A Young Woman Embraces Republican Values

Leslie Maeby, a Republican political staffer in New York State in the 1980s, came from an immigrant family that had long been sympathetic to the Democratic party. Her great-grandfather, Aleksander Obrycki, had come to Baltimore from Poland in 1895. A common laborer who became a naturalized citizen in 1907, he worked for the Democratic...
party, meeting new immigrants on their arrival and introducing them to Democrats who could help them.

Leslie's grandfather Joe Obrycki became a numbers runner, collecting bets for local gamblers. More successful than his father, he survived the Great Depression of the 1930s with little difficulty. He too was a member of the Democratic party, a cog in the machine. As New Deal programs undermined machine rule, Joe, a ward heeler and professional gambler, ran for city council but lost. Defeat notwithstanding, he remained a loyal Democrat.

Leslie's mother, Vilma, was likewise a Democrat. Leslie's father, Jack Maeby, came from a working-class background in Baltimore and was raised as a Democrat. But as his football exploits took him to college at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, he began to see the possibility of upward mobility. His own father, a factory worker, counseled him to "use this," pointing to his head, "instead of these," looking at his hands. Turning down an offer to go to graduate school, he entered a management training program with Montgomery Ward. The Maebys moved to Chicago first, then to the Albany, New York area, where they settled in the suburb of Colonie. While Albany, like most big cities, voted Democratic, Colonie was Republican.

Leslie Maeby was raised in the 1950s in a home where her mother remained Democratic, though frustrated with the Albany machine, and her father was Republican. The suburb, in the midst of a housing boom, developed quickly, as whites fled the larger city—and its black population—and sought safety in the standardized tract houses that were going up everywhere. Nelson Rockefeller, the liberal Republican governor of New York, garnered the support of both of Leslie's parents and many of their neighbors. Yet besides voting, neither Jack nor Vilma was very active politically.

Leslie drifted into politics in 1968, at age 15, without thinking about it. A cheerleader, she was drafted into a congressional campaign by the wife of Fred Field, the Republican candidate, who wanted her to wave pom-poms for her husband and greet supporters. Like the other "Field Girls," she dressed in a blue felt skirt, a white blouse, and suspenders that were striped like the flag. Several nights a week, the group rang doorbells and passed out campaign literature to voters. Leslie often made the first overtures in a household, to be followed by the candidate himself. She found the experience intoxicating, even more so when Fred Field won.

Leslie had followed an increasingly common course into the Republican fold. In a second-grade classroom, she had supported Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon in 1960. In a mock presidential debate in 1964, she had represented conservative Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater. And even though Leslie talked about current events with her mother, a liberal Democrat, she was also influenced by her increasingly conservative Republican father as well as by the Republican community in which she lived. She followed her father's political inclinations and became Republican, as she put it, "almost by default." Race riots, first in Detroit, later in Albany and other American cities, troubled her and others. The chaos in Vietnam led to the rifts in the nation that helped elect Richard Nixon—along with Fred Field—in 1968. By the time she went to the State University of New York at Albany in 1971, she was a solid Republican.

In college, she joined a sorority, where she found women of a similar personal and political bent. Her group drank beer, rather than smoking pot, and wore evening gowns to formal dances, rather than wearing tattered jeans to a rock concert. A sorority sister recommended her for a position as a page in the State Senate in Albany, and Leslie found herself immersed in the political world.

Leslie saw first hand the underside of politics, including the ways those in power manipulated issues to their own advantage. Yet she decided to set aside her idealism and to work within the system. She rose quickly, serving in 1974 on the state platform committee. She worked for John Dunne, a Republican state senator, after graduating from college in 1975, and attended the Republican National Convention as a delegate at large in 1976. When Dunne sought the office of executive of Nassau County, Leslie
ran his campaign. He lost and Leslie left the United States and backpacked through Europe. Yet everywhere she went, she was interested in what she could find about American politics. She wanted to be part of the process as the United States—under the leadership of Ronald Reagan—moved away from the welfare state.

Returning to the United States, in 1984 Leslie took the job of salvaging the re-election campaign of a Republican state senator. She succeeded in that effort, served for four years as executive assistant to the Republican state comptroller, and in 1989 became finance director of the state Republican party.

Leslie was a rock-ribbed Republican, who, like many Americans, reacted with frustration to chaos in national life and moved right as the party moved right. “It’s like if you decide to be a nurse when you’re eighteen, and stay one for twenty years,” she said. “It becomes who you are. How you read the paper. How you watch the news. Your whole outlook.”

The experience of Leslie Maeby mirrored that of countless Americans in the 1980s who left the Democratic party and supported the Republican agenda instead. At a time when people were disturbed by continuing racial conflict, troubled by changes in the welfare state that seemed to help disadvantaged citizens at the expense of middle- and upper-class Americans, and upset at the chaos caused by the Vietnam War, they began to reassess priorities within the democratic political system. In a time of flux, the Republican party seized the initiative and consolidated its own political power. In a process that began in the 1960s (as Jack Maeby left his Democratic roots and became a Republican), a new majority emerged in the United States. Millions of Americans, including members of groups who had long considered themselves Democrats, voiced their frustration by voting Republican, some for the first time. Relying on a fervent religious faith, they succeeded in transforming their vision of the American dream into national policy, and in the 1980s and early 1990s, they watched the economy improve, though often to the benefit of the most affluent Americans. At the same time, members of a variety of minority groups continued to have difficulty finding jobs, the national debt skyrocketed, and finally, the stock market crashed. Meanwhile, harsh Cold War rhetoric led to fears that the continuing confrontation on the global stage between the Soviet Union and the United States might end in nuclear war.

This chapter describes the enormous changes that occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s. It highlights the role of people like Leslie Maeby in bringing to power a new political force that altered the landscape of the United States. It describes the economic and technological shifts that affected the daily lives of millions of Americans, bringing unprecedented prosperity to people at the top of the economic pyramid but leaving millions of less fortunate Americans behind. It explores the efforts of the Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush to redefine—and limit—the government’s role in the economy, and it assesses the impact such constriction had on ordinary Americans. And finally, it examines how foreign policy initiatives brought a successful end to the long and costly Cold War.
In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Republican party re-established itself as the dominant force in national politics. The Republican ascendancy that had begun in the Nixon era was now largely complete. The liberal agenda that had governed national affairs ever since the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt gave way to a new Republican coalition determined to scale back the welfare state and prevent what it perceived as the erosion of the nation’s moral values. Firmly in control of the presidency, sometimes in control of the Senate and later the whole Congress, the Republican party set the new national agenda.

**The New Politics**

Conservatism gained respect in the 1980s, not just in the United States but in other parts of the world as well. In Great Britain, for example, the Labour Party had gained power in the latter part of the 1960s, as the nation underscored its commitment to the welfare state. A national health plan provided medical care for all, and a comprehensive educational system opened up opportunities for people limited by the class-bound strictures of the past. But
problems with both inflation and unemployment plagued Britain, like other nations, and in the 1980s, the Conservative party was back in power, with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister. Elsewhere in the late 1980s, particularly as communism began to crumble in Eastern and Central Europe, Christian Democratic movements became increasingly popular. Founded in the early twentieth century to capture the middle ground of moderate conservatism, midway between the left and the right, they occasionally came to power, sometimes alone and sometimes in coalitions with other groups. Now, as socialism deteriorated, they seemed a more viable alternative.

In the United States, conservatism attracted countless new adherents after the turbulence of the 1960s and the backlash of the Vietnam War. Innovative advertising and fund-raising techniques capitalized on national disaffection with liberal solutions to continuing social problems and made the conservative movement almost unstoppable. Conservatives seized on Thomas Jefferson’s maxim: “That government is best which governs least.” The dramatic economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s, they believed, left a legacy of rising inflation, falling productivity, enormous waste, and out-of-control entitlements. The liberal solution of “throwing money at social problems” no longer worked, conservatives argued. Therefore, they sought to downsize government, reduce taxes, and roll back regulations that they claimed hampered business competition. They wanted to restore the

focus on individual initiative and private enterprise, which they believed had made the nation strong.

The conservative philosophy had tremendous appeal. It promised profitability to those who worked hard and showed initiative. It attracted middle-class Americans, who were troubled that they were being forgotten in the commitment to assist minorities and the poor. It also offered hope for the revival of basic social and religious values that many citizens worried had been eaten away by rising divorce rates, legalized abortion, homosexuality, and media preoccupation with violence and sex.

The new conservative coalition covered a broad spectrum. Some followers embraced the economic doctrines of University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman, who promoted the free play of market forces and a sharp restriction of governmental activism in regulating the economy. Others applauded the social and political conservatism of North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, a tireless foe of anything he deemed pornographic and a fervent campaigner for a limited federal role. Still others flocked to the Republican fold because of their conviction that civil rights activists and “bleeding-heart liberals” practiced “reverse racism” with affirmative action, job quotas, and busing to promote equal opportunity.

The conservative coalition also drew deeply from religious fundamentalists who advocated a literal interpretation of Scriptures. Millions—devout Catholics, orthodox Jews, evangelical Protestants—demanded a return to stricter standards of morality.
Muslims, relying on the Qur'an, took an equally fundamentalist approach. All groups worried about sexual permissiveness, gay rights, drugs, crime, and women working outside the home, a practice they believed eroded family life. In short, fundamentalists objected to liberalizing tendencies and sought to re-fashion society by reaffirming scriptural morality and the centrality of religion in American life.

Many of these activists belonged to the so-called Moral Majority. The Reverend Jerry Falwell of Virginia and other television evangelists who focused on the concerns of religious fundamentalism attracted large followings in the 1980s. Emulating Father Charles E. Coughlin, the radio priest of the 1930s, they used electronic means to preach fiery sermons to enormous audiences and focused their television congregations on specific political ends. They also used their fund-raising ability to support candidates sympathetic to their cause. Moral Majority money began to fund politicians who demanded reinstating school prayer, ending legalized abortion, and defeating the Equal Rights Amendment. Later a group calling itself the Christian Coalition became even more powerful in supporting—and electing—candidates who met its litmus test on conservative values. The Christian Coalition and other similar groups believed strongly that a religious framework was the best way to assess candidates running for office. According to Evangelicals for Social Action, “To proclaim Christ’s lordship in politics means evaluating political candidates by their commitment to biblical principles, rather than by their pragmatism, patriotism, or personality.”

