politics, which intended to change the culture as well as public policy. Despite the federal laws passed in the 1960s, racism against America's black people persisted. For the most part, though, racism was no longer legally codified or socially acceptable at the broad institutional level, but it remained entrenched in the personal-level institutions of society and culture. Thus, many African American activists broadened their focus from just politics to politics *and culture*, hoping to change the way Americans thought about their nation. Cultural acceptance was different from political

acceptance. Political acceptance concerned the enforcement of color-blind laws, while social acceptance depended on an awareness of differences and a conscious decision to ignore them.

In response to this heightened awareness, "Black is beautiful" became a widespread call in the black community. Africa became a destination for many Americans seeking to understand their cultural past, a sentiment epitomized in and popularized by Alex Haley's 1976 bestseller, *Roots*. Attending historically black colleges acquired cultural cachet. Black Studies writers and professors established this field as an accepted academic discipline within America's colleges. The cultural politics of the Black Freedom Movement surpassed attempts to create protective legal structures to ensure equal access. Social and economic acceptance required different methods.



Courtesy of The Advertising Archives

>> *Ebony*, a monthly magazine targeting African American readers since 1945, used this 1971 cover to demonstrate the long road African Americans had traveled since slavery, now celebrating natural hairstyles like the Afro and the Black Power symbol of the raised fist.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND BUSING

Amid this transition toward greater interest in changing American culture, federal and state governments attempted to rectify the continuing effects of racism. Because many white Americans were afraid of dropping property values if their neighborhoods became racially integrated, and because of deeply entrenched fears of interracial mingling, schools generally remained segregated. To remedy this persistent problem, cities such as Boston and Los Angeles began busing students from one school district to another in order to desegregate schools. This action provoked much ire from parents, black and white, who had their children bused far from home. Riots erupted in Boston, and the level of suspicion increased between the groups on either side of the color line.

Meanwhile, the federal government developed programs of **affirmative action**, in which employers were supposed to ensure that a certain percentage of employees were minorities, or that a certain percentage of government contracts were given to minority-owned businesses. In another example of Nixon's ruthless politics, affirmative action's federal origins can be traced to his proclaimed free-market administration. He did this to cause political rifts between white and black laborers, which would, and did, break up a Democratic political coalition that was first formed by President Roosevelt in the 1930s.

Affirmative action also became policy in many of the nation's universities. In 1978, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of some elements of affirmative action, but disallowed the use of exact quotas, in a case that emerged when a white student claimed he was denied entrance to medical school because of the color of his skin. The case, *Regents of*

affirmative action Program meant to ensure that a certain percentage of a company's employees are minorities or that a certain percentage of government contracts are given to minority-owned businesses

Bob Kreisel/Alamy Stock Photo

>> In 1969, a group of activists called "Indians of All Tribes" occupied Alcatraz Island in California, demanding the land be returned to the tribes that had once occupied it. The occupation lasted 19 months.

the University of California v. *Bakke*, not only codified affirmative action in American education but also dramatically displayed the overwhelming backlash against affirmative action brought forward by many white Americans. Some members of this furious group were children of turn-of-the-century immigrants who, ignoring the centuries of racism and favoritism inherent in America's institutions, claimed to have never wronged America's racial minority groups during the time of slavery and conquest. They claimed that they were not responsible for paying the debt for America's offenses during the pre-colonial and colonial eras.

THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

After the variety of successes won by labor leaders César Chávez and Dolores Huerta in the late 1960s, in 1970 a more radical aspect of the Chicano movement emerged and was embodied by the organization *La Raza*. This term literally means "the Race," although colloquially it is synonymous with "the People." *La Raza* explicitly focused on electing Mexican American politicians to office in the West and Southwest. Demonstrating their frustration with the persistent racism that they had confronted throughout their history, members of *La Raza* rejected the name "Mexican American" in favor of the more particular "Chicano," a term derived from barrio slang.

RED POWER

Heartened by African American and Chicano efforts toward social, cultural, and economic equality, many American Indians sought political redress as well. Many Indians lived at the poverty level, and most Indian reservations had no industry of any kind. The crushing poverty inspired protests. Holding several sit-ins of their own, in 1969 a group of activists called "Indians of All Tribes" occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Demanding the land be returned to the tribes that had once occupied it, they intended to make an Indian cultural center out of the former prison. The occupation lasted nineteen months; the protesters were finally removed by the federal government, but only after sparking numerous copycat occupations and bringing the plight of AmericanIndians to the attention of the nation.

The protest recalled the pan-Indian resistance of the early 1800s, although in 1970s language. Indeed, the activists boldly declared "Red Power!" echoing Stokely Carmichael's Black Power campaign of the late 1960s. In 1968, a group of Native Americans coordinated the American Indian Movement and began a series of audacious political protests, including occupying the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs building, Mount Rushmore, and Wounded Knee, South Dakota. As with the occupation of Alcatraz, these protests provoked headlines and benefited several moderate groups helping to craft laws in Washington, D.C. They wrote a dozen new laws and steered more than $100 million to educational and health programs on Indian reservations. Furthermore, the number of Americans who identified as Indians more than doubled between 1970 and 1990.

26-4b The Women's Movement

The politics of identity moved beyond racial groups too. Throughout the 1970s, American women continued to press for increased political and economic rights.

ERA AND EQUAL RIGHTS

Throughout the 1970s, women fought against sexual harassment in the workplace and for greater awareness of women's health issues. They also secured congressional approval of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution, which would have made it illegal to discriminate based on sex. Once the Amendment passed Congress, though, it suffered defeat at the state level after grassroots campaigners organized potent protests (as described later in the chapter). The ERA never passed. Nevertheless, in 1972, Congress passed Title IX

of the Higher Education Act, which obligated universities to spend the same amount of money on women's athletics that they spent on men's athletics.

ROE V. *WADE*

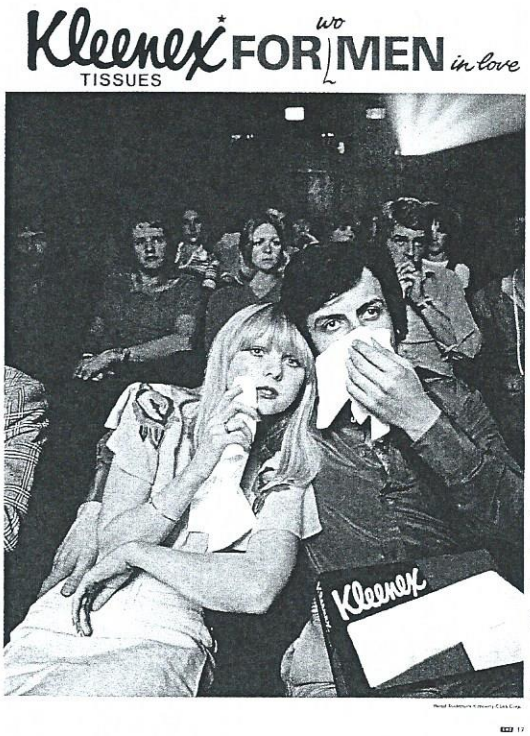
The most controversial milestone of the women's movement was a landmark legal case. In 1973, the Supreme Court handed down a decision in ***Roe* v. *Wade*** that struck down laws in forty-six states that limited a woman's access to a safe, legal abortion. The decision, which referenced a woman's right to privacy, extending that right to her reproductive system, stunned the opposition, who generally felt abortion was morally equivalent to murder. The debate about abortion has increased the polarization between the left and the right ever since.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

In a change perhaps more profound than the debates about laws that delineated women's place in American society, in the 1970s women began to play a more active role in the economy and in forming the parameters of American social life. Like other minority groups, they fomented a social movement that existed outside of normal politics. For instance, consistently struggling against a "glass ceiling" that limited their ability to rise beyond a certain corporate level, in the 1970s women fought for and sometimes won the right to earn pay equal to that of men. Some companies opened day-care centers and job-training programs specifically for working mothers. Beyond economics, the 1970s saw a rise in the use of gender-neutral terms (for instance, using the terms *firefighter* and *flight attendant* in place of *fireman* and *stewardess*).

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Some women also embraced their own sexuality in what was called the sexual revolution. There was a new cultural atmosphere in which women more openly discussed their sexual needs and desires, while sometimes flouting conventional arrangements, such as maintaining a single partner in a traditionally identifiable relationship. Divorce became more common. Breaking such long-standing taboos began a fundamental transformation in American gender relations. The image of the ideal man transitioned from the masculine if inarticulate swashbuckler of the 1940s to the man who was more "in touch with his feelings." Women forthrightly demanded equality in their private as well as their public lives, although in the 1970s, women were not always in agreement as to what exactly that meant.



Courtesy of The Advertising Archives

>> The image of the ideal man transitioned from the masculine if inarticulate swashbuckler of the 1940s to the man who was more "in touch with his feelings."

