

30

UNCERTAIN TIMES, 1974–1992

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Searching for Direction, 1974–1980
- The Reagan Revolution, 1981–1992
- Renewing and Ending the Cold War
- The Politics of Social Movements

THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT continually expanded its power following the onset of the Second World War. Most Americans supported increasing military and intelligence capabilities and using domestic programs to cushion against economic downturns and assist needy families.

Events of the 1960s and early 1970s, particularly Vietnam and Watergate, however, shook faith in government. Secrecy, corruption, and economic problems bred further disillusionment. During the 1970s and 1980s Americans debated how to respond to an aging industrial economy, a ballooning federal deficit, and a beleaguered social welfare system. Did the country need new governmental programs, or might conditions improve if Washington reduced its role?

Disagreement extended to foreign policy. Should the United States minimize anticommunism to pursue other goals, as Democratic president Jimmy Carter (1977–81) initially urged, or should it wage the Cold War even more vigorously, as his successor, Republican Ronald Reagan (1981–89), advocated? After 1989, when the Cold War ended unexpectedly, the United States needed to find a foreign policy for a post-Cold War world, a task that fell to the post-Reagan generation of national leaders.

Meanwhile, the “movement of movements,” a legacy of the 1960s, refused to fade away. Social movements associated with women’s rights, gay rights, and racial and ethnic identities affected how Americans saw themselves and their nation’s future. Some of the goals of these movements, however, met strident opposition from the New Right that had helped build Reagan’s popularity. During these years, the polarization of American politics that had become so evident during the Vietnam War and Watergate eras deepened and broadened, sparking new controversies over issues such as abortion, taxation, affirmative action, and environmental regulations.

CHRONOLOGY

1974	Nixon resigns and Ford becomes president ♦ Ford soon pardons Nixon
1975	South Vietnam falls to North Vietnam ♦ Ford asserts U.S. power in <i>Mayaguez</i> incident
1976	Jimmy Carter elected president ♦ OPEC sharply raises oil prices
1978	Carter helps negotiate Camp David peace accords on Middle East
1979	Soviet Union invades Afghanistan ♦ <i>Sandinistas</i> come to power in Nicaragua ♦ U.S. hostages seized in Iran
1980	Reagan elected president ♦ U.S. hostages in Iran released
1981	Reagan tax cut passed
1983	U.S. troops removed from Lebanon ♦ Reagan announces SDI (“Star Wars”) program
1984	Reagan defeats Walter Mondale
1986	Reagan administration rocked by revelation of Iran- <i>Contra</i> affair
1988	George H. W. Bush defeats Michael Dukakis in presidential election ♦ Congress enacts Indian Gaming Regulation Act
1989	Communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapse ♦ Berlin Wall falls ♦ Cold War, in effect, ends
1990	Bush angers conservative Republicans by agreeing to a tax increase
1991	Bush orchestrates Persian Gulf War against Iraq
1992	Bill Clinton defeats Bush

SEARCHING FOR DIRECTION, 1974–1980

When Richard Nixon resigned in August 1974, **Gerald R. Ford**, his vice president, moved from one office to which voters had never elected him to another, the presidency. Emphasizing his long career in the House of Representatives, Ford promised to “heal the land,” but he achieved limited success. A genial, unpretentious former college football star, Ford preferred that his public appearances be accompanied by the fight song of his alma mater, the University of Michigan, rather than “Hail to the Chief.” He tried to present his administration as an updated version of the “modern Republicanism” of the 1950s, but this effort quickly foundered. His appointment of Nelson Rockefeller as vice president infuriated GOP conservatives, and his pardoning of former president Nixon, in September 1974, angered almost everyone. Ford’s approval rating skidded downward, and his presidency proved to be short lived.

Ford nearly lost the GOP’s 1976 presidential nomination. Conservative Republicans rallied behind Ronald Reagan, who ignited his effort by campaigning as a “true conservative” owing nothing to Washington insiders. Ford had already won just enough delegates in the early primaries, however, to eke out a narrow first-ballot victory at the Republican Party’s national convention.