Conservatives from all camps capitalized on changing political techniques more successfully than their liberal opponents. They understood the importance of television in providing instant access to the American public. Politicians became increasingly adept at using “sound bites,” often lasting no more than 15 or 30 seconds, to state their views. As the 1990s unfolded, they also relied on new electronic systems such as e-mail, fax machines, and the Internet to mobilize their followers.

Similarly, conservatives outdid liberals in using negative political advertising. Mudslinging has always been a part of the American political tradition, but now carefully crafted television ads concentrated not so much on conveying a positive image of a candidate’s platform but on subtly attacking an...
Ronald Reagan was fond of projecting an old-fashioned cowboy image. This picture captured the sense of rugged individualism he valued and appeared on the covers of both *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines when he died in 2004. What qualities seem to come across in this photograph? Why did this image have such a powerful appeal? (Courtesy Ronald Reagan Library)

opponent’s character in order to create fundamental doubt in a voter’s mind. It was small wonder that Americans became increasingly cynical about politics and avoided voting booths in record numbers. Conservatives also were most successful in raising unprecedented sums of money for their campaigns. Richard Viguerie, the New Right mastermind, understood how to tap the huge conservative constituency for political ends and developed direct-mail appeals that assisted conservative candidates around the country.

At the same time, conservatives understood the need to provide an intellectual grounding for their positions. Conservative scholars worked in “think tanks” and other research organizations, such as the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., that gave conservatism a solid institutional base. Their books, articles, and reports helped elect Ronald Reagan and other conservative politicians.

**Conservative Leadership**

More than any other Republican, Ronald Reagan was responsible for the success of the conservative cause. An actor turned politician, he had been a radio broadcaster in his native Midwest, then gravitated to California, where he began a movie career. Initially drawn to the Democratic party and impressed with the accomplishments of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, he was also sympathetic to union causes and served as president of the Screen Actors Guild in Hollywood. But his success on the silver screen affected his political inclinations, and he changed his affiliation from Democrat to Republican in the early 1960s. As his film career came to an end, he went to work as a public spokesman for General Electric, where his visibility and ability to articulate corporate values attracted the attention of conservatives who recognized his political potential and helped him win election as governor of California in 1966. He failed in his first bid for the presidency in 1976 but consolidated his strength over the next four years. By 1980, he had the firm support of the growing Right, which applauded his promise to reduce the size of the federal government but bolster military might.

Running against incumbent Jimmy Carter in 1980, Reagan scored a landslide victory, gaining a popular vote of 51 to 41 percent and a 489 to 49 Electoral College advantage. He also led the Republican party to control of the Senate for the first time since 1955. In 1984, he was re-elected by an even larger margin. He received 59 percent of the popular vote and swamped Democratic candidate Walter Mondale in the Electoral College 525 to 13, losing only Minnesota, Mondale’s home state, and the District of Columbia. The Democrats, however, netted two additional seats in the Senate and maintained superiority in the House of Representatives.

Reagan had a pleasing manner and a special skill as a media communicator. Relying on his acting experience, he used television as Franklin D. Roosevelt had used radio in the 1930s. He was a gifted storyteller who loved using anecdotes and one-liners to make his point. In 1980, for example, he quibbled playfully with Carter over definitions of economic doldrums. “I’m talking in human terms and he is hiding behind a dictionary,” Reagan said. “If he wants a definition, I’ll give him one. A recession is when your neighbor loses his job. A depression is when you lose yours. A recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his.”
As president, Reagan managed to convey his sense of vision to the American people. He spoke of the United States as "the last best hope of man on earth," and, echoing John Winthrop's sermon to Puritans coming to the New World in 1630, he referred to America as a "shining city on a hill." He was fond of invoking images of Pilgrims coming ashore in New England, American prisoners of war returning from Vietnam, and astronauts landing on the moon, and he argued that history still had a place for the nation and its ideals. In response to those who spoke of a "national malaise," he retorted, "I find nothing wrong with the American people."

Throughout his eight years in office, Reagan enjoyed enormous popularity. People talked about a "Teflon" presidency, making a comparison with nonstick frying pans, for even serious criticisms failed to stick and disagreements over policy never diminished his personal-approval ratings. When he left the White House, an overwhelming 68 percent of the American public approved of his performance over the past eight years.

But Reagan had a number of liabilities that surfaced over time. He was the oldest president the nation had ever had; his attention often drifted, and he occasionally fell asleep during meetings, including one with the pope. While he could speak eloquently with a script in front of him, he was frequently unsure about what was being asked in press conferences. Uninterested in governing, he delegated a great deal of authority, even if that left him unclear about policy decisions. Worst of all, he suffered from charges of "sleaze" in his administration, with several aides and even his attorney general forced from office for improprieties ranging from perjury to influence peddling.

In 1988, Republican George H. W. Bush, who served eight years as Reagan's vice president, ran for the presidency. Though a New Englander, he had prospered in the Texas oil industry, then served in Congress, as top envoy to China, and as head of the CIA. Termed a preppy wimp by the press, he became a pit bull who ran a mudslinging campaign against his Democratic opponent, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts. On election day, Bush swamped Dukakis, winning a 54–46 percent popular-vote majority and carrying 40 states. But conservatives who admired Reagan were suspicious of Bush, and he did not

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Party</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>RONALD REAGAN</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>43,899,248 (50.8%)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Jimmy Carter</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>36,481,435 (41.0%)</td>
<td>49</td>
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<td>John B. Anderson</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>5,719,437 (6.6%)</td>
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<td>Republican</td>
<td>53,428,357 (58.7%)</td>
<td>525</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Walter F. Mondale</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>36,930,923 (40.6%)</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>GEORGE BUSH</td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>47,946,422 (53.9%)</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Dukakis</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>41,016,429 (46.1%)</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: Winners' names appear in capital letters.
have the kind of mandate Reagan had enjoyed in 1980 and again in 1984. Even worse from the Republican point of view, Democrats controlled both houses of Congress.

Bush quickly put his own imprint on the presidency. Despite his upper-crust background, he was an unpretentious man who made a point of trying to appear down-to-earth. He also maintained his own network of friends and political contacts through handwritten notes, telephone calls, and personal visits. More than a year and a half into his term, he was still on his political honeymoon, with a personal approval rating of 67 percent. Support grew even stronger as he presided over the Persian Gulf War in 1991. Then, as the economy faltered and the results of the war seemed suspect, approval levels began to drop, and he failed in his bid for re-election in 1992.

**Republican Policies at Home**

Republicans in the 1980s and early 1990s aimed to reverse the economic stagnation of the Carter years and to provide new opportunities for business to prosper. The United States, like industrialized nations around the world, had suffered from the Arab oil embargo of 1973, which had vastly increased energy prices. As the cost of driving cars and heating homes skyrocketed, the entire economy was knocked out of kilter. In an increasingly globalized economy, in which multinational firms had interests around the world, a downturn in one area—or one country—affected business efforts around the globe. Republicans wanted to provide American business interests with the ability to prosper at home and wherever else they operated.

To that end, Reagan proposed and implemented an economic recovery program that rested on the theory of supply-side economics. According to this much-criticized theory, reduction of taxes would encourage business expansion, which in turn would lead to a larger supply of goods to help stimulate the system as a whole. Even George Bush, during his brief run for the Republican nomination in 1980, was critical, charging that Reagan was promoting


In the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, the yearly federal budget deficit grew steadily larger, and the gross federal debt skyrocketed. In this economy, deficits and debt affected spending priorities.


*Source: Data from *Statistical Abstract of the United States.*
“voodoo economics.” Despite such criticism, Republicans followed the president’s lead and endorsed “Reaganomics,” with its promise of a revitalized economy.

One early initiative involved tax reductions. A 5 percent cut in the tax rate was enacted to go into effect on October 1, 1981, followed by 10 percent cuts in 1982 and 1983. Although all taxpayers received some tax relief, the rich gained far more than middle- and lower-income Americans. Poverty-level Americans did not benefit at all. Tax cuts and enormous defense expenditures increased the budget deficit. From $74 billion in 1980, it jumped to $290 billion in 1992. Such massive deficits drove the gross federal debt—the total national indebtedness—upward from $909 billion in 1980 to $4.4 trillion in 1992. When Reagan assumed office, the per capita national debt was $4,035; 10 years later, in 1990, it was about $12,400.

Faced with the need to raise more money and rectify an increasingly skewed tax code, in 1986 Congress passed and Reagan signed the most sweeping tax reform since the federal income tax began in 1913. It lowered rates, consolidated brackets, and closed loopholes to expand the tax base. Though it ended up neither increasing nor decreasing the government’s tax take, the measure was an important step toward treating low-income Americans more equitably. Still, most of the benefits went to the richest 5 percent of Americans.

At the same time, Reagan embarked on a major program of deregulation. In a campaign more comprehensive than Jimmy Carter’s, he focused on agencies of the 1970s such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The Republican administration argued that regulations pertaining to the consumer, the workplace, and the environment were inefficient, paternalistic, and excessively expensive. They impeded business growth and needed to be eliminated.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which had effectively regulated the airwaves in the past, now shifted course. The head of the agency under Reagan scoffed at the idea that television had a public-service role. “Television is just another appliance,” he declared. “It’s just a toaster with pictures.” The FCC increased the amount of time allotted to commercials and eliminated the rule that some programming had to be in the area of public-service broadcasts.

An American Family  In 1988, and again in 1992, George Bush and the Republicans emphasized traditional family values as a way of healing the social ills of the nation. In this campaign picture, Bush poses with his family at their home in Maine as a way of showing that he was a good family man. How effective do you think this photograph was in underscoring Bush’s commitment to family issues? (Sipa Press)
Meanwhile, Reagan challenged the New Deal consensus that the federal government should monitor the economy and assist the least fortunate citizens. He had played by the rules of the system and had won fame and fortune. Others could do the same. He charged that government intruded too deeply into American life. It was time to eliminate "waste, fraud, and abuse" by cutting unnecessary programs.

Reagan needed to curtail social programs both because of sizable tax cuts and because of enormous military expenditures. Committed to a massive arms buildup, over a five-year period the administration sought an unprecedented military budget of $1.5 trillion. By 1985, with an allocation of $300 billion, the United States was spending half a million dollars a minute on defense and four times as much as at the height of the Vietnam War.

