THIS IS A TRADITIONAL ASSIGNMENT. PRINT AND COMPLETE IN INK.

Name:_____ Class Period:_____

A Nation in Quandary 1975-1992

Purpose:
This Crossroads Essay is an optional enrichment activity providing additional insight into the era. Students who complete this activity before they take the corresponding reading quiz will earn up to 10 additional points. All students should READ the article.
For those completing the activity… ***Read directions carefully.***

Directions:
As you **read the article,** ***annotate*** in the space provided along the right margin. ***Use INK***..

Annotate by:
a. Highlighting the **main ideas/arguments**,
b. **identifying & explaining major themes** (BAGPIPE)
c. identifying & explaining historical context
d. **defining terms** you may not know.
(if it's bold… define it!)

Migration and Settlement
America in the World
Geography and the Environment
Politics and Power
Identity; American and National
Economy; Work, Exchange, and Technology
Society and Culture

NOTE: The original essay was written in 1995, so consider as you read how things have or have not changed since then!

In the years since the combined traumas of the falls of **South Vietnam** [Vietnam War] and **Richard Nixon** [Watergate], the effects of these traumas combined with delayed effects of the assassinations of 1963 and 1968 to exacerbate American self-consciousness and to undermine American self-confidence. Not only were Americans deeply uncertain about their nation's place in the world, or the continuing success of American economy and society at home -- they questioned some of the basic assumptions of modern American life:

(i) that American government is both democratic and responsible: Americans began to perceive their government, at all levels, as dominated by professional politicians who had contempt for (and whose interests were hostile to) the great body of the people. Government seemed increasingly out of control, unresponsive, dishonest, corrupt, and unable to accomplish its objectives.

(ii) that America's problems can be solved by the application of governmental power: Americans' distrust of politicians and government officials grew dramatically in the years following 1975. Further, they came to believe that **government efforts to solve social problems** not only fail but often are worse than the disease. For these reasons, the electorate came to endorse the position stated most succinctly by **Ronald Reagan**, who in his first Inaugural Address (1981) declared that "government is not the e solution to the problem. Government is the problem."

(iii) that America is a nation devoted to fostering greater equality for its people, despite differences in race, sex, ethnicity, religion, culture, or sexual orientation: The effort to realize the nation's commitment to equality at first continued in the late 1970s, as government developed **affirmative action policies** to provide remedies for past discrimination against members of minority groups. But more and more Americans viewed affirmative action as **"reverse discrimination"** favoring certain individuals based on race, and thus against other (white male) individuals based on race, even as the Supreme Court struggled to sort out which affirmative action policies were consistent with the Constitution and which were not.

Activity adapted by Rebecca Richardson, Allen High School, to target learning objectives for A.P. U.S. history based off of the 2015 Revised College Board Framework;
Original document: CROSSROADS: A K-16 American History Curriculum, Troy, NY: Council for Citizenship Education, Russell Sage College, 1995,
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On a different front in the battle for equality, the quest for equal rights for women began in muted form in the late 1960s and early 1970s, briefly dominated public attention in the 1970s, and then stalled, due to a variety of factors:

(a) Opponents of the proposed **Equal Rights Amendment** thwarted its progress through state legislatures and ultimately, in 1982, defeated it. This was a shattering setback for the cause of women's rights because ERA had swept through Congress with no trouble in 1972 and seemed destined for swift adoption. The case against ERA was only a specific application of a broader critique of **feminism** and the demand for equal rights for women. Grounded in "traditional" religious and moral values, understandings of the roles of men and women, and disapproval of changing sexual mores, the **anti-feminist movement** derived most of its support from **fundamentalist** religious groups and right-wing politicians and their supporters. The defeat of ERA, a profound setback for the women's movement, reverberated throughout American society, combining with the opposition to affirmative action to create a backlash against the use of law and government to remedy past injustices or to enforce equality under the Constitution.