The Democrats did turn to an outsider, **James Earl (Jimmy) Carter**. A retired naval officer, engineer, peanut farmer, and former governor of Georgia, Carter campaigned

by stressing personal character. He highlighted his small-town roots and his Southern Baptist faith. To balance the ticket, he picked Senator Walter Mondale of Minnesota as his running mate. In November of 1976 Carter won a narrow victory over Ford.

Carter's election rested on a transitory coalition. He carried every southern state except Virginia, running well among both whites who belonged to fundamentalist and evangelical churches and African Americans. Carter also courted former antiwar activists by promising to pardon most Vietnam-era draft resisters. Walter Mondale's appeal helped capture the Democratic strongholds of New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The election was close, however, and voter turnout hit its lowest mark (54 percent) since the end of the Second World War.

Jimmy Carter's lack of a popular mandate and his outsider status proved serious handicaps. After leaving government, Carter reflected on his difficulties: "I had a different way of governing.... I was a southerner, a born-again Christian, a Baptist, a newcomer." Moreover, Carter was caught between advisers who, on the one hand, claimed that the national government exercised too much power and, on the other, argued that Washington did too little to address domestic and foreign problems. His policies often seemed hesitant and inconsistent.

The 865-day presidency of Ford and the one-term administration of Carter reflected the uncertainties of post-Vietnam and post-Watergate America. The sense of national crisis seemed unrelenting, as politicians and citizens alike attempted to cope with a staggering economy, disruptive energy shortages, and sensationalized foreign challenges.

A Faltering Economy

Economic problems dominated the domestic side of Ford's caretaker presidency. Upon assuming the presidency after Nixon's resignation, Ford touted a program called "Whip Inflation Now" (WIN), which included a one-year surcharge on income taxes and cuts in federal spending as solutions. After both unemployment and prices still crept higher, Ford conceded WIN to be a loser. During 1975 unemployment reached 8.5 percent, and the inflation rate topped 9 percent.

Meanwhile, Ford clashed with the Democratic-controlled Congress over how to deal with the ever-rising price of oil and with stagflation, which combined economic stagnation with price inflation. Democrats tended to favor programs that might stimulate employment and economic growth; Republicans leaned toward policies that cut government spending. Ford, who vetoed nearly 40 spending bills while in office, finally agreed to a congressional economic package forged from an uneasy compromise of diverse goals. It included a tax cut, an increase in unemployment benefits, an unbalanced federal budget, and limited controls on oil prices. Democrats charged that Ford could not implement coherent programs of his own. Many Republicans complained that he could not stand up to congressional Democrats.

Once Carter took office, the problems of oil prices and stagflation only worsened. Carter pledged to lower both unemployment and inflation, rekindle economic growth, and balance the federal budget (which showed a deficit of about \$70 billion in 1976). He pushed for tax cuts, increased public works spending, and pro-growth Federal Reserve Board policies. These measures, however, seemed to further aggravate matters. By 1980 the economy had virtually stopped expanding; unemployment (after temporarily dipping) continued to rise; and inflation topped an alarming 13 percent. Most voters told pollsters that their economic fortunes had deteriorated while Carter was in office.

Confronting Urban Decay in the 1970s.

Some of financially strapped New York City's most pressing problems during the 1970s were in the South Bronx area. Here, President Jimmy Carter (in the center) poses with his Housing and Urban Development secretary and New York's mayor in front of several of the thousands of buildings that had fallen victim to decay, neglect, and arson. This widely circulated photo was intended to signal that national and local officials hoped to devise rebuilding programs for urban areas such as this.



AP Images/Harvey Georges

Economic distress spread beyond individuals. New York City, beset by long-term economic problems and short-term fiscal mismanagement, faced bankruptcy. Private bankers and public officials had to secure congressional “bailout” legislation that granted special loan guarantees to America’s largest city. Its troubles were hardly unique. According to one estimate, Chicago lost 200,000 manufacturing jobs during the 1970s. Bricks from demolished buildings in St. Louis became one of that city’s leading products. Soaring unemployment, rising crime rates, deteriorating downtowns, and shrinking tax revenues afflicted most urban areas, even as inflation further eroded the buying power of city budgets.