The huge cuts in social programs reversed the approach of liberals over the past 50 years. Republicans and conservative Democrats eliminated public-service jobs and reduced other aid to the cities, where the poor congregated. They cut back unemployment compensation and required Medicare patients to pay more for treatment. They lowered welfare benefits and food stamp allocations. They slashed the Legal Services Corporation, which provided legal services for the poor. They replaced grants for college students with loans. Spending on human resources fell by $101 billion between 1980 and 1982. The process continued even after Reagan left office. Between 1981 and 1992, federal spending (adjusted for inflation) fell 82 percent for subsidized housing, 63 percent for job training and employment services, and 40 percent for community services. Middle-class Americans, benefiting from the tax cuts, were not hurt by the slashes in social programs. But for millions of the nation's poorest citizens, the administration's approach caused real suffering.

Ironically, despite the huge cuts, overall federal spending for social welfare rose from $313 billion in 1980 to $533 billion in 1988. The increase came about because of growth in the payments of entitlement programs such as social security and Medicare, which provided benefits automatically to citizens in need. Even the most aggressive efforts of the Republicans could not wholly dismantle the welfare state.

As a political conservative distrustful of centralized government, Reagan wanted to place more power in the hands of state and local governments and to reduce the involvement of the federal government in people's lives. His "New Federalism" attempted to shift responsibilities from the federal to the state level. By eliminating federal funding and instead making grants to the states, which could spend the money as they saw fit, he hoped to fortify local initiative. Critics charged, with some justification, that the proposal was merely a way of moving programs from one place to another while eliminating federal funding. When a prolonged recession began in 1990, the administration's policy contributed to the near-bankruptcy of a number of states and municipalities, which now bore responsibility for programs formerly funded in Washington.

Reagan took a conservative approach to social issues as well. Accepting the support of the New Right, he strongly endorsed conservative social goals. To avoid compromising his economic program, however, he provided only symbolic support at first. He spoke out for public prayer in the schools without expending political capital in Congress to support the issue. In the same way, he showed his opposition to abortion by making sure that the first nongovernmental group to receive an audience at the White House was an antiabortion March for Life contingent.

George Bush followed directly in his predecessor's footsteps. Having forsworn his objection to "voodoo economics" as soon as he received the vice presidential nomination, Bush faithfully adhered to Reagan's general economic policy even after he became president. Running for president in 1988, he promised "no new taxes," although he later backed down from that pledge to join a bipartisan effort to bring the budget deficit under control.

Like Reagan, Bush wanted deep cuts in social programs. Tireless in his criticism of the Democratic majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives, he vetoed measure after measure to assist those caught in the ravages of a troubling recession that sent unemployment rates up to 8 percent and left one of every four urban children living in poverty.

Bush was more outspoken than Reagan in his support of conservative social goals. At the start of the 1980s, conservatives had questioned Bush's commitment to their social agenda, and, indeed, Bush had been sympathetic to a woman's right to choice in the abortion issue. As president, however, he firmly opposed abortion, and his Supreme Court appointments, like Reagan's, guaranteed that the effort to roll back or overturn Roe v. Wade would continue.

The Republican philosophy under Reagan and Bush dramatically reversed the nation's domestic agenda. Liberalism in the 1960s had reached a high-water mark in a time of steady growth, but in the 1980s decisions about social programs became...
more difficult, and millions of Americans like Leslie Maeby, introduced at the start of the chapter, came to believe that most of the Great Society programs had failed to conquer poverty and in fact had created lifelong welfare dependency. Conservatism offered a more attractive answer, particularly to Americans in the middle and upper classes who were already comfortable.

But the transformation was accompanied by a number of serious problems that emerged in the early 1990s. Bush faced a bankruptcy crisis in the savings and loan industry, which had taken advantage of the Republican deregulation policy to make unwise, high-risk investments that resulted in tremendous losses. Congress was forced to approve a $166 billion rescue plan (that soon reached more than $250 billion) committing taxpayers to bail out the industry.

Republican policy also widened the gap between rich and poor. Tax breaks for the wealthy, deregulation initiatives, high interest rates for investors, permissiveness toward mergers, and enormous growth in the salaries of top business executives all contributed to the disparity. So did more lenient antitrust enforcement and a general sympathy for speculative finance.

The 1980s, it became clear, produced “a decade of money fever,” as author Tom Wolfe put it. Analyst Kevin Phillips called this period “the triumph of upper America,” with “an ostentatious celebration of wealth, the political ascendency of the rich and a glorification of capitalism, free markets and finance.” The concentration of capital—an amassing of wealth at the top levels—produced dekamillionaires, centimillionaires, half-billionaires, and billionaires. “Garden-variety millionaires,” Phillips noted, “had become so common that there were about 1.5 million of them by 1989.” According to one study, the share of national wealth of the richest 1 percent of the nation rose from about 18 percent in 1976 to 36 percent in 1989. The net worth of the Forbes magazine 400 richest Americans nearly tripled between 1981 and 1989.

Meanwhile, less-fortunate Americans suffered more than they had since the Great Depression. In 1987, one out of every five American children lived in poverty, up 24 percent since 1979. And millions of people, ranging from foreclosed farmers to laid-off industrial workers, were struggling to make ends meet.
AN END TO SOCIAL REFORM

The Republican attack on the welfare state included an effort to limit the commitment to social reform. Enough had been done already, conservatives argued, and gains for less fortunate Americans came at the expense of the middle class. It was time to end federal “intrusion” in this area.

Slowdown in the Struggle for Civil Rights

Republican policies slowed the civil rights movement. Reagan opposed busing to achieve racial balance, and his attorney general worked to dismantle affirmative action programs. Initially reluctant to support extension of the enormously successful Voting Rights Act of 1965, Reagan relented only under severe bipartisan criticism. He directed the Internal Revenue Service to cease banning tax exemptions for private schools that discriminated against blacks, only to see that move overturned by the Supreme Court in 1983. He also launched an assault on the Civil Rights Commission and hampered its effectiveness by appointing members who did not support its main goals.

The courts similarly weakened commitments to equal rights. As a result of Reagan’s and Bush’s judicial
appointments, federal courts stopped pushing for school integration. The Supreme Court’s *Freeman v. Pitts* decision in 1992 granted a suburban Atlanta school board relief from a desegregation order on the grounds that it was not possible to counteract massive demographic shifts.

Yet African Americans kept the struggle alive. The Reverend Jesse Jackson, a longtime civil rights activist, established what he called the Rainbow Coalition in 1984 and ran for the presidency. Though he lost his bid for the Democratic nomination, he had the support of nearly 400 delegates, and in a nationally televised speech at the convention, he vowed not to forget his constituency. Four years later, in 1988, he sought the Democratic nomination again, this time with the support of 1,200 delegates at the convention, before falling short of his goal once more.

Despite significant victories in mayoral elections in major cities and other electoral gains, black–white relations remained tense. As Joseph Lattimore, an African American from Chicago, observed, “As far as integrating with you—we have sang ‘We Shall Overcome,’ we have prayed at the courthouse steps, we have made all these gestures, and the door is not open.” Sylvia Matthews, also from Chicago, noted, “Today it seems more acceptable to be racist. Just in the kinds of things you hear people say.”

A riot in Los Angeles in 1992 revealed the continuing racial polarization. The year before, Americans had watched a videotaped, savage beating of black motorist Rodney King by white police officers, the
most dramatic of a long string of incidents involving police brutality. When a California jury that did not include any African Americans acquitted the policemen, many people throughout the country became convinced that people of color could not obtain equal justice under the law. In Los Angeles, thousands reacted with uncontrolled fury, targeting supermarkets, drug stores, Korean businesses, restaurants, and mini-malls. Much of the chaos was orchestrated by gang members, but it also involved hundreds of ordinary citizens who acted irresponsibly, yet with a sense that the social contract had been broken by politicians and the rich who were unresponsive to their plight. Several days later, after the riot had run its course, 51 people (most of them black and Hispanic) lay dead, 2,000 were injured, and $1 billion in damage had been done to the city. It was the worst riot in decades, more deadly even than the Watts riot 27 years earlier. The upheaval served notice that racial injustice, social inequality, and poverty could no longer be ignored.

Obstacles to Women’s Rights
Women had a similar experience in the 1980s and early 1990s. They, too, made significant electoral gains at the local, state, and national levels. In 1981, President Reagan named Sandra Day O’Connor as the first woman Supreme Court justice, and in 1984 Democrat Geraldine Ferraro became the first major-party female vice presidential nominee.

Yet women still faced problems that were compounded by conservative social policies. Access to new positions did not change their concentration in lower-paying jobs. In 1985, most working women were still secretaries, cashiers, bookkeepers, registered nurses, and waitresses—the same jobs most frequently held 10 years before. Even when women

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**American Voices**

**Jesse Jackson, Address to the 1984 Democratic National Convention**

Jesse Jackson was a civil rights activist who later moved into politics and ran for the presidency in 1984 and 1988. In his first campaign, he made a passionate speech before the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco, California, in which he called for the inclusion of all people in what he called a Rainbow Coalition that would guide American life.

Tonight we come together bound by our faith in a mighty God, with genuine respect and love for our country, and inheriting the legacy of a great party, the Democratic Party, which is the best hope for redirecting our nation on a more humane, just and peaceful course.

This is not a perfect party. We are not a perfect people. Yet, we are called to a perfect mission: our mission to feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to house the homeless; to teach the illiterate; to provide jobs for the jobless; and to choose the human race over the nuclear race. . . .

My constituency is the desperate, the damned, the disinherit ed, the disrespected, and the despised. They are restless and seek relief. They’ve voted in record numbers. They have invested faith, hope and trust that they have in us. The Democratic Party must send them a signal that we care. I pledge my best to not let them down. . . .

America is not like a blanket—one piece of unbroken cloth, the same color, the same texture, the same size. America is more like a quilt—many patches, many pieces, many colors, many sizes, all woven and held together by a common thread. The white, the Hispanic, the black, the Arab, the Jew, the woman, the native American, the small farmer, the businessperson, the environmentalist, the peace activist, the young, the old, the lesbian, the gay and the disabled make up the American quilt.

Even in our fractured state, all of us count and all of us fit somewhere. We have proven that we can survive without each other. But we have not proven that we can win and progress without each other. We must come together.

