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THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: 1980-2011

The collapse of the Soviet Union put a sudden end to the Cold War, which had cost billions of dollars and millions of lives and had created insecurity and anxiety for more than fifty years. Yet the decades following the dissolution of the Soviet empire did not bring peace to the United States and the world. In fact, every American president since Ronald Reagan has used the military and economic resources of the United States to resolve foreign-affairs problems. Around the world, from Nicaragua to Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere, the United States has engaged new adversaries. The United States has itself been attacked. Even now, years after 9/11, the extent of the devastation is hard to comprehend.

Domestically, the past twenty-five years have been tumultuous as well, including an attempted assassination of one president and the impeachment of another; one popular war in the Mideast and an increasingly unpopular one in the same region a decade later. At home, many Americans have embraced evangelical religious fundamentalism as the essence of their personal and political lives, and they played an important role in the rise to the presidency of a born-again Christian. The cultural and political influence of Christian fundamentalism went hand in hand with the reemergence of conservatism as a political force. With the nation divided into so-called red and blue states, these forces are at the foundation of contemporary American social, political, economic, and cultural life for now and the foreseeable future.

KEY CONCEPTS

- With the election of Ronald Reagan, conservatism reemerged as a rejection of the liberal social and economic policies of previous administrations. Under Reagan, military spending ballooned, while spending for domestic programs was significantly slashed.
- The Cold War ended during the administration of George H. W. Bush. In the post-Cold War era, the United States often intervened militarily in the affairs of foreign nations.
- The United States experienced a period of sustained economic growth under President Clinton. During his term in office, the federal budget was balanced for the first time since the 1960s, but the Republicans gained control of Congress for the first time in forty years.
- China and Russia began to play an increasingly important economic and political role in world affairs.
- The post-Cold War era was fraught with domestic and international terrorism. Less than a year after the inauguration of President George W. Bush, the United States experienced the worst domestic attack in the nation's history.
- George W. Bush led the United States into the Iraq War to search for weapons of mass destruction and, with the hope of changing the dynamic in the Middle East, to liberate and democratize Iraq.
- President Bush's domestic and foreign policies polarized the nation, allowing the Democratic party to recapture both houses of Congress in 2006 and, with the election of Barack Obama, the White House in 2008.
- In late 2008, the United States and the world faced a dire financial crisis as the U.S. housing market and key banking and lending firms collapsed.

The United States since 1980 is discussed in depth in *The American Pageant*, 14th and 15th eds., Chapters 40–42.

THE PRESIDENCY OF RONALD REAGAN

When he entered the White House as the nation's fortieth president, Ronald Reagan was already a household name. A famous movie actor in the 1940s and 1950s, Reagan had entered politics in the early 1960s and won the California governorship as a conservative Republican in 1966. Less than two decades later, he routed the Democratic incumbent, Jimmy Carter, in the 1980 presidential election. As president, Reagan would steer the nation through the final stages of the Cold War and redefine the federal government's role in the economy. Ultimately he would become the inspiration and guiding light for political conservatives and the nemesis of liberals, who viewed his domestic policies as a threat to hard-won reforms dating back to the New Deal. Not surprisingly, foreign affairs and domestic policies under Reagan had both ardent supporters and vehement detractors, but most would agree that his two terms as president had amounted to a political revolution.

For his supporters, Reagan's conservatism fortuitously came just when many citizens—in both major political parties—were beginning to question the cultural, economic, and political transformations that had occurred in the post-World War II years. Two streams fed into the rise of conservatism:

- The religious right was made up of evangelical Christians disenchanted with what they considered damaging social and cultural trends, such as feminism, gay rights, affirmative action, and abortion rights, and they were deeply concerned about what they considered a too-powerful federal government.
- The New Right had coalesced in the 1964 presidential campaign as a challenge to the more liberal wing of the Republican Party and began to play an increasing role in the intellectual debate on the nation's direction. Some who joined the New Right were former liberals alarmed by the growing power and authority of the federal government; they are now called neoconservatives.

Conservative religious groups such as the Moral Majority, organized by the charismatic and combative Reverend Jerry Falwell, became politically active. In establishing grassroots political movements, they helped enlarge the nation's political arena and bring new topics to political debate. The New Right got support from corporate America, which embraced the New Right as allies in the struggle to develop a more probusiness environment in Washington. Claiming to represent traditional values and family relationships, conservatives swept into the White House, Ronald Reagan in the vanguard. Soon the religious right's priorities, peripheral to previous administrations, became cultural and political focal points. A central priority was abortion. In 1973, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that abortion is legal, a decision that outraged many Americans, including Ronald Reagan. Anti-abortion rights activists saw a true ally in President Reagan, and over time, the federal government and individual states enacted policies and prohibitions that modified *Roe*—for example, by limiting Medicaid funding for abortions. Abortion today continues to be a fiercely controversial topic.

REAGANOMICS

Using economic policy to shrink the federal government, President Reagan persuaded Congress to pass smaller federal budgets, with cuts mostly in social programs. Tax reform bills passed in 1981 and 1986 reduced government regulation, long an aspiration of conservatives. And Reagan cut taxes. At the heart of his domestic economic agenda was supply-side economics (so-called Reaganomics), which the president hoped would stimulate the moribund U.S. economy. Theoretically, a supply-side approach provides wealthy individuals and corporations even more money, through tax cuts, which then goes back into the economy in the form of new investments and new businesses. That results in greater consumerism and lower unemployment. Critics contended that the tax cuts reduced government revenues, which financed domestic programs such as welfare, federal aid to the arts, urban renewal and development, and education. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the wealthy

would in fact stimulate the economy; rather, they might keep the money and just become wealthier.