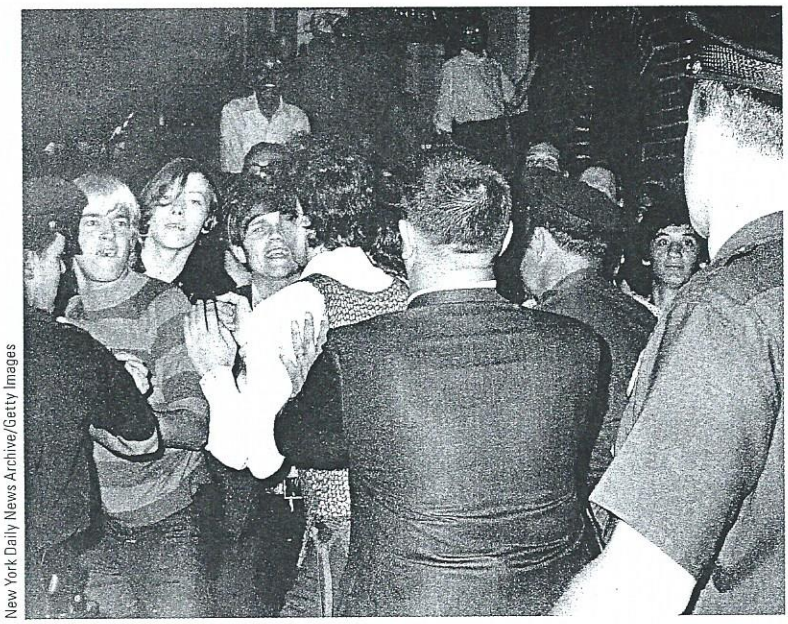
26-4c The Gay Liberation Movement

Also in the 1970s, gay men and lesbians began to demand equality as people living outside what had been perceived as the heterosexual norm. As barriers against racial and religious minorities collapsed, as women advocated and sometimes won equality, gay men and women still faced considerable legal discrimination. For example, consensual sex between two people of the same sex was illegal in nearly every state.

In 1969, a police raid on the bar at the **Stonewall Inn** in New York City sparked the Gay Liberation Movement. Gay men fought back against the police

Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision of 1973 that struck down laws in forty-six states that limited a woman's access to a safe, legal abortion

Stonewall Inn Site in New York City of the riots that ignited the Gay Liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s; at the time of the riots, all fifty states had antisodomy laws, and police busts of gay bars were routine



New York Daily News Archive/Getty Images

>> A crowd of young men, shown here, attempt to stop a police raid of the popular New York City gay bar, the Stonewall Inn. The police continued their push, leading to a riot in the streets of New York. The Stonewall riot gave spark to the gay rights movement in America, which would become increasingly prominent throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.

raid, proclaiming "Gay Power." The riot propelled many gay men and lesbians into politics and political activism, advocating for legal equality such as marriage rights. In 1977, Harvey Milk, on being elected to the Board of Supervisors in San Francisco, became the first openly gay person to win a major political campaign. He was assassinated shortly thereafter and continues to be an iconic martyr of the gay rights movement.

26-4d High Tide of Environmentalism

Demanding respect for the environment was another facet of 1970s social activism. Launched in 1962 by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, the environmental movement grew through the 1960s. In 1970, the United States celebrated the first "Earth Day," which stimulated greater awareness of humans' treatment of the land, sea, and air. Vital to 1970s environmentalism was advocacy of preserving unspoiled lands and promoting ecologically sound practices in industry, manufacturing, and automobile use.

Beyond creating valuable awareness, the political record of the environmental movement is mixed. Environmentalists cheered when Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970 and when Congress passed eighteen environmental laws throughout the decade. They rued the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline in 1973, however. Most damning was the sense that, in an era when Americans were searching for belonging, the cause of environmentalism asserted a species-wide identity, something too diffuse and broad to command much allegiance.

26-4e Popular Culture

American popular culture also reflected the broader, inward-focused trend of the 1970s, often in increasingly flashy ways that demonstrated a more complicated morality, where one might feel like cheering for the traditional bad guy. The music of the 1960s icons Sly and the Family Stone, for example, transitioned from celebrating American unity and possibility in the 1960s to being more introspective and aware of the limits of broad social change in the 1970s. In one poignant instance, Sly changed the lyrics of one of his most popular 1960s songs from "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" to, in 1971, "Thank You for Talkin' to Me Africa." In addition to demonstrating the decline of hope for broad social change, the changed lyrics also capture the rise of identity politics, with Sly looking for his roots in Africa rather than the United States.

In the later 1970s, disco music throbbed in America's cities. The 1977 film *Saturday Night Fever* enshrined disco music as a typical "seventies" cultural form, but the film also displayed as its depressing backdrop the decline and plight of American cities of the Northeast. Recently, historians have begun to debate the meaning of disco. Some see it as a reflection of the narcissistic and individualized culture of the 1970s, as people danced largely by themselves and for their own glorification. Others, meanwhile, see disco as a last gasp of the "coming together" attitude of the 1960s, as African American music propelled a Latino dance culture that was open to homosexuals and white ethnics, all in an arena of respect and fulfillment. If the meaning of disco remains open to interpretation, similarly conflicted emotions were reflected in the landmark films of the era, such as *The Godfather*, *The Godfather, Part II*, and *Bonnie and Clyde*, in which viewers were compelled to root for the success and freedom of violent criminals who defy traditional American morals. Thus the moral complexity

Archive Photos/Getty Images

>> In *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), John Travolta, shown here, did most of his dancing by himself.

of the period, with its dramatically changing social and economic background, inspired many vibrant contributions to the popular culture that also reflected the era's malaise.

26-5 THE RISE OF THE NEW RIGHT

Perhaps predictably, all of these calls for liberal change led to a combative conservative reaction. This movement, collectively dubbed the "New Right" by the press, utilized the elite intellectual conservatism symbolized by William F. Buckley's *National Review* magazine, which was founded in 1955, and took conservatism to the grassroots. The New Right was largely composed of two groups, social conservatives and economic conservatives. Social conservatives opposed abortion and what they saw as the moral decline of society, while economic conservatives urged tax cuts to limit the size and reach of government. Both types of conservatives continued to urge an aggressive stance against the Soviet Union. Both also strove to diminish government intervention in people's lives. The expansion of the federal state during the Great Society of the 1960s and what conservatives saw as the loosening of laws regarding morality spurred this new coalition to work together, and it would continue to do so for the remainder of the century.

26-5a Economic and Political Conservatism

A key dimension of 1970s conservatism arose in opposition to what were viewed as excessive tax policies in an era of inflation. If government was deemed corrupt, went the refrain, why should a significant percentage of our income go to taxes? This sentiment was most evident in California, where skyrocketing house prices meant dramatic increases in property taxes. When homeowners could not pay these higher property taxes, they revolted and passed Proposition 13, which limited all further increases on property taxes to 2 percent a year. Within months, nearly three-quarters of other states passed similar laws. The Republican Party capitalized on this populist anger, positioning itself as the antigovernment party.

The state of California had a large economic surplus, so the decline in property taxes there did not immediately limit services. In many other places, however, states could not afford to pay for public schools, road maintenance, or effective fire and police departments. In a familiar theme of the 1970s and 1980s, Americans would have to turn inward—to their communities—to solve these institutional problems. Those cities and towns that could afford a good level of local control thrived; those that could not faced dire straits.

26-5b The Religious Right

Some of the shock troops of the New Right were evangelical Christians, a growing force in the 1970s. These Protestant evangelicals poured their efforts into three things: (1) forming an intense personal relationship with Jesus; (2) gathering converts, usually former mainline or liberal Protestants; and (3) advancing a political agenda that stressed traditional "family values" that countered the women's rights movement and the Gay Liberation movement. This new crop of evangelicals especially targeted feminism and was visibly enraged by the Supreme Court's *Roe* v. *Wade* decision, which has since served as a rallying cry for the entrance of the fundamentalist movement into American politics.

In 1979, conservative Christians led by Rev. Jerry Falwell founded the **Moral Majority** political lobbying group, which, alongside tax-revolting economic conservatives, formed the other arm of the Republican Party. Evangelicals became increasingly visible in popular music and fiction. Seemingly diminished were what had been in the 1950s the

Moral Majority Conservative political organization begun by Rev. Jerry Falwell in 1979 and consisting of evangelical Christians who overwhelmingly supported the Republican Party

paramount religious divisions between mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, surging were new divisions between conservatives and liberals of all faiths, but especially Protestants. Not only did the appearance of a more public aspect of faith reflect the "southernization" of American culture, but it also demonstrated the inward turn that took place in the 1970s, as religion became a realm of division and exclusion rather than one of inclusion and community building.