- What did Jesse Jackson see as his personal mission?
- Who made up Jackson’s constituency?
- How did Jesse Jackson envision the various groups in America fitting together?
Sandra Day O’Connor became the first woman justice to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court. Her pre-Court career was similar to that of many other women, as she was denied numerous jobs when she emerged from law school. A decade later, Ruth Bader Ginsburg joined O’Connor on the nation’s highest court. Here O’Connor testified at her confirmation hearings. What impression does she convey as she answered senators’ questions? (Getty Images)

moved into positions traditionally held by men, their progress often stopped at the lower and middle levels. Interruptions of work—to bear children or assume family responsibilities—impeded advancement. In virtually all areas, American women had less support juggling family, home, and work than women in many European countries. And for those who managed to do everything on their own, a “glass ceiling” seemed to prevent them from moving up.

Wage differentials between women and men continued to exist. In 1985, full-time working women still earned only 59 cents for every dollar earned by men. Comparable-worth arguments that women should receive equal pay for different jobs of similar value met conservative resistance.

Conservatives also waged a dedicated campaign against the right to legal abortion. Despite the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, the issue remained very much alive. The number of abortions increased dramatically in the decade after the decision. In response, “pro-life” forces mobilized. Opponents lobbied to cut off federal funds that allowed the poor to obtain the abortions that the better-off could pay for themselves; they insisted that abortions should be performed in hospitals and not in less-expensive clinics; and they worked to reverse the original decision itself.

Though the Supreme Court underscored its judgment in 1983, the pro-life movement was not deterred. In 1989, a solidifying conservative majority on the Court ruled in Webster v. Reproductive Health Services that while women’s right to abortion remained intact, state legislatures could impose limitations if they chose. With that judgment, a major legislative debate over the issue began, and numerous states began to mandate restrictions.

In 1992, in Planned Parenthood v. Casey, the Supreme Court reaffirmed what it termed the essence of the right to abortion, while permitting further state restrictions. It declared that a 24-hour waiting period for women seeking abortions was acceptable and required teenage girls to secure the permission of a parent (or a judge) before ending a pregnancy. The ruling clearly gave states greater latitude in the overall restrictive effort and made an abortion harder to obtain, particularly for poor women and young women.

In response to a conservative backlash, the women’s movement became more racially inclusive. Black women now found more common ground with white feminists. While black women in the early 1990s still earned less on a weekly basis than white men and white women, that situation began to improve.

Women and men became more sensitive to the issue of sexual harassment. The dramatic confrontation between Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas and lawyer Anita Hill during confirmation hearings in 1991 dramatized both racial questions and the problem of sexual harassment. After the retirement of Thurgood Marshall, the only African American on the Supreme Court, President Bush sought to replace him with the much more conservative Clarence Thomas, putting African Americans, who wanted one of their own on the court, in a political bind. Then, during nationally televised confirmation hearings, Anita Hill accused Thomas of harassing her when she had worked for him earlier. Thomas furiously countered with charges of a “high-tech lynching.” The Bush administration managed to garner the...
necessary votes for confirmation, and Thomas followed a conservative agenda in the years that followed. In the aftermath of the turbulent confirmation hearings, Americans in Congress, in the business community, and in the larger workplace all became more aware of inappropriate behavior that could no longer be tolerated.

The Limited Commitment to Latino Rights

Latinos likewise faced continuing concerns in the 1980s and early 1990s as the commitment to reform eroded. The Latino population increased substantially as a result of immigration reform during the Great Society of the 1960s (see Chapter 28). In the 1980s, 47 percent of all legal American immigration came from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Many other immigrants arrived illegally. As the populations of Latin American nations soared and economic conditions deteriorated, more and more people looked to the United States for relief. In the mid-1970s, Leonard Chapman, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, estimated that there might be 12 million foreigners in the nation illegally. While official estimates were lower, Attorney General William French Smith declared in 1983, “Simply put, we’ve lost control of our own borders.”

Many of the new arrivals were skilled workers or professionals, who still had to retool after arriving in the United States. But even more prevalent were laborers, service sector workers, and semiskilled employees, who needed the benefit of social services at just the time they were being cut back.

Spanish-speaking students often found it difficult to finish school. In 1987, 40 percent of all Latino high school students did not graduate, and only 31 percent of Latino seniors were enrolled in college-preparatory courses; those who were in such classes frequently received little help from guidance counselors. Anel Albarran, a Mexican immigrant who arrived in East Los Angeles when she was 11 years old, applied to UCLA when a special high school teacher encouraged her and made sure that she received help in choosing the necessary courses. By contrast, her regular counselor took little interest in her; he waited until only two months before graduation to ask her if she had considered going onto college. “All he had wanted to do during high school,” Anel observed, “was give me my classes and get me out of the room.”

Like other groups, Latinos slowly extended their political gains. In the 1980s, Henry Cisneros became mayor of San Antonio and Federico Peña was elected mayor of Denver. In New Mexico, Governor Toney Anaya called himself the nation’s highest-elected Hispanic. The number of Latinos holding elective offices nationwide increased 3.5 percent between 1986 and 1987, and the number of Latina women in such offices increased 20 percent in that time. The number of Latino public officials nationwide increased 73 percent between 1985 and 1994, and Lauro Cavazos became the first Latino Cabinet official when he was appointed secretary of education in 1988.

Latino workers, however, continued to have a hard time in the employment market. Even as the nation’s overall unemployment rate dropped, the rate for the 12 million Latino workers barely budged—and worsened in relation to the rate for African Americans. Many found themselves suffering from outdated skills and weak educational backgrounds that limited economic opportunities.

Continuing Problems for Native Americans

Native Americans likewise experienced the waning commitment to reform, but they made some gains as a result of their own efforts. Some tribal communities developed business skills, although traditional Indian attitudes hardly fostered the capitalist perspective. As Dale Old Horn, an MIT graduate and department head at Little Big Horn College in Crow Agency, Montana, explained:

The Crow Indian child is taught that he is part of a harmonious circle of kin relations, clans and nature. The white child is taught that he is the center of the circle. The Crow believe in sharing wealth, and whites believe in accumulating wealth.

Some Indian groups did adapt to the capitalist ethos. “Now we’re beginning to realize that, if we want to be self-sufficient, we’re going to have to become entrepreneurs ourselves,” observed Iola Hayden, the Comanche executive director of Oklahoma’s Native Indian Opportunity. The Choctaw in Mississippi were among the most successful. Before they began a drive toward self-sufficiency in 1979, their unemployment rate was 50 percent. By the middle of the 1980s, Choctaw owned all or part of three businesses on the reservation, employed 1,000 people, generated $30 million in work annually, and cut the unemployment rate in half. After Congress approved Native American gambling in 1988, an increasing number of tribes became involved in this industry. The Pequot in Connecticut built a casino in the southeastern part of the state that became the most profitable one in the nation.
Sherman Alexie was just out of college when he published his first book of poems. In that collection, The Business of Fancy Dancing, he captured some of the special moments and the serious difficulties of Native American life.

Indian Boy Love Song (#1)
Everyone I have lost
in the closing of a door
the click of the lock
is not forgotten, they
do not die but remain
within the soft edges
of the earth, the ash
of house fires and cancer
in sin and forgiveness
huddled under old blankets
dreaming their way into
my hands, my heart
closing tight like fists.

Indian Boy Love Song (#2)
I never spoke
the language
of the old women
visiting my mother
in winters so cold
they could freeze
the tongue whole.
I never held my head
to their thin chests
believing in the heart.
Indian women, forgive me.
I grew up distant
and always afraid.

Indian Boy Love Song (#3)
I remember when I told
my cousin
she was more beautiful
than any white girl
I had ever seen.
She kissed me then
with both lips, a tongue
that tasted clean and un-
clean at the same time
like the river which divides
the heart of my heart, all
the beautiful white girls on one side,
my beautiful cousin on the other.

Indian Boy Love Song (#4)
I remember when my father would leave,
drinking,
for weeks. My mother would tell me
the dream he needed
most
Was the dream that frightened him
more
than any stranger ever could.
I
would wait by my window, dreaming
bottles
familiar in my hands, not my father's, always
empty.

According to Sherman Alexie, what happens to the spirits of Indians who have died?

What part does Alexie suggest old women play in maintaining traditions?

How does Alexie compare the beauty of whites and Native Americans?

How does Alexie feel about drinking in Native American life?

Despite entrepreneurial gains, Indians still remained (as the 1990 census showed) the nation’s poorest group. As Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Republican senator from Colorado, noted in 1995, average Indian household income fell by 5 percent in the 1980s, while it rose for all other ethnic and racial groups. According to the 1990 census, median Indian household income was less than $20,000 a year.

Asian American Gains
Asian Americans climbed the social and economic ladder one rung at a time. The Asian American population
increased dramatically with the influx of refugees at the end of the Vietnam War, with more than half a million arriving after 1975. In the 1980s, 37 percent of all immigrants to the United States came from Asia. In Los Angeles and other cities, Samoans, Taiwanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Filipinos, and Cambodians competed for jobs and apartments with Mexicans, African Americans, and Anglos, just as newcomers had contended with one another in New York City a century earlier.

Immigrants from India, the Philippines, China, and Korea often brought skills and professional expertise, although Southeast Asian refugees were frequently less well-off when they arrived. Many of these unskilled immigrants provided the labor for the rapidly expanding West Coast electronics industry, though Indians provided impressive engineering and scientific talent. Asian immigrants, following a pattern established decades before, sought better and better opportunities for their children, and in California they became the largest group of entering students at a number of college campuses.

Sometimes the media highlighted the successes of Asian immigrants, particularly in contrast to the problems encountered by other groups. In 1986, *U.S. News & World Report* noted Asian-American advances in a cover story, while *Newsweek* ran a lead article on “Asian Americans: A ‘Model Minority,’” and *Fortune* called them “America’s Super Minority.” Asian Americans were proud of the exposure but pointed out that many members of the working class still struggled for a foothold. In the Chinatowns of San Francisco and Los Angeles, 40 to 50 percent of the workers were employed in the ill-paid service sector or garment industry; in New York’s Chinatown, the figure was close to 70 percent. Chinese immigrant women, in particular, often had little choice but to work as seamstresses, just as women from other nationalities had earlier in the century.

Each group, each family, had its own story. Nguyen Ninh and Nguyen Viet, two brothers who remained in Vietnam after the victory of the North Vietnamese in 1975, were among the many who finally fled their war-torn country by boat. The boat sank, but they were rescued, only to be shuttled to Kuwait, then Greece, and finally to the United States, where another brother had arrived a few years before. Though they spoke no English, they immediately began to look for work. One became a carpenter’s helper; the other worked as an attendant at a valet parking firm. With the money they earned, they helped other members of their family emigrate. Slowly they learned English, obtained better jobs, and saved enough money to purchase a home.