At the same time, Reagan pushed for the development of an enormously expensive missile defense system: the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), nicknamed Star Wars. Advocates claimed that SDI was essential for the future defense of the nation. Most scientists doubted that the system would work, and other critics claimed the expense was prohibitive given the economic needs of millions of Americans.

Also at the heart of Reagan's domestic agenda was the desire to increase the power and influence of the states at the expense of the federal government. This approach, referred to as New Federalism, would mean that the budgets of certain federal programs would be slashed and the money turned over to the individual states, to be used at their discretion. While New Federalism resonated with those Americans who considered the federal budget to be bloated, critics held that a steep price would be paid as the government deregulated businesses and cut funding for programs that, for example, protected the environment. The administration's response was that deregulation would lower prices, which would stimulate consumerism and expand employment opportunities. In this corporate-friendly environment, labor unions were marginalized.

Always comfortable in front of a camera, President Reagan's charisma and straightforward dialogue convinced many Americans that his hard-line views on the Cold War were correct, and he was able to splinter even diehard Democrats from their party. These "Reagan Democrats" helped him win handily in the 1984 presidential race—a campaign noteworthy, in part, because of the Democratic candidate Walter Mondale's running mate, Geraldine Ferraro, the first female in the nation's history to run for such a high office.

In his first campaign for the presidency, Reagan had promised to reduce the federal deficit, but as president he actually enlarged it. The huge federal budget included significant military spending, but the substantial tax cuts initiated by his administration meant reduced federal revenues and caused the federal debt to soar. However, the president was more successful in tackling other economic maladies, such as unemployment and inflation. Critics acknowledged that unemployment did indeed decrease, but they pointed out that more and more Americans were relegated to low-paying jobs in the service sector. Nevertheless, the economy of the nation was healthy enough to contribute to Reagan's bid for reelection.

AP Tip

Note some of the comparisons that can be drawn between different periods in U.S. history. For example, historians have drawn some parallels between the 1920s and the 1980s. Both decades were dominated by conservatives: in the 1920s, three Republican conservatives occupied the White House (Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover), and in the 1980s, two Republican conservatives (Reagan and Bush) served as president. The economic approach taken in the two decades is also similar: the Mellon Tax Plan (a series of tax reductions on the wealthy and corporations) in the 1920s and the Reagan administration's supply-side approach in the 1980s. Be careful not to overanalyze these comparisons; despite the parallels, each period is unique.

REAGAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

When it came to the Soviet Union (and communism in general), President Reagan had nothing but contempt for what he referred to as the “evil empire.” To end the Cold War on his terms, Reagan decided to negotiate with the Soviets from a position of military strength. He launched a massive military arms buildup, thereby challenging the Soviet leadership to keep pace while somehow simultaneously satisfying the consumer sector of their economy. The Strategic Defense Initiative was one facet of this strategy; economic sanctions, another. When the Soviets or their proxy governments in Eastern Europe acted in an antagonistic or undemocratic way—for example, when Poland was placed under martial law after Polish workers organized a labor movement known as Solidarity—Reagan imposed sanctions. By the mid-1980s, U.S.-Soviet relations had hit rock bottom.

It was not long, however, before events in the Soviet Union took a dramatic turn. In 1985, a reform-minded and engaging leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, took over as chairman of the Soviet Communist party. Just as Reagan was determined to transform the U.S. government and economy, Gorbachev was resolved to move the Soviet Union away from what he viewed as the economic waste of the Cold War and to end his nation's long history of domestic repression. Gorbachev set out two new policies:

- *Perestroika*, or restructuring, was the incorporation of capitalist features into the Soviet economy.
- *Glasnost*, or openness, referred to the introduction of democracy into Soviet life and politics.

These policies endeared many Americans to the new Soviet leader. If Reagan was hesitant to trust the new Soviet leader, Gorbachev reassured him by reducing the Soviet nuclear presence in Europe. In a series of summits, the two political leaders warmed to each other and reached an accord that went a long way to ending the Cold War.

As a diehard anticommunist, Reagan based his foreign policy on the containment policy, the approach taken by U.S. presidents toward communism since the end of World War II. (Some contend that given his record of interventions in various parts of the world, Reagan identified more with a policy of rolling back, rather than containing, communism.) Accordingly, Reagan applied economic and military pressure on leftist nations and leaders worldwide, but most especially in the Western Hemisphere. Intent on supporting governments that were anticommunist, even if they were authoritarian and repressive (such as those in the Philippines, El Salvador, and Mozambique), Reagan had no qualms about destabilizing or overthrowing leftist governments. In 1983, the president sent U.S. troops to the tiny Caribbean island nation of Grenada when a Cuban-backed coup toppled the government and installed a communist as president. The invasion was a successful display of U.S. authority in the Western Hemisphere. Less successful was Reagan's foray into the turmoil of the Middle East. U.S. marines were dispatched to Lebanon as part of an international peacekeeping force, an exercise that ended abruptly when a suicide bomber killed hundreds of U.S. servicemen, which precipitated a U.S. withdrawal from Lebanon.