"FAMILY VALUES"

Predictably, the women's movement served as a touchstone for strong opposition. While many women sought to take advantage of the new opportunities open to them in the 1970s, a substantial percentage wanted to preserve the traditional roles of American womanhood. If securing the right to low-wage work was what the women's movement was about, some of these women thought the cost of equality too high. Others cited biblical passages about a woman's obligation to submit to her husband. Still others saw the women's movement and the sexual revolution as putting traditional families in jeopardy, by encouraging women to focus on themselves rather than their children. Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative activist, headed the opposition by founding STOP ERA to block the Equal Rights Amendment, claiming that the women in NOW were using politics to remedy their personal problems. She also asserted that the women in the women's movement were all lesbians, a mischaracterization intended to capitalize on America's homophobia. But Schlafly's tactics were effective. When she began STOP ERA in 1972, thirty of the necessary thirty-eight states had approved the amendment. After she began her organization, the amendment languished, finally expiring without passage in 1982.

>LOOKING AHEAD . . .

At the end of the 1970s, the dominant news story seemed to come from nowhere, even if it was a perfect symbol of the weaknesses felt by much of the American population. During the final year of Carter's presidency, Islamic militants took control of the American Embassy in Tehran, taking 52 hostages and starting what came to be called the Iranian hostage crisis. The crisis, which lasted 444 days and sparked numerous poorly executed rescue missions, would help propel into office a president who projected a more positive image of the United States and who promised to return America to a perceived greatness of old. But rather than serving as a definitive transition, the election of Ronald Reagan solidified many of the changes that had taken place during the 1970s.

Perhaps most importantly, Reagan symbolized the political conservatism that had gathered strength in the 1970s, and also its anti-government ethos. While projecting the Sunbelt image of a tough individual leader, he argued that government was more of a problem than a solution to society's problems. He paid homage (if usually only that) to minorities whose concerns had come to the forefront of 1970s identity politics, by, for instance, appointing Sandra Day O'Connor as the first female associate justice to the U.S. Supreme Court. Thus, despite Reagan's rhetoric of a new America, the legacy of the 1970s influenced developments for the remainder of the twentieth century. And it is to those decades that we turn next.

STUDY TOOLS 26

READY TO STUDY? IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN:

- ❑ Rip out the Chapter Review Card, which includes key terms and chapter summaries.

ONLINE AT WWW.CENGAGEBRAIN.COM, YOU CAN:

- ❑ Collect StudyBits while you read and study the chapter.
- ❑ Quiz yourself on key concepts.
- ❑ Find videos for further exploration.
- ❑ Prepare for tests with HIST5 Flash Cards as well as those you create.
- ❑ View a collection of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's papers.
- ❑ Read the text of *Roe* v. *Wade*.
- ❑ Read a State Department briefing on the status of Chile, 1970.
- ❑ Hear Nixon's resignation speech.
- ❑ Learn more about Watergate.
- ❑ Read a *Saturday Night Live* transcript of Chevy Chase's impression of Gerald Ford.
- ❑ Read the *Bakke* decision.
- ❑ See a slide show about the award-winning photo from the Boston busing crisis.
- ❑ Watch Carter's "crisis of confidence" speech.

27 | Reagan's America

David Paul Morris/Getty Images

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 27-1 Evaluate the domestic policies of Ronald Reagan as president.
- 27-2 Describe the "culture wars" that plagued the nation during the 1980s.
- 27-3 Discuss the problems Reagan's successor faced in paying for the "Reagan Revolution."
- 27-4 Describe the conditions for, and aftermath of, the end of the Cold War.

AFTER FINISHING THIS CHAPTER GO TO **PAGE 540** FOR STUDY TOOLS

The growing conservative movement and its prioritization on the freedoms most valued by conservatives, including opposing New Deal and Great Society fiscal policies and the restoration of what it defined as traditional family values, was given an optimistic face by the actor-turned-politician Ronald Reagan. Born in 1911, Reagan had been a New Deal Democrat and supporter of FDR, but his staunch anticommunism and his sense that the government was growing too large pushed him in a conservative direction beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. A former actor, Reagan never claimed to be a deep thinker, but he was an astute judge of the public mood and an incredibly personable man, with endless anecdotes and a mannerism that made even his political enemies often smile. Thus, Reagan combined his conservative beliefs with the ability to bring those ideas to the public in a nonthreatening way. By advocating tax and budget cuts, he wooed economic conservatives, while his Supreme Court appointees usually made decisions that favored social conservatives. In foreign policy, he adopted strong anticommunist rhetoric and dramatically increased the military budget, even as changes in the Soviet Union diminished the communist threat. He also sought to reinstitute school prayer in public schools and to ban abortions, smilingly harkening America back to what he saw as its more innocent days. More than anybody else, Reagan defined the confident, conservative America of the 1980s.

This was a stark contrast to the uneasy malaise of 1970s America and to Carter's moralistic quests for American austerity. As opposed to Carter requesting Americans to remember to be thrifty and live within their means, Reagan promised it was "morning in America" again, and the way to maintain American greatness was to boost the institutions of capitalism and invest heavily in the nation's defense. In some ways, Reagan symbolized the end of the communal spirit of the 1960s by emphasizing the power and talent of American individuals.

But Reagan's policies came with a cost: his insistence on defending traditional "family values" allowed him to ignore the growing AIDS crisis that emerged in the 1980s, seeing it as disease that affected only the gay community. Equally damningly, he ignored growing disparities in wealth throughout the decade, as the rich got richer and the poor got poorer. Turning a blind eye to these kinds of problems led to a growing and contentious divide between America's social conservatives and its social liberals. During the 1980s, the Democrats aligned more with social liberalism, while the Republicans established themselves as advocates for social conservatism, and the debates between the two parties became increasingly polarized, spurring what many scholars now label a culture war.

This chapter examines Reagan's presidency both at home and abroad and then turns to the internal American social divisions whose political head butting would lead to the contentious political arena that existed during the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

27-1 REAGAN'S DOMESTIC POLITICS

Toward the end of his presidency, Jimmy Carter was beleaguered by the stagnating economy and the Iranian hostage crisis. As an advocate of several of the identity politics movements, Carter also suffered from the mounting white backlash against them. In the 1980 election, Carter struggled to secure his party's nomination, and he emerged from the Democratic Convention severely weakened. He was no match for the charismatic personality of the Republicans' nominee, Ronald Reagan.

Reagan, previously a movie actor and two-term governor of California, not only took advantage of his personal charisma during the election but also took notes from previous presidential elections, which saw the South become increasingly aligned with the Republican Party. The South had been staunchly Democratic since the Civil War (recall that Abraham Lincoln had been the first Republican president), but after a hundred years, starting in the 1960s, the South's political allegiance began to noticeably shift. Partly this emerged in reaction to the civil rights movement, when Democratic Presidents Kennedy and Johnson advocated civil rights laws, angering many white southerners. Partly the South's transition to the Republicans emerged from the fact that the region was becoming increasingly wealthy as more and more corporations moved south to avoid paying the higher taxes of the northern states and skip out on having to work with entrenched labor unions. In what Republicans called the Southern Strategy, Reagan took advantage of the South's political realignment, actively courting southern leaders and making many references to the similarities between his home state of California

◀◀◀ Throughout the 1980s, Ronald Reagan, depicted here in a piece of art made of his favorite candy, jelly beans, came to symbolize a newly confident America. However, that confidence masked a rise in economic inequality and political polarization, as the freedoms prized most by conservatives battled against those valued most by liberals.

Ronald Reagan Library/Getty Images

>> Reagan handled the tasks of the presidency with smiling ease, leading some to see confidence and others to see aloofness.

and the South, combining the two in what has come to be called the Sunbelt. Reagan handily won the election, and Republican candidates riding his coattails established a Republican majority in the Senate as well.

27-1a Comfortably Conservative

Reagan synthesized the central themes of the conservative movement. These were defined as (1) an almost religious belief in the power of the free market and (2) a commitment to "traditional values," all under (3) the umbrella of staunch anticommunism. As president, Reagan proposed and had passed three key economic policies, comprising the so-called Reagan Revolution.

First, he cut taxes by 25 percent over a three-year period. Reagan argued that tax cuts would produce new investment, which would, in turn, generate an increase in federal revenues. Rather than have taxpayers send money to support the federal government, he argued, revenues would eventually "trickle down" to the lower classes in the form of more jobs. This argument is known as **supply-side economics**.

supply-side economics Theory that tax cuts would produce new investment, which would, in turn, generate an increase in federal revenues; these revenues would eventually "trickle down" to the lower classes in the form of more jobs

Second, Reagan made significant cuts in social programs, particularly welfare, food stamps, and unemployment compensation. Strategically, the administration avoided cutting such politically popular programs as Social Security and Medicare.