Professionals from some countries had a hard time. One Vietnamese physician who resettled in Oklahoma noted, “When I come here, I am told that I must be a beginner again and serve like an apprentice for two years. I have no choice, so I will do it, but I have been wronged to be asked to do this.” Professionals from other nations, with programs recognized in the United States, made the transition more easily.

Violent episodes sometimes highlighted discrimination. In 1982, in Detroit, Chinese American Vincent Chin was about to get married. At a strip club with friends the week before his wedding, he encountered two auto workers who thought that Chin was Japanese, and they regarded Japan as responsible for the crisis in the American auto industry as Japanese cars flooded the market. They followed Chin out the door and killed him with a baseball bat. In response to a guilty plea, both murderers received three years probation and $3,780 in fines. Detroit’s Asian Americans were incensed but were reluctant to jeopardize what they considered their already vulnerable role in America.

**Pressures on the Environmental Movement**

Environmentalists, too, were discouraged by the direction of public policy in the 1980s and early 1990s.
Activists found that they faced fierce opposition in the Republican years. Reagan systematically restrained the EPA in his avowed effort to promote economic growth. Under the leadership of James Watt of Colorado, the Department of the Interior opened forest lands, wilderness areas, and coastal waters to economic development, with no concern for preserving the natural environment. When asked whether he believed it was important to protect the environment for future generations, Watt, a devout Christian, responded that he did not know how many generations there were before the Second Coming. Bush initially proved more sympathetic to environmental causes and delighted environmentalists by signing new clean-air legislation. Later, as the economy faltered, he was less willing to support environmental action that he claimed might slow economic growth. In 1992, he accommodated business by easing clean-air restrictions. That same year, at a United Nations-sponsored Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with 100 other heads of state, Bush stood alone in his refusal to sign a biological diversity treaty framed to conserve plant and animal species.
Republicans sought to reorganize the government against the backdrop of an economy that was volatile in the 1980s and early 1990s. As patterns of employment changed in an increasingly mechanized workplace, millions of workers struggled to survive the shocks. Under Republican supply-side economics, the business cycle moved from recession to boom and back to recession again. When Reagan took office in 1980, the economy was reeling under the impact of declining productivity, galloping inflation, oil shortages, and high unemployment. It revived in the early 1980s, then gave way to a deep recession that lasted from 1990 to 1992, underscoring the need for renewed productivity, full employment, and a more equitable distribution of wealth.

The Changing Nature of Work
Automation and other technological advances had a powerful impact on the American workplace. The New York Times reported in 1990 that “Some factories look as if they have been hit by a kind of economic neutron bomb, which left assembly lines running at full speed but eliminated most of the people who worked on them.” Formerly profitable jobs disappeared. One pulp-mill worker voiced gloom about the future: “I think the country has a problem. The managers want everything run by computers. But if no one has a job, no one will know how to do anything anymore. Who will pay the taxes? What kind of society will it be when people have lost their knowledge and depend on computers for everything?”

In human terms, the introduction of the computer had other consequences as well. Now workers sat for hours before their screens. Some described the feeling of “floating in space” as they worked, or of being “lost behind the screen.” Others worried about radiation from the monitor or muscular fatigue from sitting at a keyboard all day. Still others complained that they could no longer touch their work. As more Americans began to use computers, people who did not work with them complained about a growing “digital divide” that further increased the gap between rich and poor. Members of the middle and upper classes had easy access to computer technology, while less fortunate individuals, many of whom belonged to minority groups, found themselves left behind.

Yet even as the nature of work changed, people seemed to be working more. In past decades, leisure time had seemed to expand, and there was talk of a four-day workweek in the 1950s. In subsequent years, however, the amount of time Americans worked steadily rose so that in the mid-1990s, American employees worked many more hours each year than their counterparts in Germany or France. More time spent at work increased stress as workers attempted to juggle the pressures between employment and family life. Problems were particularly severe for women, still trying to cope with the pressures of a double load, as they maintained responsibility for the home even when working outside. Marriages came under significant strain.

The Shift to a Service Economy
The scarcity of good jobs stemmed in part from the restructuring of the economy that occurred in the 1980s. In a trend that had been underway for more than half a century, the United States continued its shift from an industrial base, in which most workers actually produced things, to a service base, in which most provided expertise or service to others in the workforce. By the mid-1980s, three-fourths of the 113 million employees in the country worked in the service sector as fast-food workers, clerks, computer programmers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, teachers, and bureaucrats. That shift, in turn, had its roots in the decline of the country’s industrial sector. The United States had been the world’s industrial leader since the late nineteenth century. By the 1980s and
The Internet has become an integral part of our daily lives. More and more people use e-mail to communicate quickly with friends and colleagues around the world. Many Americans use the World Wide Web to make purchases ranging from books to automobiles. Others buy stocks online and rely on the Web to manage their portfolios. Historians and other scholars have come to depend on huge databases on the Web that are accessible from computers anywhere around the world.

The Internet has become an important tool for historical research. Historians can acquire census data on the Web. They can find essential statistical files, from both government offices and the private sector. They can examine huge collections of historical images. They can read the text of vital speeches. They can look at moving-picture clips from the Spanish-American War and listen to songs of the 1960s. But they need to be cautious in what they do. While the Internet provides access to a huge amount of material, the historian must evaluate it as if it was a more traditional source. But with that caution, it can be an extraordinarily useful tool.

While the Internet has only recently become an important source of historical information, it is not new. Its roots extend back 30 years, to the mid-1960s, when Americans were worried about the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. After the Russians launched their Sputnik satellite in 1957 with a rocket that demonstrated the ability to send atomic weapons from one continent to another, American scientists dedicated themselves to catching up with and then surpassing the Soviets in space. To do so, they needed to develop their computer technology.

Scientists were also interested in figuring out how to maintain communication in the aftermath of a nuclear attack. As both the United States and the Soviet Union developed bigger and better atomic bombs and then in the 1950s began to create even more potent hydrogen weapons, it became clear that a full-scale nuclear war could wipe out a nation’s ability to communicate with its distant military bases. The Department of Defense wanted to create a decentralized communication system that could continue to function even if part of it was wiped out.

In the early 1960s, scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed the concept of time-sharing, in which different users at widely separated sites could use the same central computer at the same time. Another step forward came in the mid-1960s with the development of “packet-switching” technology, which broke down data into small, discrete packets that could be transmitted over telephone lines, using modems to connect the computers to the phone lines, and then reassembled when received by another computer at the other end.

Building on those steps, the Department of Defense established the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, known as ARPANET, in 1969. It linked the computers of four institutions—the University of California campuses at Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, the Stanford Research Institute, and the University of Utah. Two years later, the system had expanded to include 23 universities and research centers around the country.

The system was hardly user-friendly in these early days. In an age before the advent of personal computers at home, or even office computers at work, only computer professionals, engineers, and other scientists mastered the intricacies of what were very complex systems. Once they did, however, they were able to communicate with one another through what became known as electronic mail, or e-mail.

The term Internet was first used to describe this decentralized network in 1982, and in 1986 the National Science Foundation created a network called NSFNET with a better-organized backbone for the
The World Wide Web links numerous Web pages together. By clicking the computer mouse on a highlighted item, a user can move easily from one linked page to another.

The entire system. This new infrastructure had different domains, each marked by a different suffix at the end of an e-mail address, such as “edu” for educational establishments, “com” for commercial enterprises, and “gov” for government offices.

But even with improvements, the Internet remained hard to use. While computer experts could find all kinds of information, others found it difficult to access what they wanted. Then, in 1991, the University of Minnesota developed a system for finding information by accessing a huge number of databases, and they named it after the university mascot—the golden gopher.

At about the same time, another development made an even greater impact on Internet use. In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee and others at the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (known as CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland, developed a new system for information distribution. It was based on the concept of hyper-text, which involved embedding links to other documents or pieces of information in the text of a document itself. While reading an article or essay on the computer, you could simply move to another document by selecting the appropriate link. This system became the basis for what came to be called the World Wide Web in 1991; over the next few years, it supplanted the gophers as the easiest way to maneuver the masses of information in cyberspace. In 1993, Mark Andreessen and others at the National Center for Superconducting Applications at the University of Illinois at Champaign–Urbana went a step further when they developed what they called Mosaic, which was a graphical Web browser. It was an easy-to-use piece of computer software that enabled the user to click the mouse on graphics or icons as well as text in a document to move to another document or Web site. Andreessen and others then formed the Netscape Communications Corporation, a private company, which marketed Netscape Navigator to browse the Web. Microsoft’s Internet Explorer provides another browser.

Reflecting on the Past Today, the World Wide Web is more accessible than ever before. But as more and more adults and children use the Web, legal issues remain to be resolved. What kinds of censorship are acceptable on the Web? How can writers, artists, and musicians maintain copyright protection for their work when the materials they produce are frequently instantly accessible on the Web? How can high-speed connections be made available to people with limited resources? How can systems be protected from “hackers” who use their ingenuity to break into commercial or government computer systems and disrupt the flow of information?

What kind of historical research might you do on the Web? How can you assess the veracity of the material you find on the Internet? What cautions are essential if you are to make the best use of Web sources?

Each chapter in this book contains a section at the end entitled “Discovering U.S. History Online.” Look at the section in this chapter and try the various links. Which ones provide you with the most useful material? Look at the site on “The Gulf War.” How could you use information here in pursuing a project on the struggle? What materials would be helpful that are not found here? What other sites can you find that provide additional material on this subject?
early 1990s, productivity had slowed in virtually all American industries.

The causes of this decline in productivity were complex. The most important factor was a widespread and systematic failure on the part of the United States to invest sufficiently in its basic productive capacity. During the Reagan years, capital investment in real plants and equipment within the United States gave way to speculation, mergers, and spending abroad. At the end of the 1980s, domestic investment was down—5.7 percent in 1990 and 9.5 percent in 1991. The energy crisis and rising oil prices also contributed
to the industrial decline. Finally, the war in Vietnam diverted federal funds from research and development with consequences that continued even after the conflict ended.

While American industry became less productive, other industrial nations moved forward. German and Japanese industries, rebuilt after World War II with U.S. aid and aggressively modernized thereafter, reached new heights of efficiency. As a result, the United States began to lose its share of the world market for industrial goods. In 1946, the country had provided 60 percent of the world's iron and steel. In 1978, it provided a mere 16 percent. By 1980, Japanese car manufacturers had captured nearly one-quarter of the American automobile market. The auto industry, which had been a mainstay of economic growth for much of the twentieth century, suffered plant shutdowns and massive layoffs. In 1991, its worst year ever, Ford lost a staggering $2.3 billion.