The Reagan administration also made every effort to subvert the newly ensconced (1979) Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua by supporting an anti-Sandinista guerrilla force known as the contras. To provide weapons to the contras—expressly forbidden by Congress because of atrocities committed by the guerrillas—the administration attempted to address two concerns simultaneously: to win the release of American hostages in Lebanon with the help of Iran and to provide military aid to the contras. Despite strong American public and official outrage against the new government of Iran, especially given its refusal to immediately release U.S. embassy workers taken hostage after that nation's 1979 revolution, the Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to Iran; the proceeds of the sale were then sent to the contras. In what became known as the Iran-Contra affair, Congress launched a televised investigation into the administration's activities, and several White House officials were convicted on criminal charges.

Despite uncertainties about his involvement in the scandal, President Reagan's popularity with the American people remained high, in large measure because of his role in thawing U.S.-Soviet relations. His vice president, George H. W. Bush, would benefit from his association with the Reagan administration when he ran for the presidency in 1988.

THE PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE H. W. BUSH

President Bush defeated the Democratic candidate, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis, in a campaign noted for its intense and sometimes objectionable negative ads, such as the infamous Willie Horton television commercial. Bush had considerable foreign-affairs experience, which he put to good use in confronting a threat to the world's oil supplies when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded neighboring oil-rich Kuwait. Skillfully organizing a United Nations military coalition, Bush ordered an invasion of Kuwait. Operation Desert Storm successfully drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait in what is referred to as the Persian Gulf War. Questions remained, however, about the limitations of the U.N. mandate and U.S. hegemony in the region, for it left Saddam in power—a condition that would be resolved by the president's son, George W. Bush, the forty-third president.

As president, Bush witnessed the final collapse of the Soviet empire and an end to the enormously costly Cold War. A friendly relationship soon developed between Bush and the new Russian president, Boris Yeltsin. Unfortunately, the hard-line government in China had not warmed to the democratic ideas that had helped transform the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies; when a peaceful prodemocracy demonstration took place in China's Tiananmen Square in 1989, it was mercilessly crushed. Like Reagan, Bush did not hesitate to influence affairs in the Western Hemisphere. For instance, he ordered an invasion of Panama to topple Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, whom the U.S. government claimed was involved in the international drug trade.

Domestically, Bush was less successful. Campaigning for the presidency, he had promised not to raise taxes: "Read my lips—no new taxes," he had said. It was a promise he would regret making. A

skyrocketing deficit and a weak economy compelled him to increase taxes, a reversal the Democrats would not let the voting public forget when Bush ran for reelection in 1992. Unlike Ronald Reagan, Bush was not the “Great Communicator.” He had difficulty articulating his conservative domestic agenda, such as school prayer. The problems of his presidency were further aggravated by the collapse of the savings and loan industry. In part a result of the Reagan administration’s deregulation of savings and loan associations, bailing them out would cost American taxpayers \$250–\$350 billion. Then, as the president began his bid for reelection, the United States experienced a recession, which did not bode well for Bush.

THE PRESIDENCY OF BILL CLINTON

When Bill Clinton, governor of Arkansas, ran for the presidency on the Democratic ticket in 1992, his party had controlled the White House for only four of the past twenty-four years. Fortunately for Clinton, many voters had become disenchanted with President Bush’s inability to resolve key national problems, especially the faltering economy. Further, at a time when conservatism was gaining popularity—a boost to the Republicans because it was an ideological perspective associated with their party—Clinton offered a new outlook on what it meant to be a Democrat. That outlook was in some ways consistent with the Republicans’. Clinton believed that Democrats could no longer hope to attract voters unless the party supported policies that addressed crime, a strong national defense, and the establishment of a friendlier relationship with the business sector.

In the 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton’s appeal was not limited to traditional Democratic bastions such as the Northeast and the Far West. In fact, he performed well in nearly every region, including a number of southern states, defeating not only the incumbent, George H. W. Bush, but also a third-party candidate, Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot (who ultimately captured nearly 20 percent of the popular vote). Clinton was the first person born after World War II to become chief executive.

Clinton initiated his presidency with an effort to address a controversial issue: gays in the military. However, his goal of eliminating a ban on gays serving in the military was met with a firestorm of indignation, and he had to settle for a considerably modified approach, a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. The president then tackled a long-standing social problem, the nation’s inadequate health-care system. He appointed his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, director of a task force charged with designing a comprehensive health-care reform. The plan was offered to Congress, but it fared no better than the attempt to lift the ban on gays in the military. Clinton had apparently mistaken his presidential campaign victory as a mandate from the American people. He did, however, sign into law the Family and Medical Leave Act (1993), which requires employers to grant unpaid medical leaves in cases of family emergency.

CLINTON’S ECONOMIC POLICIES

Clinton had greater leverage in tackling other national problems, especially the massive federal deficit. His administration worked hard

at reducing the deficit. That effort and a booming economy produced a significant surplus in 1998, an impressive achievement. Clinton, with the help of a Republican-controlled Congress, balanced the federal budget for the first time in nearly thirty years.

Another major accomplishment was the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The president strongly supported NAFTA, insisting that it would improve the economies of the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Supporters of NAFTA point out that increasing imports has stimulated employment. Critics claim that U.S. businesses have relocated plants to Mexico, where labor is considerably cheaper. Another free-trade proposal supported by Clinton, creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), provoked large-scale demonstrations at a WTO meeting held in Seattle in 1999. Although globalization was long an objective of free-trade advocates, opponents raised serious questions about its negative impact: environmental degradation and poverty wages. The issue of trade with China, a nation Clinton had excoriated before he became president, was addressed near the end of his second term with passage of a trade bill that made China a vital trade partner.