And third, the administration proposed a massive increase in military spending, equaling $1.2 trillion over a five-year period. Despite using the rhetoric of shrinking the size of the government, Reagan's investment in defense actually caused a tremendous growth in government spending. This, combined with a cut in taxes, led to a dramatic rise in the nation's already growing debt.

The Reagan Revolution sent the economy on a variable course. In 1982, Reagan's cuts initially produced an economic recession; the supposed trickle-down of wealth did not trickle down and the cuts to welfare programs limited the amount of consumer dollars entering the market. By 1984, however, some of the policies, especially the large defense expenditures, sparked an economic recovery, allowing Reagan to coast to an easy reelection in 1984 against Democrats Walter Mondale and his running mate Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman to run on a major party's ticket (and another symbol of the success of the women's movement).

By the late 1980s, however, Reagan's policies had produced the largest peacetime budget deficit in American history, which even conservatives agreed was bad for the economy. The annual deficits had created a ballooning national debt, and it became clear that the supply-side economics of the 1980s did not yield higher tax revenues, but did help shift a greater percentage of wealth to the top of the economic pyramid. In addition, it also assisted a transition that prioritized the interests of finance and real estate over that of industry.

27-1b Deregulation

Reagan also advocated limiting government involvement in business. Following this policy, he deregulated several industries from government control, including airlines and savings and loan institutions (which led to

>> The supposed trickle down of wealth did not trickle down.

iStock.com/Andyd

a mammoth scandal, discussed later in this chapter). He also loosened regulations on air pollution and motor vehicles, actions that allowed corporations to continue polluting and delay installing air bags in cars for several years. He was worried that such regulation would slow economic development.

27-1c Judicial and Administrative Appointments

While Reagan's fiscal policies reflected free-market conservatism, his judicial and administrative appointments appealed to social conservatives. He encouraged conservative positions on issues like abortion, school busing, affirmative action, and prayer in schools. Reagan appointed three conservatives to the Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor (1981), Antonin Scalia (1986), and Anthony Kennedy (1988); he also named William Rehnquist (a Nixon appointee) as chief justice. These appointments did not ensure a conservative victory in every case, as some justices supported more liberal positions than others (especially, it turned out, O'Connor), but they were valuable bricks in the conservative fortress.

27-2 AMERICA IN THE 1980s: POLARIZATION OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

The American public has always been divided by wealth, politics, and religion. But in the 1980s these divisions grew more prominently in American society and in American politics. There were logical reasons for this. Throughout the decade the wealthier amassed increased wealth, and the poor slipped further into trouble. Also during the decade, and perhaps more importantly, the New Right emerged as an organized right-wing lobbying group. Their stress on "family values," moral issues, and popular culture challenged those who had supported the new direction of social justice advocated in the 1960s and 1970s.

27-2a Divisions in Wealth

Reagan's tax cuts and his cuts to social welfare programs affected different groups of Americans differently. The policies clearly favored the wealthy. Their taxes dropped, and they benefited the most from Reagan's business-friendly policies, including deregulation of big industries. The number of American billionaires grew from just one in 1978 to forty-nine in 1987. The number of Americans earning more than $500,000 increased by a factor of ten. On the other side of the scale, the poor were becoming poorer. The percentage of Americans living below the poverty line increased dramatically during Reagan's first term.

More transformative, however, were the effects on the middle class, which during the 1980s began to capture an increasingly smaller percentage of the nation's wealth. During Reagan's years in office, the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans earned more than 40 percent of the nation's wealth, a threefold increase over the previous two decades. The bottom 90 percent of earners, meanwhile, earned slightly more than 20 percent of the nation's wealth in the 1980s, nearly a threefold decrease from the 1960s. Reagan's social welfare cuts and the decline of middle-class industrial jobs had taken their toll (see Figure 27.1).

It became increasingly apparent that this inequality was afflicting various racial groups differently. While the black middle class was in fact growing, and while the majority of impoverished Americans were white, the proportion of poor people *as a percentage of their race* indicated that people of color were vastly overrepresented below the poverty line. The African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Latinos who had moved to the northern cities after World War II had been hurt by the departure of large manufacturers. These manufacturers had moved either to the South or the West, where labor unions were less powerful or, increasingly during the 1980s, abroad, where businesses could find cheap labor and pay fewer taxes. While 1950s America was characterized by a robust and growing population of middle-class Americans, the 1980s highlighted a reemergence of economic disparities that had been absent since the 1920s.

THE RISE OF JAPAN AND THE AMERICAN TRADE DEFICIT

These economic problems were compounded by the rise of Japan as an economic power. Partly as a result of a deliberate American policy to build up a major East

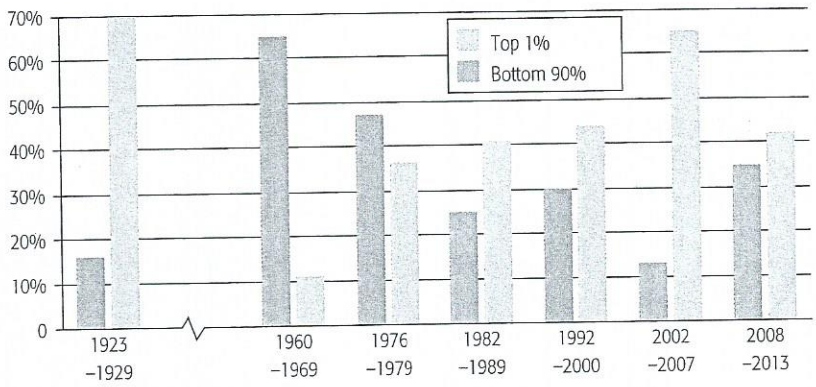
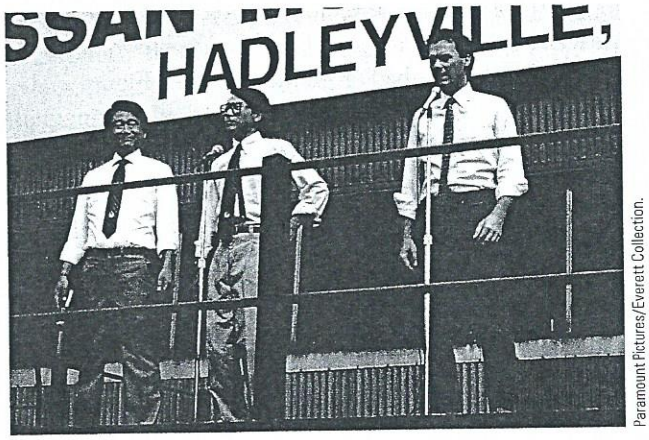


Figure 27.1 Decline of the Middle Class, Share of Income Gains

>> Deregulation, new tax policies, and deindustrialization have all contributed to the decline of the middle class since the 1960s.

Source: CBPP calculations based on data from Piketty and Saez

Asian ally after China became a communist country in 1949, Japan became the world's first fully modernized non-Western country during the second half of the twentieth century. Japan's economic "arrival" became plainly evident during a time when the American economy was showing signs of weakness following the end of the post-war boom. The United States developed a growing **trade deficit** with Japan, which meant that Japan was now successfully exporting products such as cars, steel, and consumer electronics to the United States, while the Japanese were buying fewer and fewer American goods. As a result, American congressmen began to press for an increase in import tariffs on Japanese goods. But these efforts hardly stemmed the flood. Just as the economic muscle of oil-exporting countries had humbled the United States in the 1970s, the rise of Japan led many Americans to wonder if their nation's days as an economic superpower were numbered.



Paramount Pictures/Everett Collection.

>> The economic rise of Japan in the 1980s led many Americans to wonder if their nation's days as a superpower were numbered. Hollywood picked up this theme in the 1986 film *Gung Ho*, which portrayed the Japanese takeover of a failed American auto plant.

trade deficit Inequality in trade whereby one country's exports to another outweigh the second country's exports to the first country

27-2b Continued Crisis in the Cities

These economic crises, combined with the demise of many social welfare programs, led to the continued breakdown of many American cities. While cities had always been portrayed as dangerous places, by the 1980s the growth of the suburbs, the departure of social organizations and industries, and the subsequent decline in tax revenues had solidified that image. Many major cities became symbols of decay, poverty, and racial disparity. Accelerating the decay, a cheaper form of cocaine called "crack" appeared in the mid-1980s. This drug was highly addictive, and its use spread rapidly throughout many inner cities. Meanwhile, inner-city youth seeking identity and security increasingly turned to gangs. Gang violence escalated throughout the decade, leading in some cities to an average of one gang murder per day.