Workers in Transition

In the 1980s and early 1990s, American labor struggled to hold on to the gains realized by the post–World War II generation of blue-collar workers. The shift to a service economy, while providing new jobs, was difficult for many American workers. Millions of men and women who lost positions as a result of mergers, plant closings, and permanent economic contractions found themselves in low-paying jobs with few opportunities for advancement. Entry-level posts were seldom located in the central cities, where most of the poor lived. Even when new jobs were created in the cities, minority residents often lacked the skills to acquire or hold them.

Meanwhile, the trade union movement faltered as the economy moved from an industrial to a service base. Unions had been most successful in organizing the nation's industrial workers in the years since the 1930s, and the United States emerged from World War II with unions strong. In the years that followed, the percentage of workers belonging to unions dropped, from just over 25 percent in 1980 to barely over 16 percent a decade later. As the total number of wage and salary workers rose substantially between 1983 and 1993, the overall number of union members dropped from 17.7 million to 16.6 million.

Union membership declined for a number of reasons. The shift from blue-collar to white-collar work contributed to the contraction. The increase in the workforce in the numbers of women and young people (groups that have historically been difficult to organize) was another factor, as was the more forceful opposition to unions by managers applying the provisions of the Taft–Hartley Act of 1947, which restricted the tactics labor leaders could use. At the same time, union organizing efforts fell off significantly.

Union vulnerability was visible early in Reagan's first term, when members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) went on strike. Charging that the strike violated the law, the president—who had once been a union leader himself—fired the strikers, decertified the union, and ordered the training of new controllers at a cost of $1.3 billion. The message was clear: government employees could not challenge the public interest.

Anti-union sentiments reverberated throughout the nongovernment sector as well, as many companies across the nation—confronted by falling prices and losses in revenue—sought to dissolve union agreements about hiring, wages, and benefits. Workers who kept their jobs found that their unions could not get favorable contracts. For example, in 1984 the United Auto Workers (UAW) ended a strike at General Motors by trading a

![Union Membership, 1950–1990](image)

The percentage of workers belonging to unions dropped dramatically after 1980 and continued to fall in the 1990s.


Ronald Reagan,
The Air Traffic Controllers Strike (August 3, 1981)
pledge that GM would guarantee up to 70 percent of the production workers’ lifetime jobs for a smaller wage increase than the union sought and a modification of the cost-of-living allowance that had been a part of UAW contracts since 1948.

Farmers also had to adjust as the larger workforce was reconstituted. Continuing a trend that began in the early twentieth century, the number of farms and farmers declined steadily. When Franklin Roosevelt took office in 1933, some 6.7 million farms covered the American landscape. Fifty years later, there were only 2.4 million. In 1980, farm residents made up 2.7 percent of the total population; by 1989, that figure had fallen to 1.9 percent. As family farms disappeared, farming income became more concentrated in the hands of the largest operators. In 1983, the top 1 percent of the nation’s farmers produced 30 percent of all farm products, while the top 12 percent generated 90 percent of all farm income. The top 1 percent of the growers in the United States had average annual incomes of $572,000, but the small and medium-sized farmers who were being forced off the land frequently had incomes below the official government poverty line.

The extraordinary productivity of the most successful American farmers derived in part from the use of chemical fertilizers, irrigation, pesticides, and scientific management. Government price-support programs helped, too. Yet that very productivity caused unexpected setbacks. In the 1970s, food shortages abroad made the United States the “breadbasket of the world.” Farmers increased their output to meet multibillion-bushel grain export orders and profited handsomely from high prices in India, China, Russia, and other countries. To increase production, farmers often borrowed heavily at high interest rates. When a worldwide economic slump began in 1980, overseas demand for American farm products declined sharply and farm prices dropped.

Thousands of farmers, caught in the cycle of overproduction, heavy indebtedness, and falling prices, watched helplessly as banks and federal agencies foreclosed on their mortgages and drove them out of business. Dale Christensen, an Iowa corn grower, faced foreclosure in 1983 when the Farmers Home Administration called in his overdue payments on debts totaling $300,000. “I am 58 years old,” he said. “My whole life has gone into this farm.” He was one of many struggling farmers who, in spite of government crop-support programs that cost more in 1982 than all welfare programs for the poor, could not make ends meet.

The Roller-Coaster Economy

The economy shifted back and forth during the 1980s and early 1990s. The Reagan years began with a recession that lasted for several years. An economic boom between 1983 and 1990 gave way to a punishing recession as the new decade began. It appeared that the United States had embarked on another boom-and-bust cycle as unsettling as that which had prevailed in the early years of the twentieth century.

The recession of 1980 to 1982 began during the Carter administration, when the Federal Reserve Board tried to deal with mounting deficits by increasing the money supply. Program cuts to counter inflation brought substantial unemployment in the workforce. During Reagan’s first year, the job situation deteriorated further, and by the end of 1982, the unemployment rate had climbed to 10.8 percent (and

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**Work Stoppages, 1960–1990**

<table>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>187</td>
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**Farm Indebtedness, 1950–1992**

Farm indebtedness was a continuing problem in the post-war years. Even modest improvement in the mid-1980s and early 1990s did not change the overall picture.
more than 20 percent among African Americans). Nearly one-third of the nation’s industrial capacity lay idle, and 12 million Americans were out of work.

Inflation, accompanied by heavy unemployment, continued to be a problem. The inflation rate, which reached 12.4 percent a year under Carter in 1980, fell after Reagan assumed office, to 8.9 percent in his first year and to about 5 percent during the remainder of his first term. But even the lower rate eroded the purchasing power of people already in difficulty.

The recession of 1980 to 1982 afflicted every region of the country. Business failures proliferated in every city and state, as large and small businesses closed their doors and fired employees. In 1982, business bankruptcies rose 50 percent from the previous year. In one week in June 1982, a total of 548 businesses failed, close to the 1932 weekly record of 612. In auto-making Detroit, Japanese competition and high interest rates sent car sales plummeting. The Detroit unemployment rate rose to more than 19 percent and affected the entire city.

Even the Sun Belt—the vast southern region stretching from coast to coast—showed the effects of the recession. It had enjoyed economic growth fostered by the availability of cheap, nonunion labor, tax advantages that state governments offered corporations willing to locate plants there, and a favorable climate. Now it, too, began to suffer economic problems, and large areas began to stagnate. Overexpansion in the oil industry led to a collapse in prices that disrupted the economy in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and other oil-producing regions. Worldwide gluts of some minerals, copper for example, added to unemployment elsewhere in the Southwest.

Economic conditions improved in late 1983 and early 1984, particularly for Americans in the middle- and upper-income ranges. The federal tax cut Reagan pushed through encouraged consumer spending, and huge defense expenditures had a stimulating effect. The Republican effort to reduce restrictions and cut waste sparked business confidence. A voluntary Japanese quota on car exports assisted the ailing automobile industry. The stock market climbed as it reflected the optimistic buying spree. Inflation remained low, about 3 to 4 percent annually from 1982 to 1988. Interest rates likewise fell from 16.5 percent to 10.5 percent in the same period and remained thereafter below 11 percent. The unemployment rate at the end of the 1980s fell to below 6 percent nationally (though many of the new jobs that were created paid less than $13,000


Federal defense spending rose dramatically during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. The enormous expenditures on the military led to the huge deficits that threw the economy out of kilter.

![Graph showing federal defense spending, 1976–1992](chart.png)

*Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States.*
per year). Between the start of the recovery and 1988, real GNP grew at an annual rate of 4.2 percent. But the economic upswing masked a number of problems. Millions of Americans remained poor. Many families continued to earn a middle-class income, but only by having two full-time income earners. They also went deeply into debt. To buy homes, young people accepted vastly higher mortgage interest rates than their parents had. Stiff credit card debts, often at 20 percent interest, were common. Under such circumstances, some young families struggled to remain in the middle class. Blue-collar workers had to accept lower standards of living. Single mothers were hit hardest of all.

The huge and growing budget deficits reflected the fundamental economic instability. Those deficits provoked doubts that resulted in the stock market crash of 1987. Six weeks of falling prices culminated with a 22.6 percent drop on Monday, October 19, almost double the plunge of “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929. The deficits, negative trade balances, and exposures of Wall Street fraud all combined to puncture the bubble. The stock market revived, but the crash foreshadowed further problems.

Those problems surfaced in the early 1990s, as the country experienced another recession. A combination of massive military spending, growth of entitlement programs, and tax cuts sent budget deficits skyrocketing. As bond traders in the 1980s speculated recklessly and pocketed huge profits, the basic productive structure of the country continued to decline. The huge increase in the national debt eroded business confidence, and this time the effects were felt not simply in the stock market but in the economy as a whole.

American firms suffered a serious decline, and to cope with shrinking profits and decreased consumer demand, companies scaled back dramatically. In late 1991, General Motors announced that it would close 21 plants, lay off 9,000 white-collar employees the next year, and eliminate more than 70,000 jobs in the next several years. Hundreds of other companies did the same thing, trimming corporate fat but also cutting thousands of jobs.

The unemployment rate rose once again. In mid-1991, it reached 7 percent, the highest level in nearly five years. About 8.7 million Americans were without jobs, up 2 million since the recession began.

Around the nation, state governments found it impossible to balance their budgets without resorting to massive spending cuts. Reagan’s efforts to move programs from the federal to the state level worked as long as funding lasted, but as national support dropped and state tax revenues declined, states found themselves in a budgetary gridlock. Most had constitutional prohibitions against running deficits, and so they had to slash spending for social services and education, even after yearly budgets had been approved.

After a number of false starts, the economy began to recover in mid-1992. The unemployment rate dropped, the productivity index rose, and a concerted effort began to bring the federal deficit down.

Population Shifts

As the American people dealt with the swings of the economy, demographic patterns changed significantly. The nation’s population increased from 228 million to approximately 250 million between 1980 and 1990—a rise of 9.6 percent (as opposed to 11.5 percent in the 1970s) that was one of the lowest rates of growth in American history. At the same time, the complexion of the country changed. In 1992, the country’s nonwhite population—African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans—stood at an all-time high of 25 percent, the result of increased immigration and of minority birthrates significantly above the white birthrate.