(b) The drive to extend the protection of the Constitution to the right of privacy, including the right of private decision-making in matters of sex and procreation, reached its constitutional high-water-mark in 1973, the year the Supreme Court decided ***Roe v. Wade***, which extended the constitutional right of sexual privacy to cover a woman's choice whether or not to terminate her pregnancy by an abortion. [Although *Roe v. Wade* might seem more properly to belong in Unit 8, it became controversial only once the American people began to focus on it after the passing of the twin traumas of Watergate and Vietnam.] *Roe v. Wade* galvanized conservative and right-wing groups who maintained that abortion was murder, and rejected on that basis any possibility that a pregnant woman should have the right to choose whether to continue her pregnancy or not. The conflict over abortion grew beyond anything that **pro-choice or pro-life factions** expected, to become a dominant issue of American public life -- although one that, to this day, still has not achieved a definitive resolution one way or the other.

[…continuation of explanation… Not only were Americans deeply uncertain about their nation's place in the world, or the continuing success of American economy and society at home -- they questioned some of the basic assumptions of modern American life:]

(iv) that America is a land where people of diverse races, religions, ethnic origins, and social classes can live together harmoniously and in peace: In some ways a consequence of point (iii) [on page 1], the fragmentation of American society, culture, and politics -- which Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., dubbed "the disuniting of America" - is perhaps the most disturbing development of this period, for it challenged a fundamental assumption that had governed American life for nearly a century, since the waves of immigration from Europe gave rise to the model of America as a "**melting pot**" that distilled American citizens from human "raw material" drawn from throughout the globe. Beginning in the late 1970s, Americans instead saw themselves as divided from one another along precisely the lines of race, religion, class, and ethnicity that the "melting pot" ideology taught were irrelevant.

To be sure, the "melting pot" ideology that had dominated American thinking on immigration and cultural identity was vulnerable to sharp and justified criticism. It both embodied and symbolized pressure to conform to some hypothetical standard of "**Americanization**" -- pressure that caused many immigrants to abandon their cultural, religious, and ethnic heritage; forget or scrap their native tongues; and change their names -- and even their appearances -- to win acceptance from the "majority." Moreover, those immigrants who did not jettison their entire cultural identity found themselves living double lives -- living as "Americans" in the world outside the home and in the culture of their birth within the home.

Nonetheless, despite its many flaws and the extensive human damage attributable to it, the idea of the "melting pot" did carry with it one valuable principle worth salvaging from the wreck -- that all Americans, of whatever race, creed, ethnicity, or culture, were of right citizens of the United States with a common political and constitutional heritage. The growing fragmentation of the American people endangers this principle, and this continuing challenge to the idea that Americans of whatever race, religion, ethnicity, or sex nonetheless have common interests as Americans in many ways is the most serious trial the nation faces.

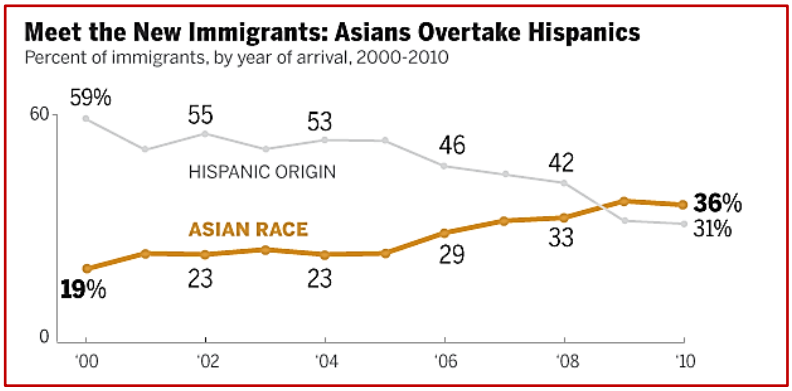
The growing splintering of the American people into groups has fostered, in turn, a growing insistence by many of those groups on redefining the Americans' "shared" or "common" heritage. On the right are ranged advocates of "traditional" core curricula, which they claim are the only dependable backbone of a sound educational system. On the left are ranged advocates of "**multicultural**" curricula, which they argue redress the imbalance of "**traditional**" curricula in favor of dead white males of European descent. But this contest is also a battle over the values animating education -- **"traditional" values** (often closely linked to conservative and fundamentalist religion) versus an emphasis on diversity of religious beliefs and moral values and on a "realistic" approach to the kinds of values and behaviors that schools should foster in their students.