OTHER DOMESTIC ISSUES

Gun control was another concern of the president. Gun control had powerful opponents, especially the National Rifle Association. But gun control made sense to many Americans who remembered the assassinations of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy in the 1960s and, more recently, the attempted assassination of President Reagan in 1981. Further, a nationwide rise in gun violence seemed nothing less than a pandemic. In 1994, Congress signed into law the Brady Bill (named for one of the victims in the assassination attempt on Reagan), which banned certain assault weapons.

Still, violence shook the nation, often in ways that Americans had never experienced. A 1993 standoff between federal agents and a religious sect known as the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, ended in the fiery destruction of the sect's compound and the death of many of its members, including children. In 1995, domestic terrorists destroyed a federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people—again, including children. And in 1999, a murderous attack carried out by two heavily armed students killed twelve other students and a teacher at Columbine High School in Colorado. Demand for stricter gun-control legislation crescendoed. Opponents argue that instead of enacting more gun-control laws, the government should enforce those laws already on the books, while protecting the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens. So far, the opponents have carried the day.

A long-festering cynicism about the federal government dating back to the 1960s had convinced many Americans that the conservatives' message of limited federal government made sense. Led by the confrontational House minority whip, Newt Gingrich, the Republicans overwhelmed the Democrats in the 1994 midterm elections and took control of Congress. Under pressure from this new potent political force (whose agenda was encapsulated in the Contract with America), Clinton was compelled to sign into law a decidedly

conservative Welfare Reform Bill, which critics claimed would eviscerate federal aid to those in need. Believing that they now had a mandate to eliminate long-standing federally funded social programs, the Republicans alienated some Americans by failing to compromise with the president over the federal budget, a standoff that shut down the federal government for a short time. Although politically wounded by his political foes in both parties—some Democrats believed he had neutralized the Republicans only by moving to the right—Clinton recovered from these political battles in time to win reelection against the Republican candidate, Bob Dole, the Senate majority leader, in 1996.

For liberals who had welcomed a Clinton presidency, Clinton's political rhetoric seemed just that and nothing more. But his generally middle-of-the-road approach and the buoyant economy resonated with the American people and provided him some political clout. He did little to stem the Republican tide against affirmative-action programs, however, much to the dismay of liberals.

CLINTON'S FOREIGN POLICY

President Clinton's initial forays into foreign affairs often reflected his inexperience. At times it seemed that his administration went from one crisis to another without any real focus. Unlike his post-World War II predecessors, Clinton could not build on Cold War thinking and policies, for the Cold War was over.

Upon his inauguration, Clinton inherited a problem that seemed to have been resolved by the previous Bush administration—namely, a humanitarian mission in Somalia. A devastating civil war between rival warlords had devastated that African nation, and the people of Somalia faced dire conditions, most ominously starvation. Although many U.S. troops were removed from Somalia after aid had been given, Clinton unilaterally decided to keep thousands of troops there to engage the warlords. When a detachment of U.S. Army Rangers was killed in October 1993, pressure mounted to remove the troops, which Clinton did. In Haiti, after international economic pressure failed, the president again used combat troops to restore the elected Haitian president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been deposed by a military coup. In the Balkans, Clinton deployed U.S. troops as part of a combined NATO military force. The Serbian-controlled Yugoslavian government had begun ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Croatia shortly after the fragmenting of Yugoslavia in 1991—some estimated that as many as 175,000 Croats and Muslims had been killed by 1992. Three years later, after intensive NATO bombing of Serb positions, the belligerents met at the negotiating table and ultimately ended hostilities, though U.S. troops remain as part of the NATO peacekeeping force.

Like his predecessor, President Bush, President Clinton paid attention to the intrigues of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Under Clinton, U.S. forces mobilized periodically—for instance, in response to Saddam's threatening remarks regarding Kuwait or to neutralize Iraqi troop movements in northern Iraq. But when Saddam refused to cooperate with U.N. weapons inspectors searching for suspected Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, the U.S., along with Great Britain,

launched a massive air attack on Iraq. It did significant damage; still, the dictator remained firmly in power.

IMPEACHMENT

Clinton's hold on power was tenuous at best in 1999 when the U.S. House of Representatives impeached him. A lengthy investigation by Kenneth Starr, a special prosecutor, revealed that the president had perjured himself while testifying about an affair with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. The president's defenders were quick to point out that the investigation by a partisan special prosecutor and impeachment by a Republican-controlled House was tantamount to a kangaroo court. But the president survived the impeachment trial in the Senate. Although Clinton's reputation was tarnished, his popularity with the American people remained high. Ironically, the Republicans experienced fallout from the investigation and trial; many Americans viewed the impeachment proceedings as nothing more than partisan politics, especially when it was revealed that several Republican leaders had themselves committed acts of marital indiscretion.

As President Clinton's term in office expired, foreign-affairs problems lingered. Tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians was high, despite Clinton's best efforts to broker a settlement to end their long-standing dispute. The unpredictable actions and rhetoric of North Korea's regime were also worrisome. In the end, assessment of Clinton's presidency is caught between charges that he despoiled the office of president and conducted an amateurish foreign policy and credit for his New Democrat policies that invigorated the economy and balanced the federal budget.