The population shifted geographically as well. American cities increasingly filled with members of the nation’s minorities. White families continued to leave for the steadily growing suburbs, which by 1990 contained almost half the population, more than ever before. In 15 of the nation’s 28 largest cities—New York, Chicago, and Houston among them—minorities made up at least half the population. Minority representation varied by urban region. In Detroit, Washington, New Orleans, and Chicago, African Americans were the largest minority; in Phoenix, El Paso, San Antonio, and Los Angeles, Latinos held that position; in San Francisco, Asians outnumbered other groups.

The cities also grew steadily poorer. In Houston, for example, although increasing numbers of African Americans, Latinos, and Asians lived in the suburbs, most of the poorest minority families were concentrated in the city itself. As had been the case since World War II, commuters from the suburbs took the better-paying jobs, while people living in the cities held lower-paying positions. Mario Perez, a 27-year-old Latino immigrant, noted in 1991 that the increase in the number of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the nine years since he arrived in Houston made it easier to find a job but harder to secure well-paying work. Perez himself worked seven days a week sweeping streets downtown and tending plants for $5.50 an hour.

At the same time, the population was moving west. In 1900, the Mountain and Pacific states contained...
about 5 percent of the nation’s population. By 1990, that figure stood at 21 percent. The population of the nation as a whole rose by less than 10 percent in the 1980s, but the population of the West increased by 22 percent.

That population was becoming much more urbanized. In the 50 years following 1940, the six largest metropolitan areas in the West grew by 380 percent; the six largest in the East expanded by only 64 percent. By 1990, 80 percent of all westerners lived in metropolitan areas, compared to 76 percent of the people in the rest of the United States. As writer Wallace Stegner observed, the West “is urban; it’s an oasis civilization.”

With its urban development, the West became a pacesetter for the rest of the country. If the New England village was a symbol of the eighteenth century and the midwestern town was a similar symbol of the nineteenth century, then the western metropolis had special symbolic importance in the late twentieth century. Western cities were unbounded, open-ended, and sprawling in all directions. They seemed capable of expanding indefinitely. Horizontal, low-slung homes made western neighborhoods look very different from those in the Northeast. Tourism became a dynamic industry, with the West in the forefront. The motel, a western invention, made automobile travel easier. Western cities were among the most popular tourist destinations, drawing visitors from all over the world.

California was the nation’s fastest-growing state, its population increasing in the 1980s by nearly 26 percent. Responding to a question about California’s impact on the rest of the country, Wallace Stegner replied, “We are the national culture, at its most energetic end.” Los Angeles became the most dynamic example of American vitality and creativity. The motion picture industry exerted a worldwide impact. The city became a capital of consumption and served as a symbol of a dynamic national life.
In the early 1990s, the United States emerged triumphant in the Cold War that had dominated international politics since the end of World War II. In one of the most momentous turns in modern world history, communism collapsed in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, and the various republics in the Soviet orbit moved toward capitalism and democracy. Other regions—the Middle East and Africa—experienced equally breathtaking change.
Reagan, Bush, and the Soviet Union

The Cold War was very much alive when Ronald Reagan assumed power in 1981. Like most of his compatriots, Reagan believed in large defense budgets and a militant approach toward the Soviet Union. He wanted to cripple the USSR economically by forcing it to spend more than it could afford on defense.

Viewing the Soviet Union as an “evil empire” in his first term, Reagan promoted a larger atomic arsenal by arguing that a nuclear war could be fought and won. The administration dropped efforts to obtain Senate ratification of SALT II, the arms reduction plan negotiated under Carter, although it observed the pact’s restrictions. Then Reagan proposed the enormously expensive and bitterly criticized Strategic Defense Initiative, popularly known as “Star Wars” after a 1977 movie, to intercept Soviet missiles in outer space.

In his second term, Reagan softened his belligerence. Mikhail Gorbachev, the new Soviet leader, watching his own economy collapse under the pressure of the superheated arms race, realized the need for greater accommodation with the West. He understood that the only way the Soviet Union could survive was through arms negotiations with the United States that would help reduce his overextended budget. He therefore proposed a policy of perestroika (restructuring the economy) and glasnost (political openness to encourage personal initiative). His overtures opened the way to better relations with the United States.

Concerned with his own place in history, Reagan met with Gorbachev, and the two developed a close working relationship. Summit meetings led to an Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 1987 that provided for the withdrawal and destruction of 2,500 Soviet and American nuclear missiles in Europe.

George Bush maintained Reagan’s comfortable relationship with Gorbachev. At several summit meetings in 1989 and 1990, the two leaders signed agreements reducing the number of long-range nuclear weapons, ending the manufacture of chemical weapons, and easing trade restrictions. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed in 1991 dramatically cut stockpiles of long-range weapons.

The End of the Cold War

The Cold War ended with astonishing speed. Gorbachev’s efforts to restructure Soviet society and to work with the United States brought him acclaim around the world but led to trouble at home. In mid-1991, he faced an old-guard Communist coup, led by those who opposed glasnost and perestroika.

He survived this right-wing challenge, but he could not resist those who wanted to go even further to establish democracy and capitalism. The forces he had unleashed finally destroyed the Soviet system and tore the USSR apart.

Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia, the strongest and largest of the Soviet republics, emerged as the...
dominant leader, but even he could not contain the forces of disintegration. Movements in the tiny Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, culminating with independence in 1991, began the dismantling of the Soviet Union. The once-powerful superpower was now a collection of separate states. Although the republics coalesced loosely in a Commonwealth of Independent States, led by Russia, they retained their autonomy—and independent leadership—in domestic and foreign affairs.

Meanwhile, Communist regimes throughout Europe collapsed. In a series of remarkable developments that occurred at the same time and intertwined with the turbulence in the Soviet Union, many of the Communist satellites broke loose, rejected communism, and proclaimed a new commitment to democracy.

The most dramatic chapter in this story unfolded in Germany in November 1989. Responding to Gorbachev’s softening stance toward the West, East Germany’s Communist party boss announced unexpectedly that citizens of his country would be free to leave East Germany. Within hours, thousands of people gathered on both sides of the 28-mile Berlin Wall—the symbol of the Cold War that divided Berlin into East and West sectors. As the border guards stepped aside, East Germans flooded into West Berlin amid dancing, shouting, and fireworks. Within days, sledgehammer-wielding Germans pulverized the Berlin Wall, and soon the Communist government itself came tumbling down. By October 1990, the two Germanys were reunited.

The fall of the Berlin Wall reverberated all over Eastern Europe. Everywhere it brought in its wake the pell-mell overthrow of Communist regimes. In Poland, the 10-year-old Solidarity movement led by Lech Walesa triumphed in its long struggle against Soviet domination and found itself in power in December 1990, with Walesa as president. Governing, however, sometimes proved more difficult than leading the revolt. In Czechoslovakia, two decades after Soviet tanks had rolled into the streets of Prague to suppress a policy of liberalization, the forces of freedom were likewise victorious. Like Poland, Czechoslovakia sought and received aid from the United States. But not even economic assistance could keep the nation intact, as turbulence led to the creation of separate and independent Czech and Slovak republics. The same forces that culminated in the independence of Czechoslovakia brought new regimes in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Albania.

Yugoslavia, held together by a Communist dictatorship since 1945, proved to be the extreme case of...
In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Soviet Union fragmented and lost control of its satellites in Eastern Europe. As many countries shown here declared their independence, Czechoslovakia broke into two nations, while Yugoslavia ruptured into a group of feuding states. Reflecting on the Past: How widespread was the turbulence that led to the fall of communism? How quickly did the process take place? How did events in one country influence events in another country?

Early in 1992, Bush and Yeltsin proclaimed a new era of “friendship and partnership” and formally declared an end to the Cold War. After half a century of confrontation, the United States had won. Yeltsin abandoned the quest for nuclear parity—maintaining an arsenal equal to that of the United States—and agreed to cut back Russian conventional forces. The United States then extended aid to the former Soviet republics, which needed help in reorganizing their economies as free enterprise systems.

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CHAPTER 30  The Revival of Conservatism, 1980–1992

Dismantling the Berlin Wall  The destruction of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 was a symbolic blow to the entire Cold War structure that had solidified in Europe in the postwar years. People grabbed hammers and joined together in tearing down the hated wall. Joyous celebrations marked the reunification of a city that had been divided for decades. How does this dramatic picture convey the exuberant mood of the time? (Alexandria Avakian/Woodfin Camp & Associates)

American Involvement Overseas  As the United States struggled to keep abreast of the momentous changes in Eastern Europe, it was equally involved with events in the rest of the world. Here again the nation sought to preserve stability as the Cold War drew to an end.

In Latin America, the United States intervened frequently as it had in the past, hoping to impose stability on the volatile region. Viewing Central America as a Cold War battlefield early in his presidency, Reagan openly opposed left-wing guerrillas in El Salvador who fought to overthrow a repressive right-wing regime. He was fearful that still another nation might follow the Marxist examples of Cuba and Nicaragua. The United States increased its assistance to the antirevolutionary Salvadoran government, heedless of a similar course followed years before in Vietnam. Efforts to destroy the radical forces failed, but in 1989, a far-right faction won the Salvadoran elections and polarized the country.

Nicaragua became an even bloodier battleground in the effort to promote stability. In 1979, revolutionaries calling themselves Sandinistas (after César Sandino, who fought in the 1920s against U.S. occupation troops) overthrew the repressive Somoza family, which had ruled for three decades. President Carter initially extended aid to the Sandinistas and recognized the new regime, then cut off support to show his disapproval of their curbs on...
civil liberties and their alleged efforts to assist rebels in El Salvador. The Republicans adopted a far stronger position. Their 1980 platform pledged to replace the Sandinistas with a “free and independent” government. Once in office, Reagan circumvented congressional opposition to his efforts to defeat the revolutionary reformers and signed a National Security directive in November 1981 authorizing the CIA to arm and train counterrevolutionaries known as contras.

Nicaragua became enmeshed in a bitter civil war. When the war went badly for the contras, the CIA assumed the military initiative and mined Nicaraguan harbors, violating international law. Upon discovering these secret missions, Congress cut off military aid to the contras. Peaceful elections in early 1990 finally drove the Sandinistas out and brought the fighting to an end. Though the economy remained in desperate straits, the new regime seemed to offer the best hope of healing the wounds of the bloody conflict.