Conservative economists and business interests charged that domestic programs favored by most congressional Democrats contributed to economic distress. Increasing the minimum wage and enforcing stringent safety and antipollution regulations, they argued, drove up the cost of doing business and forced companies to raise prices to consumers. During his last two years in office, Carter seemed to agree with some of this analysis. Defying many Democrats in Congress, he cut spending for social programs, sought to reduce capital gains taxes to encourage investment, and inaugurated the process of “deregulating” various industries, beginning with the financial and transportation sectors. This policy of deregulation would become a major emphasis that Republican administrations would pursue after 1980.

Welfare and Energy Initiatives

As the economic crisis spread during his presidency, Carter puzzled over how to respond to people's distress. His staff differed over whether to propose increasing monetary assistance to low-income families or to advocate federal spending to create several million public service jobs. A proposed compromise failed in Congress, although Carter did expand the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973, an act that offered temporary public service jobs to people, especially students, with low incomes. Despite economic hardships, no agreement could be forged on behalf of a broad vision to overhaul the nation's social welfare system. **Republicans tended to argue on behalf of less government spending on welfare programs; Democrats generally favored greater assistance to the underemployed.**

The president pushed harder on energy issues. The United States obtained 90 percent of its energy from fossil fuels, much of it from imported petroleum. In 1978, as in 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), a cartel dominated by oil-rich nations in the Middle East, dramatically raised the price of crude oil and precipitated acute worldwide shortages. As gasoline became expensive and scarce, drivers denounced high prices. Long lines at the gas pumps around the country sparked anger both at OPEC and at the administration. Carter, in response, promised to make the United States less dependent on imported fossil fuel.

The president had earlier charged James Schlesinger, head of a new Department of Energy, with developing a plan. Schlesinger outlined ambitious goals to decrease U.S. reliance on foreign sources: (1) expand domestic energy production through tax incentives and deregulation; (2) levy new taxes to discourage consumption; (3) foster conservation; and (4) promote non-petroleum energy sources, especially coal and nuclear power. Neither Carter nor Schlesinger consulted Congress or even some key members of the president's own administration. Instead, in early 1977, **Carter announced that the energy crisis represented "the moral equivalent of war,"** and he abruptly advanced a complex plan that included more than 100 interrelated provisions.

Congress quickly rejected it. Gas and oil interests opposed higher taxes. Consumer activists blocked deregulation. Environmentalists charged that greater use of coal would increase air pollution. Carter, nonetheless, continued to press for energy conservation; for development of renewable sources, such as solar and wind-generated energy; and for greater use of nuclear power.

The nuclear option generated especially sharp controversy. In theory, nuclear reactors could provide inexpensive, almost limitless amounts of energy. The cost of building and maintaining them, however, far exceeded original estimates and posed safety risks. In 1979 a serious reactor malfunction at **Three Mile Island**, Pennsylvania, along with a popular movie about a similar event (*The China Syndrome*) heightened fears of a nuclear-reactor meltdown. Responding to growing concerns, power companies canceled orders for new reactors, and the nuclear power industry's expansion halted.

Meanwhile, OPEC **oil prices continued to rise, from about \$3.60 a barrel in 1971 to nearly \$36 a decade later, at the end of Carter's presidency.** Such dramatic price increases in a basic commodity that fueled the American economy helped drive the damaging stagflation of the 1970s. Although few Americans agreed on how to solve this oil crisis and America's broader energy problems, many lost confidence in Carter's leadership.

Negotiation and Confrontation in Foreign Policy

Foreign policy lurched along a similar uncertain course during the mid and late 1970s. Upon assuming office in late 1974, President Ford pledged a renewal of U.S. military support to the government in South Vietnam, if North Vietnam ever directly threatened its survival. The antiwar mood in the United States and battlefield conditions in Vietnam, however, made fulfilling this commitment impossible. North Vietnam's armies stormed across the South in March 1975, and Congress, relieved that U.S. troops had finally been withdrawn after the 1973 Paris peace accords, refused any new American involvement. Conducting their last mission in Vietnam, U.S. helicopters scrambled to airlift U.S. officials and top-ranking South Vietnamese officers off the American embassy's rooftop.