THE PRESIDENCY OF GEORGE W. BUSH

Texas's governor, George W. Bush, claimed to represent a new approach to right-wing ideology. He called himself a compassionate conservative, by which he meant that he would, for example, transform welfare programs so that recipients would have opportunities to work for the government assistance they received; in the process, they would gain both new skills and a new outlook on the value of hard work, thrift, and self-sacrifice. Liberals saw compassionate conservatism as a contradiction in terms. But Bush believed that when it was applied to the formulation of both domestic and foreign policy, compassionate conservatism offered Americans and people in nations around the world a materially and spiritually richer life.

THE CONTESTED ELECTION

In 2000 President Bush came to the White House after one of the most controversial elections in U.S. history. Bush received fewer popular votes than his opponent, Al Gore, and Florida's contested election would determine who received enough electoral votes. The design of the Florida ballot confused many voters, and voting machines did not work well. Eventually, after political wrangling at the state level, the Bush campaign took its case to the U.S. Supreme Court. In a highly

partisan decision, the five conservative justices ruled for the Republican candidate, despite harsh criticisms by the other justices that the Court's decision would damage the judicial branch's reputation as a neutral political arbiter.

While in his forties, Bush had become a born-again Christian, and as president, he relied on his religious faith to guide his conservative agenda. Having pledged to work with the political opposition and to represent all Americans, the president was soon seen as a divisive force whose Christian fundamentalism and so-called compassionate conservatism alienated many. He took strong stands on moral and ethical issues such as stem-cell research, federal funding for faith-based charitable organizations, and abortion rights. His support of big business, critics claimed, often hurt workers, and it came at the expense of the environment and concerns about global warming. The intellectual inspiration behind many of Bush's domestic and foreign policies was Karl Rove. Noted for his political acumen and hardnosed approach to politics, Rove was not beyond using Machiavellian methods to achieve his conservative objectives.

Yet the president's popularity rating was high during his first term, especially in the so-called red states—those that tend to vote Republican. A massive tax cut had been enacted in 2001 to stimulate consumerism, investments, and economic expansion—whether it did so remains in doubt—and even though deficits reappeared and the economy was weak, Americans felt optimistic.

BUSH AND TERRORISM

The defining event of Bush's first term was the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States by members of Al Qaeda, a Muslim terrorist group headed by Osama bin Laden. Hijacking four passenger planes and using them as guided missiles, the attackers destroyed the two World Trade Center towers in New York City and significantly damaged the Pentagon in Washington. The fourth plane crashed in Pennsylvania, brought down by passengers who overwhelmed the terrorists. Nearly three thousand people died in the attacks, and both the nation and the world were stunned by the magnitude of the destruction.

Later Bush would be criticized for having ignored explicit warnings that the nation's enemies were planning an attack on American soil, but at the time his popularity ratings soared as Americans rallied to the side of their government and president. Not long after, President Bush ordered an attack on Afghanistan. Controlled by the Taliban, reactionary Islamic fundamentalists, Afghanistan had provided bin Laden and Al Qaeda refuge before and after the attacks. Making no distinction between terrorists and those who harbored them, Bush authorized Operation Enduring Freedom; U.S. forces, along with Afghans opposed to the Taliban, defeated the Taliban in short order and rolled back the policies of its oppressive regime. Although Osama bin Laden's influence and that of Al Qaeda were significantly neutralized, he and his key aides managed to escape into the mountainous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

IRAQ

Seeing the war on terrorism as a global concern, in 2002 the Bush administration shifted its attention to a long-time nemesis, Iraq's Saddam Hussein. Relations between the United States and Iraq had been tense following the first Gulf War, when Iraqi troops were forced out of Kuwait but Hussein had been left in place. Hussein's violence against his own citizens and concern that he was developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) spurred the Clinton administration to adopt a policy favoring regime change in Iraq. George W. Bush was determined to end Hussein's regime, which his father could not do given the objectives of the U.N. mandate in the First Gulf War.

Claiming that democracy could help developing countries achieve stability and prosperity, the president laid out a new foreign relations policy known as the Bush Doctrine: the United States would engage in international nation building in order to promote the spread of democracy, and it would attack its enemies before they had an opportunity to attack the United States and American interests. Unlike his father, who had assembled a broad international coalition for the first Gulf War, the younger President Bush soon realized that even NATO member nations opposed a military solution and instead favored a resumption of United Nations weapons inspections. U.N. Resolution 1441, passed in November 2002, authorized that. It was accepted by Hussein, and weapons inspectors returned to Iraq in early 2003.

No evidence was found that Iraq had resumed development of WMD, but the Bush administration, playing on the public's doubts and anxieties, campaigned to convince Americans and the world that a military solution was necessary and ultimately inevitable; further, the administration maintained that Iraq had intimate ties with Al Qaeda. Unable to win United Nations approval for a military operation in Iraq, the United States and Britain, its one major ally, gave Hussein and his notorious sons an ultimatum: leave Iraq or be invaded. Despite unprecedented worldwide protests, the United States and its allies attacked Iraq in March 2003. The military phase of the war went well for the U.S. and coalition forces. The capitulation of Iraqi armed forces ended the major combat operations, as Bush claimed "Mission Accomplished."

But in a real sense, the conflict was just beginning. Over the next few years, as American and coalition casualties mounted and Iraq was on the brink of civil war, critics increasingly challenged not only the reasons for going to war but also its planning and execution. There were many questions about the administration's integrity and competence:

- To justify deposing Hussein, the administration had claimed that Iraq had purchased yellowcake uranium from Niger in order to develop its nuclear capabilities. U.S. intelligence documents later proved false.
- The so-called Downing Street memo made reference to a 2002 meeting of between British and American officials to discuss ways to alter intelligence reports in order to legitimize military intervention.