Reagan found it easier to maintain stability on the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada. The president ordered marines there in October 1983 after a coup installed a government sympathetic to Fidel Castro’s Cuba. Concerned about the construction of a large airfield, 2,000 marines invaded the island, rescued a number of American medical students, and claimed triumph. Though the United Nations condemned it, Americans cheered what the administration called its “rescue mission.”

Middle Eastern and Central American concerns became entangled in the Iran–contra affair. In 1987, Congress learned that the National Security Council had launched an effort to free American hostages in the Middle East by selling arms to Iran and then using the funds to aid the contras, in direct violation of both the law and congressional will. The trial of Oliver North, the National Security Council official responsible for the policy, focused on his distortions and falsifications before congressional committees and on his destruction of official documents that could have substantiated charges of wrongdoing by top officials. Convicted in 1989, North received a light sentence requiring no time in prison from a judge who recognized that North was not acting entirely on his own.

Bush, too, was involved in a variety of episodes abroad. Despite memories of past imperialism, the United States invaded Panama in 1989; the reasons it gave were to protect the canal, defend American citizens, and stop drug traffic. The campaign resulted in the capture of military leader Manuel Noriega, notorious for his involvement in the drug trade. Noriega was brought to the United States, tried, and after a lengthy trial, convicted of drug-trafficking charges.

The United States likewise found itself drawn into turbulent African affairs. In South Africa, the United States supported the long and ultimately successful struggle against apartheid. This policy, whereby the white minority (only 15 percent of the population) segregated, suppressed, and denied basic human rights to the black majority, was part of South African law. A resistance movement, spearheaded by the African National Congress (ANC) sought to end apartheid. Nelson Mandela and other ANC leaders refused to give up, despite fierce resistance to their efforts to achieve freedom. While the United States had long expressed its dislike of this ruthless system of segregation, economic and political ties to South Africa kept the United States from taking steps to weaken it. Then, in 1986, bowing to increased domestic pressure, Congress imposed sanctions, including a rule prohibiting new American investments. The economic pressure damaged the South African economy and persuaded more than half of the 300 American firms doing business there to leave.

The final blow to apartheid came from the efforts of Nelson Mandela. The black ANC activist, who had become a symbol of the militant resistant movement during his 27 years in prison, steered his nation through a stunning transformation. In 1990, during Bush’s presidency, South African prime minister Frederik W. de Klerk succumbed to pressure
from the United States and the rest of the world, which finally embraced the ANC cause. He freed Mandela and announced plans by which apartheid would be gradually overturned. Talks between South Africa’s white government and the ANC that Mandela led laid the groundwork for a smooth transition to a biracial democracy. Mandela and de Klerk worked together to ensure peaceful elections in 1994, in which blacks voted for the first time. After years of struggle, the ANC assumed power and dismantled the apartheid system. Mandela himself became president of a South Africa that was building itself anew. American aid provided support in transitional times.

**Anti-American Demonstrators in Baghdad** A multinational coalition freed Kuwait after Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein—whose image appears on the signs at the anti-American demonstration in Baghdad—annexed the oil-rich land in 1990. The Persian Gulf War gave George Bush a quick victory, but the long-range results of U.S. involvement were questionable. What impression do the multiple pictures of Saddam Hussein convey? (Chris Morris/Black Star)

**The Gulf War**

When Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, the United States led a coalition to drive Iraq out. Operation Desert Storm began in early 1991 and routed Iraqi forces, while leaving Kuwait’s extensive oil fields in flames. Reflecting on the Past: How many Middle Eastern countries were involved in the Gulf War? What role did oil play in the events that unfolded during the war? Why was Israel vulnerable during the conflict?
Elsewhere in Africa, U.S. policymakers had greater difficulty in maintaining post–Cold War stability. Somalia, an impoverished East African nation, suffered from a devastating famine, compounded by struggles between warlords that led to an almost total disintegration of order. In 1992, Bush sent U.S. troops to assist a UN effort to relieve the starvation and stabilize the country, but those efforts proved unsuccessful in a struggle that continued into the twenty-first century.

A dramatic crisis occurred in the Middle East in 1990 when Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, invaded and annexed oil-rich neighboring Kuwait. Hussein seemed intent on unifying Arab nations, threatening Israel, and dominating the Middle Eastern oil on which the West, including the United States, relied.

President Bush reacted vigorously. Working through the UN, as Harry Truman had done in Korea, the United States persuaded the UN Security Council to vote unanimously to condemn the attack and impose an embargo on Iraq. After Hussein refused to relinquish Kuwait, in mid-January 1991 a U.S.-led multinational army of nearly half a million troops from 28 nations struck at Iraq. In Operation Desert Storm, the coalition forces’ sophisticated missiles, aircraft, and tanks swiftly overwhelmed the Iraqis. Americans were initially jubilant. Then the euphoria faded as Saddam turned his remaining military power against minorities in Iraq. Bush’s unwillingness to become bogged down in an Iraqi civil war and his eagerness to return U.S. troops home left the conflict unfinished. A year after his defeat, Hussein was as strongly entrenched as ever.

Meanwhile, the United States was involved in a larger, and ultimately more important, effort to bring peace to the Middle East. In the early 1990s, Secretary of State James Baker finally secured agreement from the major parties in the region to speak to one another face to face. A victory in the Israeli parliamentary elections in mid-1992 for Yitzhak Rabin, a soldier who recognized the need for peace and was ready to compromise, offered further hope for the talks.

**Conclusion**

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the United States witnessed the resurgence of conservatism. The assault on the welfare state, dubbed the “Reagan Revolution,” created a less-regulated economy, whatever the implications for less-fortunate Americans. The policies of Ronald Reagan and George Bush continued the trend begun by Richard Nixon in the 1970s. They reshaped the political agenda and reversed the liberal approach that had held sway since the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s. In foreign
affairs, Republican administrations likewise shifted course. Reagan first assumed a steel-ribbed posture toward the Soviet Union, then moved toward détente, and watched as his successor declared victory in the Cold War.

To be sure, there were limits to the transformation. Such fundamental programs as social security and Medicare remained securely in place, accepted by all but the most implacable splinter groups. Even the most conservative presidents of the past half century could not return to an imagined era of unbridled individualism and puny federal government. On the international front, despite the end of the Cold War, the nation’s defense budget remained far higher than many Americans wished, and the nuclear arsenal continued to pose a threat to the human race.

Nor was the transformation beneficial to everyone. Periods of deep recession wrought havoc on the lives of blue-collar and white-collar workers alike. Working-class Americans were caught in the spiral of downward mobility that made them question the ability of the nation’s economy to reward hard work. Liberals and conservatives both worried about the mounting national debt and the capacity of the economy to compete with Japan, South Korea, Germany, and other countries. Countless Americans fretted about the growing gaps between rich and poor. They fought with one another over what rules should govern a woman’s right to an abortion. For the first time in American history, many children could not hope to do better than their parents had done. Reluctantly they tried to prepare themselves to accept a scaled-down version of the American dream.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. How did the conservative movement become a major force in American life?
2. How successful was Reagan in implementing his conservative program?
3. What was the fate of social reform movements in the 1980s?
4. How did economic issues affect American life in the 1980s?
5. How did the Cold War finally come to an end?

Recommended Reading

Recommended Readings are posted on the Web site for this textbook. Visit www.ablongman.com/nash

Fiction and Film


The film Bedtime for Bonzo (1951) shows Ronald Reagan the actor playing the part of a professor trying to teach morals to a chimpanzee. Knute Rockne, All American (1940) is another of Reagan’s films in which he plays the part of George Gipp (the Gipper), a Notre Dame football player. The Life and Times of Harvey Milk (1984) is an Academy Award–winning documentary about the gay San Francisco city supervisor who was murdered. Wall Street (1987) captures the sense of greed and corporate arrogance that created the tone for the 1980s. When Harry Met Sally (1989) is a film about the difficulties of relationships between men and women.
Discovering U.S. History Online

Ronald Wilson Reagan
www.ipl.org/div/potus/rwreagan.html
This site contains basic factual data about Reagan's election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library
www.reagan.utexas.edu
This site offers selected pictures and written documents from the Reagan years.

Media, Advertising, and the 1984 Presidential Election
http://it.stlawu.edu/~quack/seminar/home.htm
This site presents a study of "the Reagan campaign's use of media, in the form of paid advertising and news coverage . . . [and contrasts it] with Mondale's approach, in order to demonstrate how different the campaigns truly were."

The Reagan Years
www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/reagan.years
This site includes photos and speeches from Reagan's life, especially from key issues and events of his presidency such as Reaganomics, the Iran–contra affair, and his views on the Communist empire in an attempt to contribute to the "debate [on] the legacy of [his] two-term presidency."

George Herbert Walker Bush
www.ipl.org/div/potus/ghwbush.html
This site contains basic factual data about George H. W. Bush's election and presidency, speeches, and online biographies.

Divining America: Religion and the National Culture in the Twentieth Century
www.nhc.rtp.nc.us:8080/tserve/twenty.htm
Using essays and primary sources, the site was "designed to help teachers of American history bring their students to a greater understanding of the role religion has played in the development of the United States."

U.S. Forest Service History
www.lib.duke.edu/forest/Research/usfscoll/
Incorporating original documents and photographs as well as bibliographic references, this site presents "information about the history of the United States Forest Service, in the Department of Agriculture."

United States Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/history
A history of the agency, including a timeline from 1970 to the present, topical information, publications, collection search, and photographs.

The Forgotten Americans
www.pbs.org/klru/forgottenamericans/
Companion site to the film, this site offers a portrait of the "Third World conditions" experienced by the mostly Latino residents of U.S. neighborhoods outside the city limits in Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico, called colonias.

American Cultural History: 1980–1989
http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade80.html
An informative breakdown of various cultural and economic trends during the 1980s, including Art and Architecture, Books and Literature, Fashion and Fads, Education, Events and Technology, Music and Media, Theater, and Film and Television.

Global Economy
www.pbs.org/wgbh/commandingheights/lo
This site examines the "forces, values, events, and ideas that have shaped the present global economic system, including Reagan's introduction of 'supply-side' economics."

An Outline of the U.S. Economy
http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/oecon/
This text-based Web site presents the basics of the American economy as well as a brief history of major economic events.

Foreign Policy
http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/clips/

The Cold War
www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war
This is the companion site to the CNN series on the Cold War. It contains some material on the end of the struggle.

The Gulf War
www.pbs.org/pages/frontline/gulf
This site combines personal accounts with a chronology and general information about the war.