Perhaps due to racism, perhaps due to fear, lawmakers instituted harsh penalties for crimes committed in the inner cities. Possession of small amounts of crack cocaine, for instance, merited a punishment equal to that for owning much larger amounts of cocaine, the more expensive version of the same drug. As these penalties increased, so did the American prison system, which was disproportionately populated by racial minorities from cities. In addition to building prisons, the Reagan administration addressed the growing drug problem with a public relations campaign entitled "Just Say No." Nancy Reagan, the First Lady, spearheaded the campaign, and she got many celebrities to join in. Critics claimed that the campaign was nothing more

than hollow rhetoric that missed the underlying provocations that drove drug use. The causes of the urban crisis are complex and were decades in the making, but politicians seemed both uneager and unable to rectify the most central problems.

27-2c Culture Wars

While a transformation in the distribution of wealth led to one significant division in American life, another emerged in the realm of culture. On the one hand, beginning in the 1980s, inner-city youth fully embraced a new style of music called hip hop or rap. Often featuring poetic rhymes and beatbox music, rap musicians told stories of inner-city plight, of often violent searches for manhood, and of casual escapism that sometimes scandalized mainstream culture. Artists like Grandmaster Flash, Run-D.M.C., Slick Rick, and LL Cool J honed the music into a formative player in the American music scene, and by the later 1980s, the music was receiving both accolades and scorn. And just as jazz had done in the 1920s, rap music's tone of protest and sexualized masculinity drew adherents from well beyond the sources from which it derived, most readily white suburbanites with the purchasing power to sustain rap's growth. Hip hop culture spread well beyond its inner-city origins, and it articulated a vision of America that was racially and ethnically diverse, as well as unkind and ungenerous to the have-nots.

In an almost polar opposite fashion, white conservatives sought to reshape the image of the nation in another direction. With leaders like Pat Robertson, James Dobson, and Jerry Falwell, evangelical Christians made up the bulk of the proponents of the New Right, while conservative radio personalities like Rush Limbaugh fueled the movement and stoked the belief that the United States had become unmoored from its Christian principles. With some success, they protested what they saw as the sexual licentiousness on television, the general permissiveness of American secular society, the emphasis on relativism and pluralism in America's educational system, and the liberties with which the courts had interpreted the privacy clause of the Constitution, especially regarding a woman's right to have an abortion.

Although Reagan only tacitly endorsed the New Right, he did make appearances with its leaders, giving the movement mainstream leverage. They made headlines when they fought to have textbooks remove evolutionary theory from their pages, arguing that evolution contradicted a biblical explanation for the origins of the world. They similarly struggled to remove sex education from public schools, as well as works of literature that they perceived to be overly sexual in nature. Because many of these battles were fought at the level of local school boards, the so-called culture wars were felt deeply in the heart of America.

Gabriel12/Shutterstock.com

>> "I was making close to $2,000 a week selling weed when I decided to join the Unknown Vice Lords. Doing so allowed me to expand my drug-selling territory. Life seemed great."—Jeremiah, teen gang member. "Or so said Jeremiah," explaining the appeal of joining a gang when almost all other options in America's cities seemed foreclosed.

The rise of the New Right stimulated the formation of a left-wing opposition. Political liberals founded organizations like People for the American Way (1981) and older groups like the American Civil Liberties Union revamped and actively lobbied against the policies of the New Right. They presented a full agenda based on separation of church and state, individual privacy laws, and expanded systems of social welfare.

27-2d AIDS

Along with increasing divisions in wealth and the culture wars, a third social crisis emerged in the 1980s,

YOU CAN'T LIVE ON HOPE.

Image courtesy of The Advertising Archives

>> During the eighties, state departments of public health wielded the power of advertising in a massive effort to educate the public and prevent the spread of AIDS. The federal government opted not to, with Reagan himself ordering his surgeon general to refrain from discussing the disease publicly.

this one deadly. Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a deadly disease that attacks a person's immune system, the system that powers a person's body to fight other diseases. AIDS is spread through transmission of bodily fluids, most especially by blood or semen. Because it compromises the immune system, it leaves the body vulnerable to other diseases. When undiagnosed or untreated, AIDS is deadly.

AIDS was first detected in the United States in 1981, and by 1988 more than 57,000 cases had been diagnosed. But throughout the 1980s, no one knew quite what it was; its etiology remained a mystery. More troubling, because in America the disease was initially detected in homosexual men, many Americans were leery to respond, thinking it was simply a disease contained within one American community. Demonstrating the levels of homophobia that existed in the 1980s, politicians were incredibly slow to respond to the epidemic because it affected people they felt they could safely ignore without political ramifications. Reagan himself ordered his surgeon general, the leading spokesperson of matters of public health in the federal government, to refrain from discussing the AIDS crisis publicly, dismissing it as only a gay disease and thereby limiting federal funds for research on the disease and aid to those who suffered from it. But it quickly became apparent that, in places like Haiti and Africa, AIDS had spread beyond the gay community and was a disease that had little to do with one's sexual preference. When basketball star Earvin "Magic" Johnson announced in 1991 that he had contracted AIDS despite being heterosexual, he helped transform the perception of the disease beyond one that simply impacts the gay community. Safe-sex education and heightened awareness of the disease have curbed the runaway epidemic of AIDS in the United States, but it is still a key concern of American society, and it certainly roiled the veneer of confidence and prosperity in Reagan's America, while at the same time putting on dramatic display the nation's continued homophobia.

"Read my lips: no new taxes."

—George H. W. Bush, 1988 Republican National Convention, uttering a sentence that would come back to haunt him during his 1992 bid for reelection

27-3 PAYING FOR THE REAGAN REVOLUTION

Despite Reagan's upbeat image, his "revolution" and the cultural and economic divides that it seemed to exacerbate had immense costs that were borne by his successors.

27-3a The 1988 Election

Reagan's vice president, George H. W. Bush, emphasized Reagan-style conservatism as he campaigned for president in 1988. In the campaign, he portrayed Democratic candidate Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis as a big-government liberal who supported high taxes and who was too soft on crime. Bush ran ads describing an African American Massachusetts prison inmate named Willie Horton who, released by Dukakis on a temporary furlough, kidnapped a Maryland couple and raped the woman. Whereas liberals in the 1960s had been able to scare the public with ads playing on fears of nuclear war, Bush turned *liberal* into a derogatory term that implied a connection between Democratic policies and social disorder.

Cynthia Johnson/Time Life Pictures/Getty Images

>> George H.W. Bush, pictured here, won the 1988 election by a comfortable margin, but was left to pay for the Reagan Revolution, including by raising taxes.

Elected by a comfortable margin, Bush continued many of Reagan's social and economic policies. In appointing a very conservative justice, Clarence Thomas, to the Supreme Court, Bush increased the conservative majority on the Court. But his economic policies were not as successful. Indeed, in both domestic and international affairs, Bush struggled to manage several of the long-term problems that Reagan's policies had created. He was stuck paying for the Reagan Revolution.

27-3b Bush's Domestic Policies

Bush's first hurdle was cleaning up a savings and loan scandal produced by Reagan's attempt to deregulate that industry.

THE S&L CRISIS

Unbridled from government oversight, large numbers of savings and loans (S&Ls) emerged to compete with banks as depositories of people's money. But instead of securing that money, S&Ls invested people's deposits in shady real estate deals, bonds of dubious reliability, and other high-risk investments. Some of these high-risk investments were successful: large companies used the money to buy up weaker competitors, using their debt as a tax write-off and downsizing the weaker companies to make them profitable or eliminating them altogether. In the business world, this forced companies to streamline production and remain competitive.

Some S&L investors, however, were less successful in their investments, leading to waves of layoffs, companies burdened with huge debt, and overly consolidated industries. When several of these high-risk deals went sour, millions of Americans lost their savings. President Bush orchestrated a program to allow depositors to recoup their lost savings, but this plan came with a price tag of nearly $500 million for Americans. American taxpayers were paying the price of bank deregulation.

NO NEW TAXES?

The combination of Reagan's increased military spending, his tax cuts, and the payouts to rectify his deregulation created a huge national debt. During his election campaign, Bush tried to maintain Reagan's optimistic demeanor and promised the American people that he would not raise taxes. It was, he argued, still morning in America. This promise became untenable by 1990. That year, Bush proposed and passed a budget that raised taxes and cut defense spending, because maintaining high outlays without recouping money via taxes was deemed dangerous federal policy. Politically, however, the move was a disaster for Bush. Reneging on his word about raising taxes would, in 1992, cost him his bid for reelection. Even worse, raising taxes and cutting defense spending did little to forestall a serious recession. It was too little, too late.

RECESSION

By 1990, unemployment had risen to 7 percent, and companies were regularly downsizing. The number of impoverished Americans rose by 2 million, and the cost of operating with a huge national debt was becoming apparent. Incredibly, Bush failed to respond immediately. He eventually proposed tax credits and a middle-class tax cut, but these proposals came much too late to stem a recession.

27-4 FOREIGN RELATIONS UNDER REAGAN-BUSH

During their time in office, both Reagan and Bush supported an active, interventionist foreign policy. This was disastrous for balancing America's budget, but it did help end the Cold War, albeit in ways that even Reagan himself didn't predict.