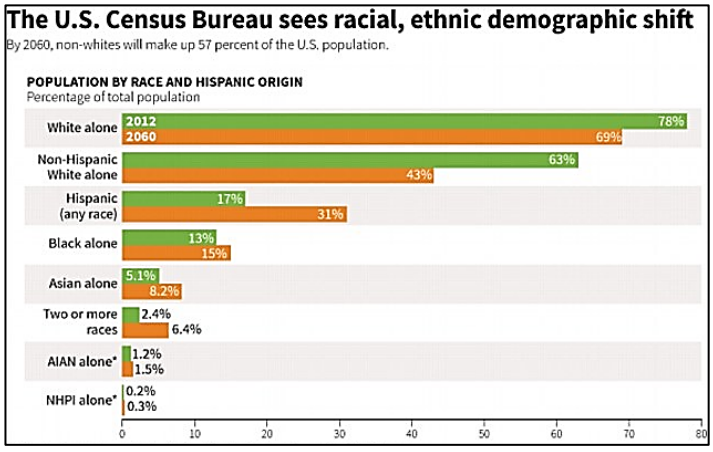
(v) Still other interests and distinctions divide the American people as well:

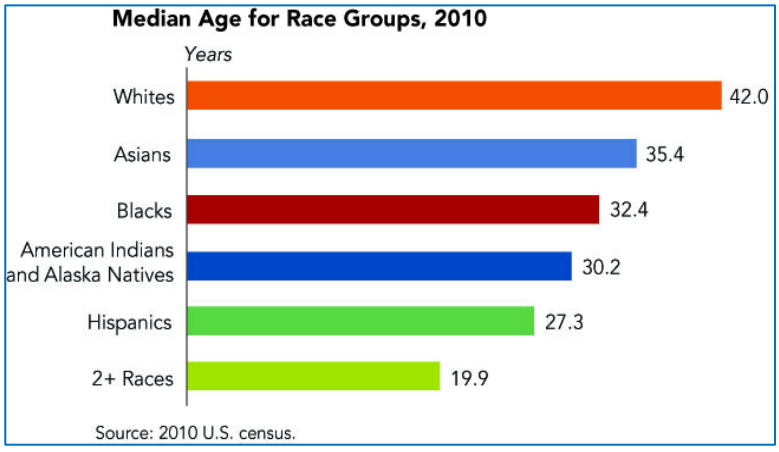
(a) The new immigration: Census results in the 1980s and the 1990s confirm that the largest and fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States is the **Hispanic-Americans**, an umbrella term that includes people who can trace their ancestry to countries throughout Latin America (for example, Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico) as well as to Spain. Many of these Americans either are bilingual in Spanish and English or are fluent only in Spanish -- leading, on the one hand, to pressure to launch **bilingual programs** in schools and government and, on the other, to demands that English receive legal or even constitutional sanction as the **official language** of the United States. (Just as many Hispanic-Americans either are so totally assimilated that they refuse to speak Spanish, or are the children of assimilated parents who refused to teach them Spanish at home.) **Asian-Americans** of all sorts (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, Pakistani) rank just behind Hispanic Americans as a fast-growing force in American life. This demographic development is especially significant because many Asian-Americans have brought with them their own religions (such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shinto) -- faiths profoundly different from the **Judeo-Christian tradition** that helped to shape most of the nation's history. Among other things, the growth of these segments of the nation's population indicates that those of European descent may well become a minority not only among American immigrants, but of the American population.

NOTE: Asian immigrants have just recently exceeded Hispanic immigrants, becoming the largest modern day immigrant group. HOWEVER, Hispanics have more children and will continue to be the largest group in population number if not in incoming number. Also, the next generation will live in a country where Whites are no longer the majority. In public schools, white children are already in the minority. In 2010 only 51% of children under the age of 5 were White alone.