Spring 1975 brought new communist victories in Indochina. In early April, Khmer Rouge forces in Cambodia drove a U.S.-backed government from the capital of Phnom Penh, and on April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese troops finally overran the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon, renaming it Ho Chi Minh City. Debate over U.S. policy in Indochina became especially heated in the months that followed.

Within this charged atmosphere, Ford tried to demonstrate U.S. military power. In May 1975 a contingent of Khmer Rouge boarded a U.S. ship, the *Mayaguez*, taking its crew hostage. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger declared that it was time to “look ferocious” and convinced Ford to order bombing strikes against Cambodia and a rescue operation for the crew. This military response, coupled with Chinese pressure on the Khmer Rouge, secured the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew. Although the *Mayaguez* rescue cost more lives than it saved, Ford's approval ratings briefly shot up. His other foreign policy initiatives, which included extending Nixon's policy of détente with the Soviet Union and pursuing peace negotiations in the Middle East, achieved little.

Carter promised new directions away from the Nixon-Ford record on foreign policy. On his first day in office, he granted amnesty to most Vietnam-era draft resisters. He soon declared that he would not display an “inordinate fear of Communism” and would endorse human-rights initiatives. After four years, however, Carter's foreign policy initiatives seemed in as much disarray as were his economic and energy policies.

Carter had little background in foreign policy. Furthermore, his top aides—Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski—pursued contradictory agendas. Vance preferred quiet diplomacy and avoidance of confrontations, while Brzezinski favored a hard line, anti-Soviet policy with an emphasis on military muscle. Pulled in divergent directions, Carter's foreign policy seemed to waffle. Carter himself favored settling disputes through negotiation, not military threats, and he elevated the promotion of human rights overseas into one of his most important priorities.

Carter's faith in negotiation and in his own skills as a facilitator yielded some successes. On the issue of the Panama Canal, the object of diplomatic negotiations for 13 years, Carter secured treaties that granted Panama increasing authority over the waterway and full control in 2000. Carter convinced skeptical senators, whose votes he needed in order to ratify any treaty, that the canal was no longer an economic or strategic necessity.

Carter's personal touch also emerged during the **Camp David Peace Talks of 1978**. Relations between Egypt and Israel had been strained since the Yom Kippur War of 1973, when Israel repelled an Egyptian attack and seized the Sinai Peninsula and territory along the West Bank (of the Jordan River). Reviving earlier

Republican efforts to broker a peace settlement, Carter brought Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, leaders of Israel and Egypt, respectively, to the presidential retreat at Camp David. After 13 days of difficult bargaining, the three leaders announced a framework for further negotiations and a peace treaty. Middle East tensions hardly vanished, but the accords reached at Camp David kept alive high-level discussions, lowered the level of acrimony between Egypt and Israel, and bound both nations to the United States through Carter's promises of economic aid.

In Asia, the Carter administration built on Nixon's initiative, expanding economic and cultural relations with the communist government in China. The United States finally established formal diplomatic ties with the People's Republic on New Year's Day 1979.

Carter's foreign policy became best known for its emphasis on **human rights**. Carter argued that Cold War alliances with repressive dictatorships, even in the name of anticommunism, undermined U.S. influence in the world. The policy, however, proved difficult to orchestrate. His administration continued to support some harsh dictators, such as Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Moreover, rhetoric about human rights helped justify uprisings against longstanding dictator-allies in Nicaragua and Iran. Revolutions in these countries, fueled by resentment against the United States, brought anti-American regimes to power and presented Carter with difficult choices.

In Nicaragua, the *Sandinista* movement toppled the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, which the United States had long supported. The *Sandinistas*, initially a coalition of moderate democrats and leftists, soon tilted toward a militant Marxism and began to expropriate private property. Republican critics charged that Carter's policies had given a green light to communism throughout Central America, and some pledged to oust the *Sandinistas*.

If events in Nicaragua brought dilemmas to Carter, those in Iran and Afghanistan all but shattered his uncertain presidency. The United States had steadfastly supported the dictatorial Shah Reza Pahlavi, who had reigned in oil-rich Iran since an American-supported coup in 1953. **The shah's overthrow in the Iranian revolution of January 1979**, by a movement dominated by Islamic fundamentalists, signaled a massive repudiation of U.S. influence. When the White House allowed the deposed shah to enter the United States for medical treatment in November 1979, Iranians seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran and 66 American hostages. Iran demanded the return of the shah in exchange for the hostages' release.

