

Unit 9 *The Reagan Era 1980-1993 & Modern Times to 2008*



Brief Summary

This summary is not meant to replace your reading and study time in your AMSCO guide, and it by no means covers every significant fact from the era... but it will provide a simple overview/review of the era with some of the major terms in bold as a reminder of those items most likely to show up on the exam. Consider it an introduction to the era or a simple review. As you **READ**, **highlight** any event/item that you do not recall or understand.

1980-1988

The 1980's started with the presidential election of **Ronald Reagan** and ended with victory in Cold War... making Americans once again feel good about themselves and their place in the world as the **Berlin Wall** was torn down in 1989 and then soon after the **Soviet Union** broke up in 1991. The **Cold War** was finally over. The attention then shifted more to the **Middle East** where tensions continued to rise over America's support for Israel and intervention in the affairs of oil rich nations.

The **Religious Right** organized against all of the social protest movements of the 1960's and 1970's. They espoused the views of **small government**, **low taxes**, and **hands off businesses** (less regulation). These so called **neo conservatives** of the religious right got behind former actor **Ronald Reagan** for President. The Reagan years ushered in an era reminiscent of the 1920's with government working with business to make profits and increase employment.

Reagan's plan for the stagnant economy was **supply side economics**, or **Reaganomics**. The plan was to cut taxes on businesses and individuals including the wealthy. The idea was that the money would trickle down to the middle and lower class. The plan didn't seem to work, as the money didn't seem to trickle down to the bottom...the number of homeless people skyrocketed in the 80s. (Deinstitutionalizing mentally ill in the 1970s also contributed to increased homelessness). The 1980's, as in the 1920's, was a period when the **gap between rich and poor widened**. On a more positive note, 20 Million new jobs were created and unemployment fell to 5.5%, inflation dropped from 13.5% in 1980 to 4.1% by 1988, Net worth of families earning \$20,000 to \$50,000 grew 27%, and real GNP rose 26%.

Society was changing in the 1980's. **Cable Television** ushered in a time when the T.V. had programming twenty four hours a day. Channels dedicated to news (**CNN**), sports (**ESPN**), and music (**MTV**). As in the 1950's new music burst on the scene. **Rap music** began as African American music, just as Rock n Roll did, until it achieved mainstream acceptance in the following decade.

A new disease would put the breaks on the sexual revolution. The birth control pill, introduced in the 1960's, and the legalization of abortion in **Roe v Wade**, created a sexual freedom among young people. The discovery of **AIDS** in the 1980's halted that freedom. At first it was only infecting homosexuals, which the religious right saw as justice to sinners. By the end of the decade it was affecting all groups of society, however.

President Reagan called the **Soviet Union** "**The Evil Empire**". He quickly built up our **nuclear weapons**. The Soviets followed suit and a dangerous new **arms race** surged forward. Reagan increased defense spending, sending the country into deep debt. His most ambitious plan was **Strategic Defense Initiative (S.D.I.) or Star Wars**. It would put a missile defense shield into space at the cost of 1 trillion dollars; it did spend billions but was not successful. In 1984 the new Soviet leader, **Mikhail Gorbachev**, signaled a willingness to make changes in Soviet society. His two plans, **glasnost** and **perestroika** radically altered the U.S.S.R. These changes, coupled with the disastrous war in **Afghanistan** and the costly **arms race** would eventually lead the collapse of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev and Reagan got along very well and signed the **Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty (I.N.F.)**, which called for the destruction of some nuclear weapons. Reagan's military buildup and his shrewd partnership with **Pope John Paul II** and **Mikhail Gorbachev** led to the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

Reagan intervened in the civil wars in **Latin America**, always opposing the communist side (**containment policy**). Congress passed a law making it illegal to support the **Contra Rebels** in Nicaragua. Reagan's employees in the National Security Advisors office violated this law. It was known as the **Iran Contra affair**. What came out at the hearings that the president apparently fell asleep at meetings (or delegated/trusted too much) and didn't directly give orders for this law breaking. Did he know? Well, he wasn't an idiot so I'd say yes but we may never know for sure... However, none of these things mattered as the Teflon President's reputation is untarnished and he is considered one of the top 10 presidents of all time.

1988-2000

At the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's things looked promising for the United States. The **Soviet Union collapsed** and we stood alone as the world **superpower**. We fought a short, decisive war that reinforced our superior feeling. Unfortunately, things weren't as rosy as we would have liked. **Terrorism**, foreign and homegrown, began creeping into our orderly society. Politics took a turn for the worse now that we didn't have the Soviet menace to unite us. George H. W. Bush was Reagan's vice president, and he was elected to the presidency in 1988.

In 1989 **Chinese** students began protesting for democracy and freedom in **Tiananmen Square**. The T.V. news covered the historic event live. The Chinese authorities had finally had enough, and violently crushed the student uprising killing hundreds (although they deny it). This was disheartening for many Americans who cheered the students and hoped for a global collapse of communism.

In 1990 the worlds attention turned toward a small country called **Kuwait**. Iraq fought a ten year war with its neighbor, Iran; the United States had helped both sides leaving the counties with a large debts. **Iraq** ceased Kuwait for its valuable oil fields. The United Nations, led by the United Sates, demanded that Iraq leave. Iraq's leader, **Saddam Hussein**, refused to leave. In January 1991 **Operation Desert Storm** or the **Gulf War** began. The aerial bombing lasted a month. The ground war lasted just days. The U.S. lost 140 soldiers, the Iraqis lost over 100,000. Kuwait was reclaimed, but Saddam was left in power in his country. This war raised the question of what American Foreign Policy was in the post Cold War world. Should we be the world's policeman or should we look inward?