(Sources: U.S. Census and Reuters.com)







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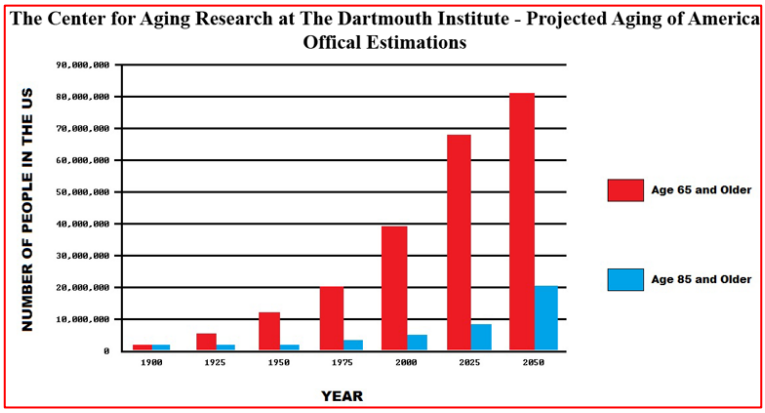
(b) The aging of America: Census results also confirm that, as the massive bulge in the population representing the so-called "**baby boom**" (those Americans born between 1946 and 1962) ages, more and more Americans will be dependent on the **Social Security** system, which will be funded by taxes paid by fewer and fewer Americans -- members of the **"baby bust"** (those born in the 1960s and early 1970s) and the **"second baby boom"** (children of the "baby boom" generation, born in the late 1970s and 1980s). Not only will this major age shift affect the Social Security system; it also will pose important challenges to the nation's public and private systems for providing and paying for health care.



By the year 2050, more than 80 million Americans will be over the age of 65.
(Source: The Center for Aging Research at The Dartmouth Institute)

(c) The health care crisis: The national crisis over affordable and available health care goes beyond concerns derived from the aging of America. The sheer expense of health costs and the alarming growth in the number of Americans lacking even basic health insurance have surfaced periodically in debates over American health policy. For more than three decades, the growing recognition of cancer as a major killer of Americans has spurred efforts to find a cure -- with only partial success and an uncertain future. Still another issue that drives public debate about health care is the spread of **AIDS**, a sexually-transmitted disease that, to date, is invariably fatal and at this writing has no cure. [1995]

(d) The environmental crisis: The plight of the environment was first brought to public attention in the early 1960s by Rachel Carson's landmark book ***Silent Spring*** (1962); it first captured widespread interest in 1970, with the first "**Earth Day**." Although the modern environmental movement tapped into a long and honorable tradition of "stewardship" thinking about the environment (going back to the Progressive era's **Ballinger-Pinchot controversy**), it scored its principal successes in the 1970s, with the adoption of environmental legislation and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. It also set out, with less success, to educate Americans about their nation's status as the world's leading consumer of natural resources and raw materials and to encourage conservation, recycling, and a less expansive way of life. In the 1980s, however, environmentalism came under sustained attack, on a variety of grounds, from the right wing of American politics. Critics of environmentalism dismissed environmentalists' warnings against global warming, air and water pollution, toxic waste dumps, the destruction of forests, the wholesale extinction of animal and plant life, and the deterioration of the earth's ozone layer as alarmist, anti-business, and a anti-human. This debate still rages, as the nation tries to come to terms with its obligations to its people and to the rest of the world.