27-4a The End of the Cold War Era

When he first entered office, Reagan took a hard line with the Soviet Union, provocatively portraying it as an "evil empire." He also began various new weapons programs that, in an effort to keep up in the so-called arms race, helped lead to the economic collapse of the Soviet Union.

STAR WARS

Among the many ways Reagan expanded the Cold War to, the bluntest was to increase the number of American weapons, reigniting the arms race that had slowed through the 1970s. Reagan revived military programs Carter had cut. He dismissed overtures from the Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, to cut back certain missiles if the United States would refrain from deploying intermediate-range missiles of its own in Europe. Reagan also proposed building new defensive weapons capable of "rendering . . . nuclear weapons impotent" by zapping them from space. This "Strategic Defense Initiative" or SDI (denigrated by critics as "star wars") violated the 1972 ABM Treaty, which forbade defensive systems capable of covering either the entire United States or the Soviet Union. Andropov and other Soviet leaders saw SDI as a rejection of arms control overtures in favor of a new quest for global supremacy.

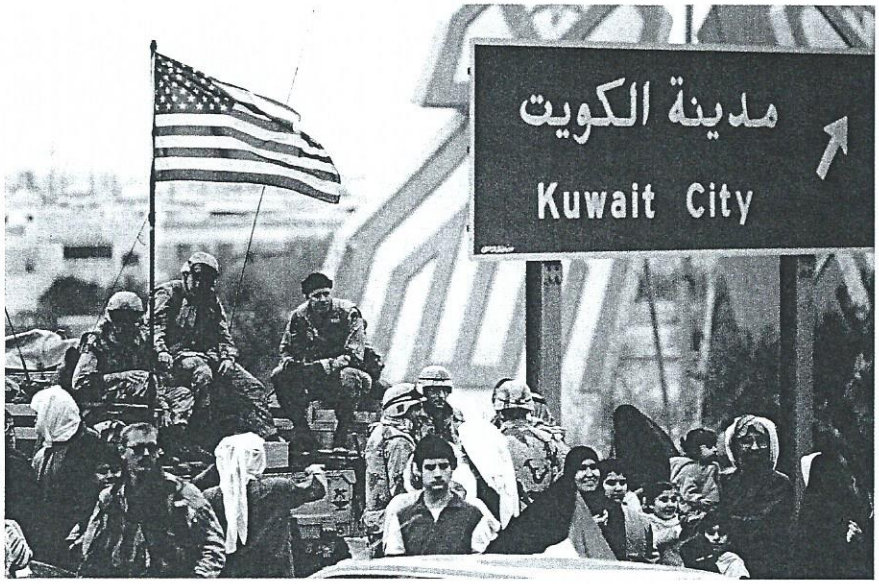
Reagan may have been betting that the Soviet Union could not afford to keep up. After all, in August 1980, shipworkers in Poland staged a series of strikes that led to the formation of Solidarity, the first independent labor union in a communist-controlled country. The union's launch sparked a wave of sympathy strikes and indicated that the Soviet Union was having problems maintaining its empire.

PERESTROIKA

Relations between Reagan and the Soviets softened during Reagan's second term. The chief impetus for change was the arrival of a new Soviet premier, Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev was a reformer eager to restructure the Soviet economy (the Russian word for "restructuring" is *perestroika*, a catchphrase of the 1980s and 1990s). He was also in favor of softening the opposition between the West and the East (the Russian word for "openness" is *glasnost*, another catchphrase of the era). Gorbachev was keenly aware of the exceptional costs of Reagan's burgeoning arms race, and he sought to rectify the Soviet Union's financial problems by slowing the nuclear buildup. In 1987, the two leaders—Reagan and Gorbachev—agreed to eliminate thousands of intermediate-range missiles in the Intermediate Nuclear

Courtesy Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

>> President Reagan developed a solid partnership with the Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, leading to several breakthrough summits and the opening of the Soviet nations to some Western goods. It wasn't all good will, though: the Soviet Union was in fact going broke. Here they are pictured at a plenary meeting at the Soviet Mission during the Geneva Summit.



Patrick Durand/Getty Images

>> The end of the Cold War shifted the focus of American diplomatic interests, with no area deemed more important than the Middle East. Here, the American flag flies next to a sign for Kuwait City, which American troops had just liberated from Iraq.

Forces (INF) Treaty. Gorbachev then removed troops from Afghanistan, signaling Russia's willingness (and financial need) to stop actively promoting the spread of communism around the world, one of the key fears coloring the American understanding of the Cold War. With the Soviet Union's removal from Afghanistan, the American-supported Mujahideen took control, and the Mujahideen's inability to control the war-ravaged nation led to the rise of the Taliban, something that would have deadly ramifications for the United States in 2001. But by the late 1980s, it was clear the United States had the upper hand in the Cold War.

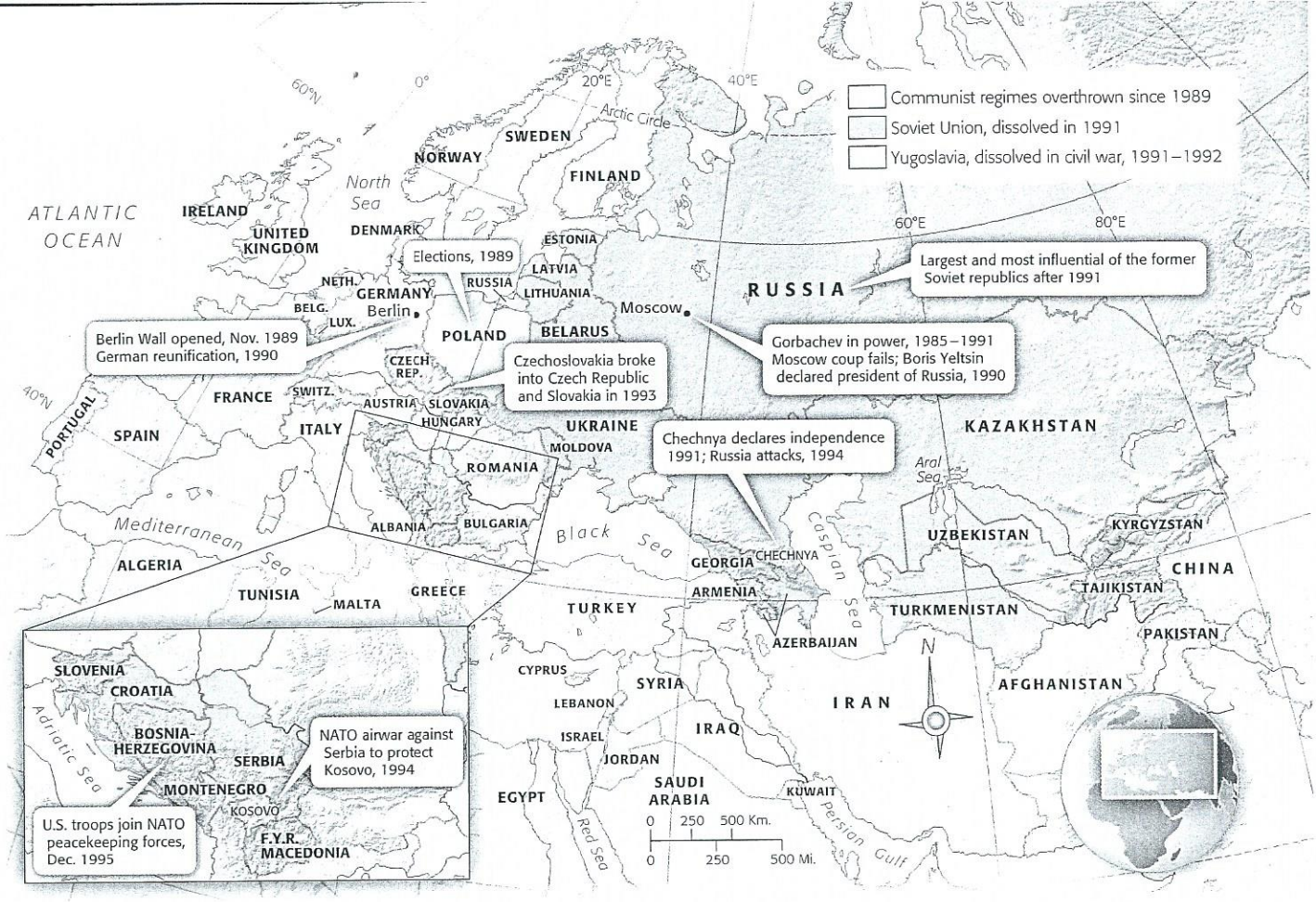
THE MIDDLE EAST

In addition to the delicate relations with the Soviet Union, the United States experienced several complicated new foreign policy problems throughout the 1980s. Its most complex international relations involved the Middle East. There, an attack in Lebanon, the country immediately north of Israel, was the initial flashpoint. Lebanon had been torn apart since 1975 by a civil war between Muslims and Christians, and the small country had been turned into a battlefield by the foreign armies of Syria, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and Israel. Fearing the presence of troops from Soviet-friendly Syria so close to Israel, the United States sent peacekeeping forces to Lebanon in August 1982. The Hezbollah terrorist organization viewed U.S. peacekeepers as targets and kidnapped a number of American educators and missionaries. The worst blow came in October 1983, when Hezbollah terrorists attacked the barracks of U.S. peacekeepers in Beirut; a single suicide bomber driving a truck filled with explosives killed 241 servicepeople.