- With the support of both parties, Congress passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution in 2002. Critics claim that in the absence of U.N. authorization, the invasion of Iraq was illegal.
- While the Iraqi army was easily routed, the occupation seemed to be a planning afterthought, and the coalition was unprepared when Iraq was overwhelmed by an insurgency and approached civil war.
- Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld underestimated the troops and equipment that would be needed for the occupation of Iraq.

Convinced that traditional sources and means of gathering intelligence were woefully inadequate, the administration controversially embraced so-called asymmetrical warfare, the use of controversial techniques and tactics to gain information and destroy the nation's enemies, such as assassination and torture of suspected terrorists. This was a major departure from past governmental practices. However, even supporters of the administration's new policies could not justify a series of scandals that disturbed many Americans and tarnished the reputation of the United States worldwide. Photographs from Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad of Iraqi prisoners being terrorized, humiliated, and abused traveled around the world and brought shame to the United States. Al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo, Cuba, were also harshly treated, and their legal status became a source of controversy. The Bush administration, claiming the prisoners were illegal combatants and therefore not entitled to legal rights under the Geneva Conventions, put them in legal limbo, incarcerated but not charged with criminal or terrorist behavior.

The very premise for the invasion of Iraq was destroyed when no weapons of mass destruction were found. The administration argued that establishing a new Iraqi state without Saddam was in the best interest of Iraq, the Middle East, and the world, but as American casualties inexorably rose, calls for ending the war increased.

GLOBALIZATION

If the events in Afghanistan and Iraq are mostly U.S. concerns, the integration of the world's economies and societies, commonly referred to as "globalization," affects people and states worldwide. According to one observer, globalization has "flattened" the world—meaning that all nations have a shot at economic competitiveness in the global marketplace. Using various international organizations including the World Bank and the International Money Fund (IMF), as well as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), advocates of globalization have sought to reduce obstacles to international trade such as protective tariffs. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), among the United States, Mexico, and Canada, is another example of a free-trade initiative. Globalization has undoubtedly helped many developing economies such as India and China, but critics argue that it has exacerbated already acute environmental conditions, widened the gap between wealthy and poor nations, and stimulated a clash of cultures. While there is a noticeable increase in

the flow of commodities worldwide, the demand for inexpensive products has caused a proliferation of sweatshops.

One consequence of expanded industrialization is the impact it has had on the environment. Global warming has certainly caught the attention of world leaders and grassroots organizations. Claiming that Earth's temperature is increasing primarily because of human activities, politicians and environmentalists have sought international cooperation in combating this global concern. However, believing that international agreements unfairly punish American industries, Bush refused to sign the Kyoto Protocol, established in 1997 to reduce global warming. The United States is the only developed nation that has not ratified the agreement.

HOMELAND SECURITY

The events of 9/11 took the U.S. military to Afghanistan and Iraq. They also affected civilians at home. In October 2001, soon after the attacks, Congress passed the USA Patriot Act (an acronym for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) by a nearly unanimous vote. The act is designed to enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate, apprehend, and deport suspected terrorists. Almost immediately, however, the Bush administration was assailed for giving to law enforcement expanded surveillance powers and access to citizens' medical records and communication such as letters and e-mails. Subsequent additions to the Patriot Act have permitted "roving wiretaps" and access to personal voicemails. Critics increasingly charge that some measures in the Act come at the expense of personal freedoms and civil rights that are the essence of what it means to be an American.

KATRINA

As if 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were not enough, a natural disaster of immense proportions befell New Orleans. Sitting at the bottom of a crescent-shaped bowl, well below sea level, New Orleans is susceptible to the effects of hurricanes, which are common in the nearby Gulf of Mexico. Over the years, the city, together with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has invested large sums of money to construct levees to protect New Orleans in the event of exceedingly high tides. On August 29, 2005, the enormously powerful category-3 hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans, and before long, giant ocean swells overwhelmed the levees, deluging most of the city. The tragic effects of the hurricane on the city and its inhabitants were compounded by the incompetence of the federal government. Charged with dealing with disaster relief, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was headed by Michael Brown, a political appointee with no experience in disaster management. FEMA's inability to help those in need shocked not only Americans but people around the world, who observed that many of the city's poor and black residents were left to fend for themselves. Nearly 2,000 Americans died in the hurricane and in the days after it made landfall, and more than six years later, many remained homeless.

BUSH'S LEGISLATION

George W. Bush was successful in putting many of his plans into effect. But he also suffered setbacks. At the beginning of his presidency, both parties knew that mounting medical insurance and prescription drug costs were of concern to the American public. The Democrats wanted to find a way to cover the approximately 45 million Americans who had little or no medical health care insurance. Republicans wanted to shrink the government's role in providing not just health care, but all social services, and privatizing some of these functions was always the mantra of the Bush administration. To compensate for cuts in government social programs, the administration controversially channeled federal funds to faith-based organizations that provided services. Republicans were leery of big government-run health care programs such as Medicare, which they charged were inefficient and provided substandard health care. A better solution, they contended, was to allow individuals to manage their own health care with special savings accounts, which could be used to fund and customize their health care insurance needs. Today health care remains a problem that eludes resolution.