In a Nutshell: The **Ballinger-Pinchot Affair** was one of the causes of the Republican Party split which led to Theodore Roosevelt's attempt to dethrone Taft in the election of 1912. Taft was hand-picked to succeed Roosevelt and was expected to continue policies as Teddy expected. Taft broke with Teddy regarding conservation in this "affair" which began when the head of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, publicly criticized Taft's Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger. Basically, Pinchot believed that Ballinger opposed conservation by working with big business, because he returned some Alaskan lands to private ownership as its seizure was deemed by him and by Taft as unconstitutional. Taft sided with Ballinger and fired Pinchot who had been instrumental in defining and implementing conservation policies under Teddy Roosevelt, which included the **scientific management of the nations forests as well as developing the commercial value of public lands**. Taft and Ballinger questioned whether the federal government could legally conserve land without congressional approval. As a result, the new Interior Secretary immediately restored 3 million acres of land to private hands. **Pinchot believed the federal government could legally seize land for conservation purposes.** He thought Ballinger was trying to stop the conservation movement and accused the secretary of siding with private interests. In particular, Ballinger wished to sell waterpower sites and coal lands as opposed to leasing them. Roosevelt used his presidential power to conserve land. Upon assuming office, Ballinger restored private property rights to Alaskan lands. After Ballinger's actions, **conservationists feared big business would "rape" the Alaskan territory.** Congress later cleared Ballinger of any wrongdoing. The public generally sided with Pinchot. The Progressive wing of the Republican Party also sided with Pinchot. The Republican Party split in two and experienced a civil war which ended in Democrat Woodrow Wilson's election in 1912. The conservatives eventually emerged triumphant in 1920 as the public rejected progressivism. **The controversy blurred and over-simplified complex conservation issues** by leading people to see them in terms of conflicting personalities and ideological stereotypes of **"the public" versus "the interests."** In the election of 1912, The Bull-Moose –Progressive Party- Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" called for a strong central government to correct America's social problems and protect citizens from **special interests**. Among the basic components of this philosophy was the **scientific conservation of natural resources.** The controversy made conservation a **partisan issue** that obscured the complicated business of managing the country's resources. (source: TheExaminer.com, Don Keko, "The Taft-Roosevelt Rift: Ballinger-Pinchot")

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(e) The human costs of an ailing economy:

(1) Homelessness in the 1980s and 1990s became an increasingly visible national problem, on a scale rivaling the era of the **Great Depression**. Traceable to, among other factors, the movement in the 1970s to **deinstitutionalize** many mental patients, the growing dearth of affordable housing, and the ordinary American's increasingly precarious economic health, homelessness cannot be dismissed any longer as a "phony" national problem.

(2) Substance abuse, for most of the nation's history ignored because it tended to affect only the inner cities (and because alcoholism and smoking were not considered part of the problem until the last twenty years), spread throughout the nation -- a reaction, in part, to the gutting of the economy in many regions. The collapse of industries in the **"rust belt"** of New England and the Middle West, and the apparently quick and easy money to be made in drug trafficking, have combined to make drug abuse one of the principal problems afflicting American society -- despite nearly three decades of sustained federal, state, and local efforts to combat traffic in dangerous drugs.

(3) Violent crime- of which drug traffic is only one instance -- continued to preoccupy Americans, and to provide a focus for political argument. Two camps emerged to debate the crime problem with growing acrimony but little progress to any sort of solution: One group, based mainly along the right wing of the political spectrum, maintained that government should "get tough" with criminals, concentrating on apprehending those who commit crime and punishing them more severely (including an expanded use of the **death penalty**). The other, occupying mostly the left wing, argued that crime was a phenomenon whose roots could be traced to larger social ills; they maintained that the most effective response to crime would be to combat homelessness, unemployment, and other social problems, and to **control individual citizens' access to firearms**, rather than "locking criminals up."

These crises, in varying proportions and to varying degrees over time, posed the enduring issues of American life in the years since 1975.

One of the principal reasons for the American people's growing disenchantment with, and distrust of, politics and politicians is the growing inability and unwillingness of all too many politicians, of whatever party or point of view, to come to grips with the problems that alarm Americans most. Ironically, one of the principal reasons for American politicians' failure to confront national problems is their astute perception that most Americans either do not want to face the details of those problems, the hard work needed to devise solutions, and the necessity of accepting social costs as the price of those solutions.

I. Drift, 1975-1981

Two transitional Presidents, **Gerald R. Ford** and **Jimmy Carter**, struggled in vain to find solutions to the crises confronting the nation at home and abroad as Americans came to question the effectiveness and desirably of a large, activist government. In retrospect, their successes at least equaled their failures in office, suggesting that they were underrated at the time. In retrospect, the electorate unfairly may have saddled Ford and Carter with the blame for problems beyond any President's ability to solve -- another consequence of the centrality of the Presidency in American public life.