Bill Clinton became the first baby boomer president. Elected in 1992, he was very charismatic, but the Republicans controlled Congress and they sought to stop his legislative agenda. They assigned a special prosecutor to look into his financial affairs to determine if he had done anything illegal. The probe quickly expanded to include his personal life. At first he steadfastly denied having an affair with a White House intern. Later, he tearfully admitted that he did. The Republicans brought him up on **impeachment** charges of lying under oath. He became the second president to be acquitted by the Senate. Do you remember the first?

A new technology, the **internet**, connected people up via their computers. The web made information more accessible, but also gossip, misinformation, and illegal activities easier. Major technology boom!

The 1990's also gave rise to homegrown terrorism. The 1995 **Oklahoma City Bombing**, at the **Alfred P. Murrah building**, took the lives of 168 people. The 1996 Olympics in Atlanta were bombed. Both of these events were perpetrated by Americans against Americans. Even schools weren't safe. In 1999, twelve students and a teacher were killed in a **Columbine**, Colorado high school by fellow students. Even more chilling were the copycat killers, who tried to achieve a higher body count than Columbine. Outside terrorism sporadically occurred in the in the 1990's that foreshadowed the more deadly attacks in the next decade. In 1993 the **World Trade Center** in New York City was bombed, killing six, but it remained standing. The **U.S.S. Cole**, a navy destroyer, was bombed while refueling in Yemen. U.S. Embassies in Africa were bombed. Later, these attacks would be linked to the terrorist group **Al-Qaeda**.

Although the **Cold War** was over, trouble continued as **former Soviet Union nations** struggled to reform and faced extraordinary levels of crime and corruption. Former eastern block countries broke into smaller countries (such as **Yugoslavia** breaking into several parts) as genocide and ethnic cleansing spread. Clinton sent troops to **Bosnia** in 1995 and to **Kosovo** in 1999 to help maintain balance in the "powder keg" of Europe. **Nuclear proliferation** continued in the 1990s as well. India and Pakistan tested their first nukes in the 90s. So by the time we get to the year 2000... United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China, and Israel, have atomic weapons. North Korea and Iran may have them soon.

The situation in the **Middle East** remained dire, and Clinton worked very hard to help broker a peace agreement. An agreement was reached to hand over portions of **Israel** to the **Palestinians**, but quickly worsened again. **Anti-American sentiment** was rising quacking during this era. Cue 9-11.

2000- Present

The new century would witness a disputed presidential election, the deadliest attack on American soil, a War on Terror, a historic Presidential primary and an election. The year **2000** was a **presidential election** year. The Democrats chose Vice President **Al Gore** and the Republicans selected Texas Governor **George Bush**. On election night both sides at one point were declared winners. **Florida's** popular vote was in dispute. Both sides claimed victory, and Florida's twenty five electoral votes would decide the election. A manual recount started. Each ballot was scrutinized to determine which candidate the **hanging or pregnant chad** selected. The recount was finally halted by the Supreme Court and George Bush was declared the winner by less than 300 votes. He was the fourth president to be elected when more American citizens voted for the other candidate (the others were Andrew Jackson, Rutherford B. Hayes, and Grover Cleveland).

On **September 11, 2001** terrorists from **Al-Qaeda** hijacked four planes in the United States. The nation watched in horror as two planes crashed into the **World Trade Center** in New York City. Another plane crashed into the defense building known as the **Pentagon** and the fourth crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. In all, nearly 3,000 Americans were killed in the bloodiest day in America since the Civil War battle of **Antietam** in 1862. The United States gained the support of the world in waging a war on the Terrorists. We invaded **Afghanistan**, where **Al-Qaeda** operated. The terrorists were able to train in the war torn country because of the devastation caused by the Soviets and the American backed mujahadeen rebel fighters. We wanted to capture the master mind, **Osama Bin Laden**, which we didn't do until recently. We expanded the **War on Terror** to **Iraq**. Supposedly, **Saddam Hussein** had **Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)** that might be given to terrorists. The **Iraq War** was a quick American victory, but no Weapons of Mass Destruction were recovered. It's possible Hussein misled the world in order to keep Iran at bay, or perhaps the WMD's were moved into Syria before the U.S. got there. Reconstructing Iraq proved to be more problematic. American troops were still in the country more than five years after President Bush declared Mission Accomplished. (Mission Accomplished had more to do with ousting corrupt leadership but the democrats love to criticize Bush on this one)

The "W." administration expanded the size and role of the executive branch by creating the **Department of Homeland Security** and signing the **Patriot Act** which gave the federal government more power to gather intelligence within the United States in an effort to root out terrorists and organizations supporting terrorists. Bush's second term ended with the **recession of 2008**, an economic downturn we are still trying to recover from.

The 2008 presidential election pitted the Republican Senator **John McCain** vs. the Democrat **Barack Obama**. Obama is the first African American to win a major political party nomination. He fought in the Democratic primaries against **Hillary Clinton**, the first woman to seek a major political party nomination. This historic primary seems to be the culmination of the effectiveness of the **Civil Rights Movement** and the **Women's Rights Movement** of the 1960's. The election of Obama to the presidency is a historic event. The voter turnout was more than 25 % higher than the last three elections, that colossal amount hasn't voted since the 1800's. **Hillary Clinton** was named Secretary of State for Obama's first term, the second woman to hold this post (Madeleine Albright was the first during Clinton's administration) and the first former First Lady to hold such a high office.

President Obama made history when he pushed through Congress a comprehensive health care act (**Affordable Care Act**... aka "Obamacare"), accomplishing something FDR, LBJ, and Clinton only dreamed of. The liberal agenda of the Obama administration has been met with resistance from some conservatives, the most right-wing of which created the **Tea Party** which is fighting for smaller government, less welfare, and more federalism (states rights) among other things such as securing 2nd Amendment rights.