In an effort to address legitimate concerns about the viability of Social Security and shrink the federal government, President Bush sought to partially privatize the enormously expensive program, which was established during the New Deal. His plan called for allowing individuals to direct a portion of their Social Security contributions to their own private accounts invested in stocks and bonds. Some 90 percent of Americans over the age of 65 rely on Social Security payments—for many it is their only retirement income—so it came as no surprise that a concerted attempt to change the program unnerved many Americans; Bush was stymied. With the collapse of so many financial institutions in the fall of 2008, it is hard to imagine this idea gaining much support in the near future.

Another hot-button issue, one as old as the nation itself, is immigration. Ironically, although Americans take pride in being a land of immigrants, we have built up a lot of legislation limiting or blocking immigration from certain regions and nations. Contemporary concerns, however, relate to illegal immigrants, many from Latin America and Mexico, who fill many low-paying jobs in the United States. Just how many there are is unknown, but the number is certainly in the millions. Critics claim that illegal immigrants both drive down wages and strain communities' social services, while those who favor a lenient policy argue that illegal immigrants are already an integral part of the nation's economy, filling jobs U.S. citizens refuse, and that deportation would be costly for the country and punitive toward hard-working people. Bush favored a lenient policy toward immigrants and had the support of many Democrats, but Republicans in Congress balked and would not back his legislation.

Bush was encountering substantial criticism in 2004, but he was able to win reelection in a close contest with Senator John Kerry. But the war in Iraq, national security controversies, and the impotent federal response to Katrina were growing sources of controversy in 2006, and Americans had come to think that the country was on the wrong track. The impact on the 2006 congressional elections was profound; the Democrats won back both houses of Congress. At the

same time, the nation was gearing up for the 2008 election. For the first time in many years, neither the president nor the vice president would be running, making the contest truly “open.”

THE 2008 ELECTION

Many candidates vied for the nomination in both parties. The Democratic field was quickly reduced to senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, who struggled for the nomination to the bitter end of the primaries, when Obama eked out a narrow victory. In a campaign characterized by nearly flawless organization, a sophisticated use of the Internet, funding raised from a vast number of citizens giving small amounts of money, and avoidance of negative campaigning, Obama presented himself as the candidate of change.

Senator John McCain won the Republican nomination. A prisoner of war in Vietnam for more than five years, McCain was admired for his service to the country and liked for his wit. However, he was burdened by being in the same party as George W. Bush and by Americans’ anxiety that the country had been seriously damaged in the past eight years. He chose as his running mate Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska, who proved to be a divisive figure.

The vitality and resilience of the economy became a key issue for voters. Enormous sums of money had been diverted to rebuilding Iraq’s infrastructure, while Bush’s huge tax cuts had reduced the government’s revenue. Dramatic increases in oil prices exacerbated the nation’s economic woes and destabilized the already shaky automobile industry, and robust economic competition from emerged economic giants such as China and India was unsettling. Suddenly, Wall Street investment banks were in deep trouble; greed, financial instruments that were both poorly understood and risky, a lack of transparency, and in some cases fraud brought a number of firms to their knees. The collapse of the subprime mortgage industry precipitated failures throughout the financial sector and led to a credit crunch.

The economic collapse was the most important factor in Barack Obama’s victory, with 53 percent of the vote to John McCain’s 46 percent. (The electoral vote was 365–173.) In Congress, the Democrats, who had taken back both houses in the 2006 midterm elections, strengthened their majorities. In the House of Representatives, Democrats picked up twenty-one seats, giving them 257 of the 435 seats; in the Senate, the Democrats gained eight seats, giving them, including the two Independents who caucus with them, 59 out of 100 seats.

THE GREAT RECESSION

President Obama’s first priority when he came into office was to confront the economic crisis in which the nation was mired. Unemployment rates were escalating, large and small businesses were failing, and people continued to lose their homes. President Obama, under pressure to respond similarly to FDR in the 1930s, pushed his “stimulus package,” the American Relief and Recovery Act, through Congress. The Act included improvements to national infrastructure, loans and tax breaks to small businesses, new spending for jobs, and

government assistance for big banks and major American automakers. As the 2012 presidential campaign began, the U.S. still had significant economic woes, complicated by those in Europe and Standard & Poor's downgrading of the U.S. credit rating.

HEALTH CARE

One of the issues on which President Obama campaigned was improving health care and providing access to health care for all Americans. Despite resistance from Congress that led to significant revisions, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act passed in March 2010, marking the first time since 1965 that the government successfully instituted healthcare reform. The Act mandated all Americans to purchase health insurance, required states to establish "exchanges" to facilitate insurance purchases at competitive rates, prohibited insurers from denying coverage to anyone with a preexisting medical condition, and allowed children up to the age of twenty-six to remain covered by their parent's health plans. There was a great deal of opposition to the Act, largely from "small government" advocates who believed the national government was overstepping its boundaries and those who believed the plan placed an undue burden on the government's limited resources. Fourteen states sued to block the Act, challenging its constitutionality in federal court with mixed results.