- Despite occasional foreign-policy successes, such as the negotiation of a **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty**, the **Panama Canal Treaty**, and the **Camp David Accords**, most Americans believed that the nation's course in world affairs was drifting, uncertain, and potentially self-destructive.
- For the first time in the nation's history, Americans recognized the interconnectedness of the American economy with the world economy -- and they did not like what they saw. The **energy crisis of the 1970s** (which began during the last years of the Nixon Presidency but achieved its full stature in the Ford and Carter years) dramatized how the American "way of life," with its often extravagant consumption of energy and other scarce resources, was in truth highly dependent on foreign nations and the resources they controlled. Also, new competitors in the **global economy** -- most prominently, the Germans and the Japanese, soon followed by the South Koreans -- challenged American technological and economic primacy. Combining inflation of prices with economic stagnation **("stagflation"),** the recession of the early 1970s worsened, combining economic downturn and persistent unemployment with inflation that eroded the purchasing power of the individual consumer. The confluence of these phenomena persuaded millions of Americans that the United States had lost its way.

- The eroding of public confidence in government that began with the assassinations of the 1960s and the Vietnam debacle accelerated due to (i)**Watergate** (and its coda, the Ford pardon of Nixon) and (ii) a series of congressional scandals [such as ABSCAM which was an FBI sting operation that uncovered politicians in the House and Senate taking bribes from a fraudulent Arabian company in return for political favors – 13 Congressmen were convicted.] At the same time, Americans grew increasingly litigious even as they damned lawyers as parasites and the courts as hopelessly inefficient and unjust. In the sphere of criminal justice, Americans demanded a greater emphasis on "**victims' rights**" and downplay or even brush aside "**criminals' rights**" -- even those protected by the **Bill of Rights**. Even the press -- briefly American heroes after the Watergate scandal -- became vulnerable to public criticism, for while Americans eagerly consumed their regular diet of startling revelations and exposure of scandal, they also complained about an overly intrusive, arrogant press.

II. The Reagan revolution: A New Direction at Home?

Ronald Reagan was the key political figure of the 1980s. The most successful President in American politics since Dwight Eisenhower, Reagan (a Republican) took for his model Franklin D. Roosevelt (a Democrat), who had been his political hero as a young man. But, while Reagan, a former movie and television actor, skillfully emulated FDR's mastery of the modern news media and his ability to communicate directly with ordinary citizens, he had a far different substantive agenda in mind.

At home, Reagan reversed half a century of American political assumptions. For the first time since before the **New Deal**, a President persuaded Americans that **activist government** was not the way to solve the nation's problems -- rather, as he declared in his 1981 inaugural address, government was the problem. Reagan set out to slash the size of the federal government, targeting some agencies (even Cabinet departments, such as Education and Energy) for abolition and others for radical reduction. Although he failed in these sweeping goals, he managed for eight years to appoint officials to run those departments who shared his hostility to their agencies' mandates and missions, and who managed to administer many of those agencies into ineffectiveness in achieving their statutory mandates.

Reagan's great goal was to slash taxes and cut governmental regulation of the economy in order to release the productive energies of the American people. He confidently maintained that cutting taxes would enable Americans to invest in new economic enterprises, causing the economy to grow dramatically and creating thousands of jobs or even more, thus re-employing many Americans who had lost their jobs due to the recession of the 1970s. He also insisted that excessive governmental regulation absorbed the same energies that should be diverted into investment in economic growth. "**Reaganomics**" never worked in practice as well as it sounded in theory -- neither its tax-cutting nor its deregulating goals came to fruition. *Why didn't it work as planned?...*