Of course, much of the U.S. interest in the Middle East centered on oil. Americans had become increasingly dependent on the energy source during the second half of the twentieth century. When America's oil supplies were repeatedly threatened throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the United States took military or diplomatic action. In 1980, for instance, Iraq, a militarily powerful oil-producing Arab state at the head of the Persian Gulf, attacked its neighbor Iran in an attempt to secure control of local waterways. The United States, the Soviet Union, and other Arab states in the region supported Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in his fight against Iran's militant Islamic republic. When Iran struck back against Iraq and its allies by firing missiles at their oil tankers, the United States responded by reflagging Kuwaiti tankers with American colors, bringing them under the defensive umbrella of the U.S. Navy. The threat of direct American military force reinforced the idea that the free passage of oil traffic was a key national interest. It also signaled deeper American involvement in the Middle East. Whereas from the 1950s to the 1970s, American involvement in the Middle East was mostly covert, from the 1980s onward, this was less and less the case.

THE IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

America's Cold War focus on keeping left-wing governments out of Latin America and Reagan's desire to guard American interests in the Middle East converged in the Iran-Contra affair. In 1985, at the urging of Israel, the United States sold weapons to Iran for use in its war with Iraq, which Israel viewed as its most dangerous enemy in the region. Reagan did this despite an embargo against Iran (imposed after the 1979 hostage crisis) and the fact that Iran was an avowed enemy; indeed, the United States was at the same time offering support to Iran's enemy, Iraq. It sold weapons to Iran because top officials in the Reagan



Map 27.1 The End of the Cold War

>> As this map shows, beginning in 1989, several Soviet-controlled countries became free of the Soviet Union, ultimately leading to the end of the Soviet Union altogether.

administration hoped that doing so would ease relations between the United States and that oil-rich nation.

More damning, however, was the discovery that members of Reagan's administration took profits from the sale of arms to Iran and sent the money to a right-wing guerrilla group in Nicaragua called the ***contras***, who were battling the left-wing government. It was never proven that Reagan was aware that the Iran arms sale funds had been diverted to the *contras*, but the nationally televised testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North demonstrated that Reagan had not sufficiently controlled members of his own administration. Cold War imperatives were, and had been since 1946, causing rifts in American diplomatic circles, and Reagan's administration was not above the law when it came to executing American foreign policy.

contras Right-wing Nicaraguan guerrilla group during the 1980s

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

By the late 1980s, the *perestroika* and *glasnost* initiated by Soviet premier Gorbachev had begun to blossom. Inspired by their exposure to capitalism, Western popular culture, and the loosened Soviet controls allowed by Gorbachev, in 1989, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, then Bulgaria and Romania, all overthrew their communist regimes. In November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down. In 1990, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia all declared their independence. In 1991, the once-mighty Soviet Union petered out, collapsing into a number of independent states—Russia, Ukraine, and many others (see Map 27.1). The USSR was no longer.

This meant that the United States had won the Cold War. Or, more realistically, that the Soviet Union had

lost it. In the early 1990s, it quickly became apparent that Gorbachev's motives for *perestroika* were financial: the Soviet Union simply could not afford to maintain the huge military presence needed to keep its buffer states under control. Historians still debate the role of the United States in the demise of the USSR, with some saying America's sometime hardline approach actually prolonged the Cold War by giving political cover to Soviet leaders who would rather talk about the evils of the United States than poverty and hunger at home. Others argue that the policy of containment, first articulated in 1946 and lasting through the presidency of George H. W. Bush, had succeeded in keeping communism from conquering and dominating the world and that capitalism had clearly triumphed over Soviet-style communism. Regardless, the end of the Cold War led to a reduction of nuclear weapons by both the United States and the former Soviet Union, although many weapons still exist. It also allowed the United States to station fewer troops in Europe. To understand why the Soviet Union collapsed, see "The Reasons Why . . ." box.

27-4b Other Foreign Affairs

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, several small, brutal wars emerged as people fought for control of their now-independent nations. Nowhere was this more troubling than in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a part of the former Yugoslavia. There the various factions engaged in

The Reasons Why...

There were several reasons why the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991:

Containment and the arms race. Since 1946, the policy of the United States had been to contain communism where it was and fight any efforts to spread it beyond the Soviet Union. This policy had been incredibly divisive in the United States, leading to several wars (both declared and undeclared), violent protests, and vast expenditures on military supplies and nuclear weapons. But it had succeeded in checking the expansion of communism in various parts of the world, including Latin America. More importantly, it also had forced the Soviet Union to spend vast amounts of money fighting wars around the world and maintaining a huge nuclear arsenal.

Widespread poverty. By the 1970s and 1980s, the draconian leadership of the Soviet Union and its overly centralized economic planning had led the countries of the Eastern bloc to lag behind the countries of the West, some of which had enjoyed technological advances absent in Soviet-controlled nations. In Poland, for instance, more than 60 percent of the population lived in poverty throughout the 1980s, while the people of Western Germany were faring significantly better. This led to protests in many of the countries of the Soviet Union, protests that were expensive to contain and defeat.

Gorbachev's policies. By the middle 1980s, it became clear to many in the Soviet Union that it was nearing bankruptcy and could not afford to keep fighting the Cold War or to maintain strict controls over its subordinate nations. In 1985, the Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev began a series of initiatives, called "glasnost" (openness) and "perestroika" (restructuring), aimed at softening relations with the United States, and perhaps ending the Cold War. This, of course, would also keep down the cost of the arms race. He also later tacitly invited the nations of the Eastern bloc to secede, suggesting the Soviet Union would not punish them for doing so.

The defections of 1989. In 1989, several Eastern bloc nations simply declared their independence from the Soviet Union. Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia departed first, then Bulgaria and Romania. Only in Romania was there any resistance. In the other countries, the Soviet-backed communists simply stepped down. The most dramatic moment occurred in November 1989, when the Berlin Wall was destroyed in a public protest against Soviet rule and the Cold War more generally. By 1991, there were only a handful of nations left in the Soviet Union, and the union formally dissolved. Not all communist countries fell, however. Protests in 1989 in China were rebuffed, and the communist government there still retains control.

Tom Stoddart Archive/Getty Images

>> In November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down. The event became a key symbol of the fall of communism and, ever since, has continued to be a touchstone in the struggle for increased freedoms around the world.

ethnic cleansing, defined as the complete expulsion of an entire ethnic population from a particular area. With the Soviet Union no longer serving as watchful overlord, several nationalist movements clashed in civil wars throughout central and eastern Europe.

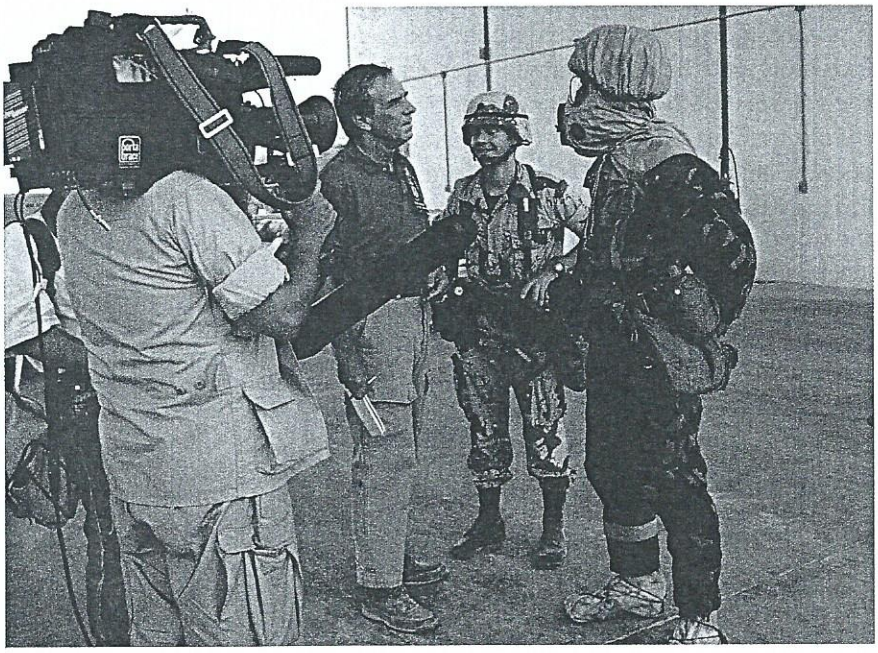
TIANANMEN SQUARE

Meanwhile, in June 1989, several spontaneous prodemocracy rallies in China coalesced in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. The Communist Chinese government used force to end the rallies, killing at least several hundred of the student activists. This action strained U.S.–China relations and demonstrated that even as some governments were willing to liberalize their policies in certain arenas, such as economics, they would obstinately oppose any movement toward ceding political power. Communism as practiced in the USSR may have failed, leading to the demise of the Soviet empire and the rise of several brutal nationalist wars, but in China, the Communist Party still exerted considerable control.

THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

The Middle East was another foreign policy crisis point. In 1988, the war between Iran and Iraq ended without a clear victor. The United States had actively supported the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein throughout the struggle, despite selling arms to Iran in the Iran-Contra affair of 1985. In 1990, Hussein attempted to reestablish Iraq's control of the Middle East and ease some of his war debt by taking over the tiny oil-rich neighboring country of Kuwait. Bush feared that Hussein might use this as a base to threaten American oil supplies, and he responded by condemning the action and organizing a broad coalition of nations (including several Middle Eastern nations) in an embargo against Iraq. He set a deadline for Iraq to remove its troops from Kuwait and threatened to use the coalition to fight him if necessary.

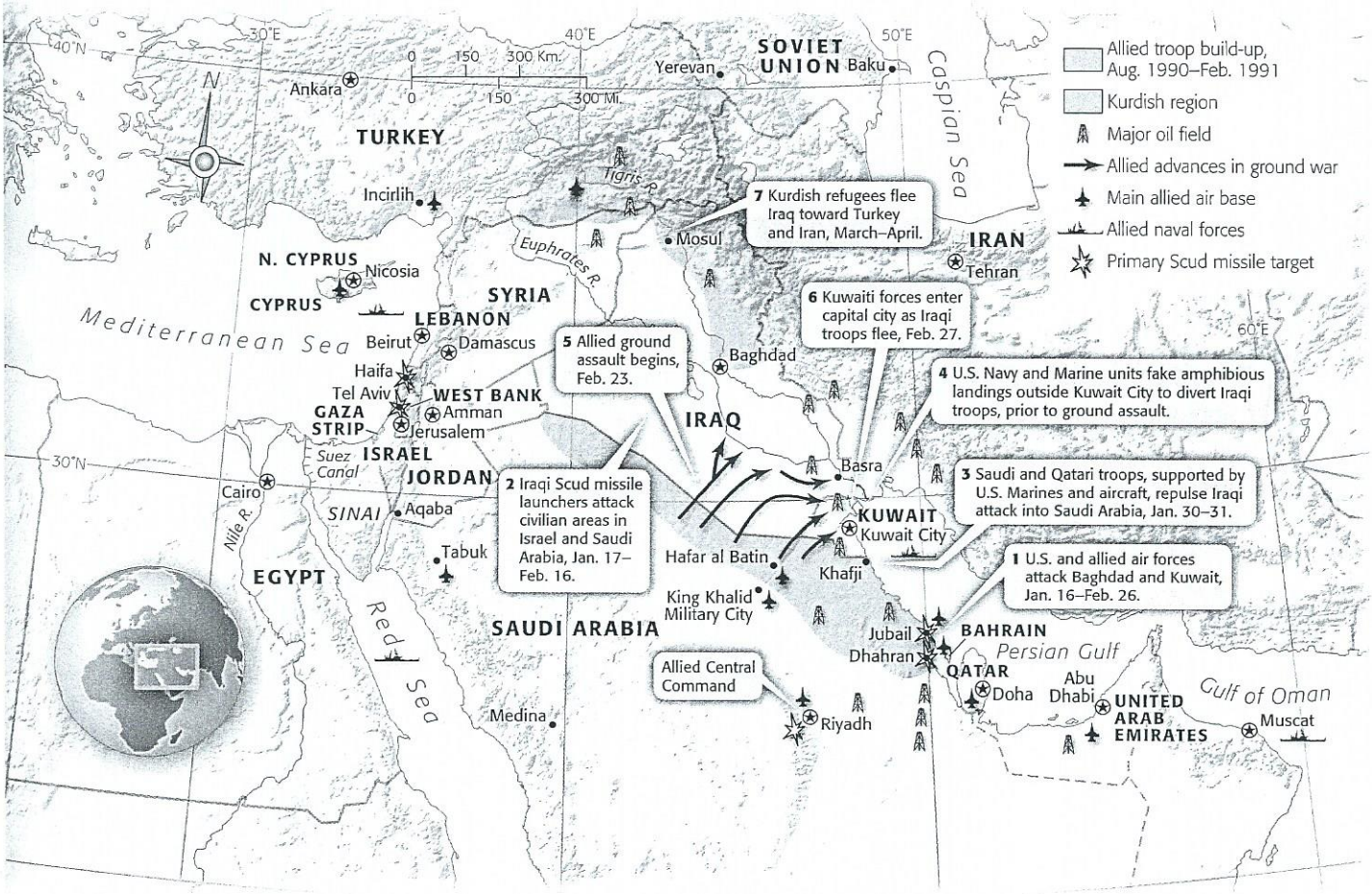
In this game of brinksmanship, Hussein did not blink, and in January 1991, the Persian Gulf War began



Danita Delimont/Alamy Stock Photo

>> Vietnam was the first televised war, but the Gulf War was the first to be televised live.

ethnic cleansing Complete expulsion of an entire ethnic population from a particular area



Map 27.2 The Persian Gulf War

>> A map of the Middle East, showing the stages of war in the Persian Gulf in 1991.

(see Map 27.2). It was more of a rout than a war: 40,000 Iraqis were killed, compared to 240 coalition troops. Hussein's attempt to attack Israel and break up the coalition aligned against him failed after U.S. antiballistic missiles destroyed the bombs headed for Israel. Hussein had played his last card, and once the ground war began in earnest, in late February 1991, the war was over within days. Covered by satellite television and twenty-four-hour television news networks—both relatively new developments—Americans and the world watched from cameras in Baghdad hotels as missiles dropped and ground troops advanced. Vietnam was the first televised war, but the Gulf War was the first to be televised live.

In the end, Iraq quickly gave up Kuwait. Bush decided not to invade Iraq and remove Hussein because such an action would have destroyed the coalition he had amassed and also because he did not know who would succeed Hussein. This decision left certain factions in Iraq vulnerable to Hussein's harsh regime, including the ethnic Kurdish minority in northern Iraq and the **Shia Muslims** in the south, both of whom were hated by Hussein's **Sunni Muslim** base. The Sunni–Shia split within Islam dates back to the death of Islam's founder, the Prophet Mohammad, and concerns not only a battle

Sunni Muslims A branch of Islam containing the vast majority of the world's Muslims, who follow closely the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed and who have codified his teachings in Islamic law

Shia Muslims A branch of Islam containing a minority of the world's Muslims, who believe clerics have offered ongoing interpretations of Islamic texts

over who was the rightful heir to Mohammad but also certain religious principles. Historically, Sunnis have more strictly followed the teachings of Mohammad, while Shias see their leaders as reflections of God on earth. Sunnis have almost always been in the overwhelming majority, but both sides see the other as apostates sullying the true faith, which has led to continued conflict in the region.

>LOOKING AHEAD...

When the war in the Persian Gulf ended in 1991, President Bush enjoyed strong support. His approval rating soared to a record-breaking 91 percent. But the weak American economy kept plaguing him.

Nevertheless, two historic transitions marked the years between 1980 and 1992. First was the increasing division between the country's haves and have-nots. Appeased by the friendly face of Ronald Reagan, large numbers of Americans lost interest in supporting the broad social welfare programs of the New Deal and the Great Society, favoring smaller government instead. One result of the decline of the social safety net was an increase in disparities of wealth.

The second historic transition of the era was the end of the Cold War, which terminated the fifty-year struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. With the conclusion of the Cold War, the world became a more open, accessible place, and this development, sometimes called globalization, would be a key part of the world economy that would shape the 1990s.

STUDY TOOLS 27

READY TO STUDY? IN THE BOOK, YOU CAN:

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- ❑ Read Reagan's address on the campaign against drug abuse.
- ❑ Read an article discussing income disparities.
- ❑ Hear Reagan's "Evil Empire" speech.
- ❑ See a timeline of events about the S&L crisis.

CH27 TIMELINE

1980 Ronald Reagan defeats Democrat Jimmy Carter in presidential election.

What Else Was Happening

Polish "Solidarity" becomes first independent labor union in Communist bloc.

Iraq attacks Iran.