THE U.S. AS THE 2012 ELECTION APPROACHES

The United States faces many questions as the 2012 presidential campaign begins. While the Obama administration successfully removed most American troops from Iraq, with the exception of a small peacekeeping force, American troops remain in Afghanistan, where the conflict shows no sign of resolution. Arizona was the first state to pass harsh laws attempting to prevent illegal immigration and provide for the deportation of undocumented immigrants already in the country. The federal government challenged these laws, which have been and are being reviewed by the courts; portions of the legislation have been declared unconstitutional. The emergence of the Tea Party in response to Barack Obama's election changed the political landscape as Tea Party members insisted on a renewed emphasis on states' rights and strict adherence to the Constitution. The continued economic crisis combined with effective campaigns by some "Tea Party-ers" contributed to the Republican party's regaining their majority in the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm elections. The uprisings in the Middle East, called the "Arab Spring," will also have a profound, yet still unknown, impact on American foreign policy in that volatile region.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Which of the following presidents reflected a comprehensive conservative approach to government in the post-World War II era?
 - (A) Harry S Truman
 - (B) John F. Kennedy
 - (C) Ronald Reagan
 - (D) Lyndon Johnson
 - (E) Bill Clinton
2. In *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court ruled that
 - (A) the government cannot provide economic or military aid to groups that were in open rebellion against their government
 - (B) abortion is legal
 - (C) the president and Congress are required to balance the federal budget
 - (D) Florida's electoral votes were won by George W. Bush in the 2000 election
 - (E) the federal government was responsible for bailing out the savings and loan industry
3. The Iran-Contra affair is associated with the presidency of
 - (A) Ronald Reagan
 - (B) George W. Bush
 - (C) Bill Clinton
 - (D) Richard Nixon
 - (E) George H. W. Bush
4. The Tea Party supports
 - (A) Obama's stimulus plan
 - (B) returning to Revolutionary-era values
 - (C) increased presidential powers
 - (D) strict interpretation of the Constitution
 - (E) the same ideas as the Republican Party
5. Which of the following did NOT occur during the presidency of Bill Clinton?
 - (A) Family and Medical Leave Act
 - (B) North American Free Trade Agreement
 - (C) The passage of the Brady Bill
 - (D) The federal attack on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas
 - (E) The U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan
6. Jerry Falwell is associated with
 - (A) pro-abortion rights
 - (B) the Oklahoma City bombing
 - (C) opposition to the Family and Medical Leave Act
 - (D) the Christian fundamentalist movement
 - (E) Congress's decision to impeach President Clinton

7. Geraldine Ferraro
 - (A) is the first female to run for the vice presidency for a major political party
 - (B) is associated with the Reagan Democrats
 - (C) was responsible for planning the bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995
 - (D) was President Reagan's secretary of state
 - (E) was a White House intern implicated in an affair that ultimately led to Bill Clinton's impeachment
8. The controversy over the 2000 presidential election revolved around contested ballots in which state?
 - (A) Georgia
 - (B) Michigan
 - (C) Ohio
 - (D) Florida
 - (E) New York
9. President George W. Bush ordered a U.S. invasion of Afghanistan to
 - (A) secure that nation's oil fields during a civil war
 - (B) topple the Taliban government, which had aided and abetted Al Qaeda terrorists
 - (C) restore to power a U.S.-backed government that had been overthrown by the Taliban
 - (D) draw public attention away from the Iran-Contra scandal
 - (E) topple the regime of Saddam Hussein
10. Operation Desert Storm refers to
 - (A) the U.S.-backed military operations in Kuwait
 - (B) the U.S. overthrow of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega
 - (C) the U.S. military operation in Somalia
 - (D) the overthrow of Saddam Hussein
 - (E) the U.S. effort to capture Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden
11. Many conservatives oppose the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act because they
 - (A) believe the national government is taking too much power
 - (B) don't see any problems in the current healthcare system
 - (C) support building up entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid
 - (D) believe health insurance companies will correct any inequities in the current system
 - (E) proposed a less expensive plan that President Obama vetoed
12. The economic recession that began in the United States in 2007 was caused in large part by
 - (A) increased social spending by the Bush Administration
 - (B) a failure to initiate tax cuts
 - (C) enormous taxes placed on corporations and the wealthy by the Bush administration
 - (D) the collapse of the housing market and banks that provide home mortgages
 - (E) the considerable amount of money the U.S. government has spent on keeping out illegal immigrants

13. Those responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995
- (A) carried out the attack in response to the federal government's assault on the Branch Davidian religious sect in 1993
 - (B) were members of the Taliban
 - (C) were members of Al Qaeda
 - (D) were members of a racist organization who blamed the federal government for passing civil rights legislation
 - (E) carried out the attack in preparation for a larger attack on the White House and the Pentagon
14. The attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, were perpetrated by
- (A) the Taliban
 - (B) Saddam Hussein
 - (C) Iranian religious fundamentalists
 - (D) the nations referred to by President Bush as the "Axis of Evil"
 - (E) Al Qaeda
15. The 2008 presidential election was unique in the nation's history because
- (A) for the first time since 1980 a presidential incumbent failed to be reelected
 - (B) a woman was selected as a presidential candidate
 - (C) a third-party candidate received more electoral votes than one of the major-party candidates
 - (D) an African American was the presidential candidate of a major party
 - (E) the candidate of the Democratic party swept the Deep South

FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the conservatives between 1980 and 2008. In your response develop TWO of the following:
 - a. the presidency of Ronald Reagan
 - b. the Contract with America
 - c. the presidency of George H. W. Bush
 - d. the presidency of George W. Bush
2. To what extent was President George W. Bush's handling of foreign and domestic affairs successful?

Answers

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. (C) Ronald Reagan is considered one of the most conservative presidents in the past sixty years (*The American Pageant*, 14th ed., pp. 1031–1032/15th ed., pp. 944–945).
2. (B) The Supreme Court's decision in 1973 made abortion legal in the United States (*The American Pageant*, 14th ed., p. 1008/15th ed., p. 932).