- **Taxation:** Most Americans who received the benefits of the tax cuts did not invest their new income; rather, they either used it for added consumption or to finance short-term economic transactions (such as leveraged buyouts, corporate takeovers, tender offers) that promised quick and lucrative short-term investments. Many corporations were forced to issue "junk bonds" to finance takeover attempts and tender offers, or to make themselves unattractive to takeover specialists; this added debt forced these corporations not to invest in new growth but to cut their expenses to the bone, to close plants and fire workers, and to emphasize only projects guaranteed to generate short-term returns.
- **Regulation**: The deregulating of such vital components of the American economy as the airlines and the savings & loan industry only resulted in a bitter economic struggle for survival. The airlines emerged from the 1980s sadly weakened, with several previously important carriers in bankruptcy or on the brink of insolvency and nationwide complaints mounting about safety and service. If any one industry can stand as the monument to Reaganomics, it was the **savings & loan industry**. The abolition of regulations limiting the power of thrifts to engage in business other than banking, of rules limiting the territory within which they could operate, and of enforcement mechanisms designed to rein the thrifts in combined to produce an orgy of failed investments, explosive paper growth followed by even more explosive economic collapses, and a huge, nightmarish **burden of debt** that the federal government was obliged to shoulder because of its commitment, dating from the New Deal, to provide deposit insurance to protect individual depositors from the **failure of S&Ls**.

The 1980s witnessed an economic boom that, on the surface, seemed to confirm the efficacy of Reaganomics. However, the go-go 1980s proved even more evanescent than the go-go 1960s, for the **1987 stock market crash** revealed to all what worried economic experts had been predicting for years: An economy whose growth was based on little more than the pyramiding of paper was destined to fail; the higher the pyramid reached only meant that the economy had a lot further to drop.

The other component of the Reagan Revolution at home was the President's vigorous insistence on **traditional values**. Appointing federal judges and executive-branch officials who shared his conservative agenda, Reagan and his allies hoped to reverse government domestic policy on all fronts -- withdrawing the federal government from providing social services, stripping the federal government of its authority or commitment to enforcing constitutional rights, eliminating legal services for the poor, and so forth. Although the actual achievement of these goals was fragmentary, Reagan managed to reverse the general public's thinking on most major domestic issues.

Emblematic of the **Reagan Revolution**'s emphasis on traditional values was the Administration's campaign to name to the federal bench right-wing judges who would reaffirm traditional values and roll back Supreme Court precedents (such as ***Miranda v. Arizona*** [1966], on the rights of criminal suspects and defendants; ***Griswold v. Connecticut*** [1963], recognizing a constitutional right of privacy in sexual matters even though the text of the Constitution did not provide specific authorization for it; ***Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*** [1978], the pivotal decision on affirmative action; and, above all, ***Roe v. Wade*** [1973], the decision that extended constitutional privacy to protect a woman's decision whether or not to have an abortion). At first, the Reagan judicial appointments sailed through the Senate (dominated by Republicans, for the first time in more than three decades, from January 1981 through January 1987) with at best token opposition from demoralized Democrats. In 1987, the retirement of Justice Lewis F. Powell, Jr., gave the Reagan Administration the chance to redirect the Supreme Court decisively. But Reagan's nomination of Judge **Robert H. Bork**, a former Yale law professor and a leading right-wing critic of activist liberal Court decisions, provoked a firestorm of opposition and criticism. The televised hearings on Bork's nomination, combined with a vigorous (and occasionally unfair) media campaign against Bork organized by liberal activists, doomed the nomination. In many ways, the Bork defeat spelled the end of Reagan's attempts to put traditional values at the core of the nation's public and private life.

III. The Reagan revolution: A New Direction Abroad?

Abandoning peaceful coexistence and detente, President Reagan engaged in a vigorous polemical struggle with the Soviet Union and other Communist nations. Reagan denounced the U.S.S.R. as the **"evil empire"** and at first reversed the course set by his Republican (Nixon, Ford) and Democratic (Carter) predecessors. Reagan and his advisors also favored focusing the nation's energies abroad on combating allies of the U.S.S.R. such as **Cuba,** new Communist or Marxist regimes such as the **Sandinista government of Nicaragua**, and rebel movements such as the FMLN in **El Salvador**. The domestic consequence of Reagan's foreign policy was a massive defense buildup, which seemingly helped to remedy the recession while diverting resources, money, and economic energy into d defense industries.

