

Period 9: 1980 to the Present

In a Nutshell

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

Key Concepts

Part 1

- A. A new conservatism grew to prominence in U.S. culture and politics, defending traditional social values and rejecting liberal views about the role of government.
- B. Reduced public faith in the government's ability to solve social and economic problems, the growth of religious fundamentalism, and the dissemination of neoconservative thought all combined to invigorate conservatism.
- C. Conservatives achieved some of their political and policy goals, but their success was limited by the enduring popularity and institutional strength of some government programs and public support for cultural trends of recent decades.

Part 2

- D. The end of the Cold War and new challenges to U.S. leadership in the world forced the nation to redefine its foreign policy and global role.
- E. The Reagan administration pursued a reinvigorated anti-Communist and interventionist foreign policy that set the tone for later administrations.
- F. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. foreign policy and military involvement focused on a war on terrorism, which also generated debates about domestic security and civil rights.

Part 3

- G. Moving into the 21st century, the nation continued to experience challenges stemming from social, economic, and demographic changes.
- H. The increasing integration of the U.S. into the world economy was accompanied by economic instability and major policy, social, and environmental challenges.
- I. The U.S. population continued to undergo significant demographic shifts that had profound cultural and political consequences.

Significant Topics

1. The Malaise of the Late 1970s

Public confidence and trust in government declined in the 1970s in the wake of economic challenges, political scandals, foreign policy "failures," and a sense of social and moral decay.

- a. energy crisis

b. stagflation

c. Carter's "Malaise" speech, 1979

d. Iranian hostage crisis, 1979

2. **The Rise of the Religious Right**

The rapid and substantial growth of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian churches and organizations, as well as increased political participation by some of those groups, encouraged significant opposition to liberal social and political trends.

a. Moral Majority

b. Focus on the Family

3. **The Conservative "Revolution"**

Conservatives enjoyed significant victories related to taxation and deregulation of many industries, but many conservative efforts to advance moral ideals through politics met inertia and opposition.

a. supply-side economics (Reaganomics)

b. Economic Recovery Tax Act, 1981

c. sagebrush rebellion

d. Contract with America, 1994

e. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 1992

4. **The Growth of Government**

Although Republicans continued to denounce “big government,” the size and scope of the federal government continued to grow after 1980, as many programs remained popular with voters and difficult to reform or eliminate.

a. increase in the budget deficit and national debt

b. Medicare Modernization Act, 2003

5. **The United States and the Soviet Union**

President Ronald Reagan, who initially rejected détente with increased defense spending, military action, and bellicose rhetoric, later developed a friendly relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, leading to significant arms reductions by the United States and the Soviet Union.

a. Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)

b. Mikhail Gorbachev

c. Iran-Contra Scandal, 1987

d. Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

e. Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty, 1987

f. Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989

g. Fall of the Soviet Union, 1991

6. **U.S. Foreign Policy after the Cold War**

The end of the Cold War led to new diplomatic relationships but also new U.S. military and peacekeeping interventions, as well as debates over the nature and extent of American power in the world.

a. Persian Gulf War, 1991

b. Dayton Agreement, 1995

c. Bombing of Yugoslavia, 1999

7. **The War on Terrorism**

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

a. Al Qaeda

b. Taliban

c. Attacks of September 11, 2001

- d. Patriot Act, 2001
- e. Department of Homeland Security, 2001
- f. War in Afghanistan, 2001
- g. Iraq War, 2003-2011

8. Changes in the American Economy

Economic inequality increased after 1980 as U.S. manufacturing jobs were eliminated, union membership declined, and real wages stagnated for the middle class. Policy debates intensified over free trade agreements, the size and scope of the government social safety net, and calls to reform the U.S. financial system.

- a. Rust Belt
- b. North American Free Trade Agreement, 1993
- c. The Third Way
- d. Affordable Care Act, 2010

9. The Revolution in Technology

The spread of computer technology and the Internet into daily life increased access to information and led to new social behaviors and networks.

- a. information technology

10. Energy and the Environment

Conflict in the Middle East and concerns about climate change led to debates over U.S. dependence on fossil fuels and the impact of economic consumption on the environment.

a. Kyoto Agreement, 1997

b. global warming

11. Immigration and Migration

After 1980, the political, economic, and cultural influences of the American South and West continued to increase as population shifted to those areas, fueled in part by a surge in migration from regions that had not been heavily represented in earlier migrations, especially Latin American and Asia. The new migrants affected U.S. culture in many ways and supplied the economy with an important labor force, but they also became the focus of intense political, economic, and cultural debates.

a. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986

b. Immigration Act of 1990

12. The Transformation of American Society

Demographic changes intensified debates about gender roles, family structures, and racial and national identity.

a. cultural pluralism

b. glass ceiling

c. Don't Ask, Don't Tell, 1994

d. Defense of Marriage Act, 1996

e. Nancy Pelosi

f. Barack Obama

g. *United States v. Windsor*, 2013

Additional Information

Examples:

1. weapons of mass destruction

2. boomburbs

Topic Number

#7 – War on Terrorism

#13 – The
Transformation of
American Society