The great difficulty that Reagan and his Administration faced was congressional skepticism of and opposition to Administration foreign policy. Determined to conduct foreign and defense policy despite this resistance from a coordinate branch of government, Reagan and his aides sidestepped legal and even constitutional limitations, arguing for an expansive interpretation of executive authority in defense and foreign policy. The unraveling in late 1986 and 1987 of the **Iran-contra affair** derailed the Reagan Presidency, and Reagan and his allies managed to regain their balance only through exploring new initiatives offered by the reformist leader of the USSR, **Mikhail Gorbachev**. In sum, Reagan's foreign policy was a mélange of angry rhetoric, haphazard decision-making, and unfulfilled goals. His rapprochement with Gorbachev epitomized the condition of his foreign policy, for he embraced in 1987 the leader of the nation he so fiercely denounced five years before as "the evil empire."

IV. Drift, 1989-1993

George H. W. Bush captured the Presidency by persuading the American people that he would continue the **Reagan Revolution** and by depicting his Democratic adversary as unpatriotic, incompetent, and unfit to govern. At the same time, Bush portrayed himself as uniquely well qualified to assume the Presidency, regularly describing himself as the most experienced man ever to hold the office. The question was whether he could translate his experience and his allegiance to the Reagan Revolution into a successful Presidency. The difficulty was that President Bush inherited not only the apparent successes of the Reagan years -- the **collapse of the Warsaw Pact nations** (in 1989) and the **Soviet Union** (in 1991), **ending the Cold War** -- but the unresolved problems of that era as well.

It was in the Bush years that the failure of **Reaganomics** became apparent. Skyrocketing **deficits** were exacerbated by the blossoming of the **S&L crisis** and a shaky economy that never recovered from the **stock market crash of 1987**. Bush's attempts to solve the deficit problem by a one-time increase of taxes violated his single most famous campaign promise, damaged his credibility, and divided his own party. ["**Read my lips, no new taxes**" he pledged in his campaign… by raising taxes he lost much of his support.]

Further, the collapse of **European Communism** left the man who had trained all his adult life to be a Cold War President without any clear sense of what the post-Cold War world should be. President Bush showed great skill in organizing, and in rallying public support for, military ventures in **Panama** (1989) and **the Persian Gulf** [War] (1991); his popularity ratings soared after each of these operations, but he could not translate them into domestic-policy initiatives or successes.

The 1980s witnessed an all-but-official decision to ignore problems of race and poverty in America, or at best to commit these problems to the tender mercies of the free market. Devastating **riots** such as those in **New York City** (1991) and **Los Angeles** (19 92) suggested that the problems had not gone away, but had festered in obscurity until they exploded on the public scene. In sum, the Bush years were a period of drift like the Ford and Carter years. Americans therefore sought a President who promised to provide the certainty in defining issues and policies responding to them and the decisiveness in giving those policies effect that they associated with admired Presidents of the past -- Lincoln, FDR, Harry Truman, JFK, and (paradoxically) Reagan.

George Bush was not that President. His opponents in 1992, Arkansas Governor **Bill Clinton** (the Democratic nominee) and **H. Ross Perot**, a self-created independent candidate, skillfully pilloried Bush as ineffective, out of touch, and unresponsive to the serious problems the nation faced. The question the electorate faced was whether either Clinton or Perot could take up the challenge that Bush could not meet. The voters chose Clinton, in large part because they disdained Bush and distrusted Perot because he could not or would not step beyond his folksy anatomizations of the problems the nation faced to provide detailed accounts of his proposed solutions. By contrast, Clinton and his running mate, Tennessee Senator **Al Gore, Jr.,** ran the best Democratic presidential campaign in living memory. Clinton presented himself as a skilled politician with a firm grasp of the nation's problems and the ability to devise and enact solutions to those problems.

Throughout 1992, politicians and citizens alike called repeatedly for sweeping amendments to the Constitution -- to respond to the growing budget deficit by requiring a balanced budget, to curb the powers of incumbents by limiting congressional terms of office, to ban abortion, and to restore prayer to the public schools. Demands surfaced, for the first time in a generation, for a second constitutional convention. The election of Clinton stilled these demands -- but the respite might well be brief. As **President Clinton** took office, he seemed to represent a last chance for normal politics; should he fail in his efforts to provide solutions to the nation's problems, the demand for sweeping constitutional change might well resurface.