In response, Carter turned to tough talk, levied economic sanctions against Iran, and—over the objections of Cyrus Vance (who subsequently resigned)—sent a combat team to rescue the hostages. This military effort ended in an embarrassing failure. Carter's critics cited this “hostage crisis” as conclusive proof of his incompetence and used the issue relentlessly in the next presidential campaign. After Carter's defeat in the 1980 election, diplomatic efforts finally freed the hostages, but the United States and Iran remained at odds.

Criticism of Carter also focused on the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, a move primarily sparked by Soviet fear of the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalists along its borders. Carter responded in a nonmilitary manner. He halted grain exports to the Soviet Union (angering his farm constituency), **organized a boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympic Games in Moscow**, withdrew a new Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) from the Senate, and revived registration for the military draft. Still, Republicans (along with some Democrats) charged Carter with allowing

U.S. power and prestige to decline. They saw the Soviet Union embark on a new campaign of expanding communism, attempting to add new clients not only in Central America and in Afghanistan but also in other areas of the world.

For a time, after Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts entered the 1980 presidential primaries, it seemed as if Carter's own Democratic Party might deny him a second term. Although Kennedy's challenge eventually fizzled, it popularized anti-Carter themes that Republicans would gleefully embrace in the election of 1980. "It's time to say no more hostages, no more high interest rates, no more high inflation, and no more Jimmy Carter," was Kennedy's standard stump speech.

The New Right By 1976, the idea of preventing another Carter or another Kennedy presidency animated a diverse coalition of conservatives: a **New Right**. This broadly based movement succeeded in holding together several different constituencies. The already disparate group that had initially gathered around William F. Buckley's *National Review* during the 1950s provided one of these constituencies. Even as Buckley continued to use his magazine to push conservative ideas, he reached out to new converts through television. His long-running interview show, *Firing Line*, debuted on PBS in 1971 (and ran for another 28 years). The economist Milton Friedman—a frequent Buckley guest, 1976 Nobel laureate, and creator of a PBS series touting free-market economic principles—provided another important link between the conservatism of the 1950s and 1970s. In addition, many of the then-youthful conservatives who had energized Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign, such as Patrick Buchanan, came to the New Right after having worked in Richard Nixon's administration.

In contrast, the "neoconservative" (or "neocon") wing of the New Right of the 1970s had generally identified with Democrats, rather than Republicans, during the 1950s and much of the 1960s. Fiercely anticommunist, writers and academics such as Norman Podhoretz, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Irving Kristol saw too many Democrats criticizing Lyndon Johnson and then rallying behind George McGovern and his theme of "Come Home America." Fearful that the Democratic Party might abandon a strong anticommunist stance, neoconservatives also viewed most domestic movements of the 1960s, particularly those displaying countercultural values, as threatening the social stability and intellectual values they admired. This initial generation of neoconservatives, often the offspring of European-Jewish immigrants, also complained that U.S. foreign policy, even under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, failed to support Israel strongly enough.

Conservative business leaders provided another important New Right constituency. Convinced that anti-corporate professors and students dominated most colleges and universities, business magnates such as Joseph Coors, of the Colorado brewing family, placed at least portions of their fortunes at the service of their convictions. In their view, new regulatory legislation accepted by the Nixon administration, especially measures dealing with workplace safety issues and environmental concerns, threatened "economic freedom" and "entrepreneurial liberty." If colleges and universities could not provide intellectual support for conservative perspectives, then businesses should create counter-institutions in the form of right-leaning think tanks. Conservative business leaders and their philanthropic foundations generously funded existing

research institutions, such as the American Enterprise Institute (founded in 1943), and created new ones, such as The Heritage Foundation (established in 1973).

Money from New Right businesspeople also financed lobbying efforts, such as those mounted by the Business Roundtable (created in 1973) and the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD). This bipartisan group, which took its name and much of its leadership from a similarly named group of the 1950s, argued that the foreign policy establishment of the 1970s, including “realists” such as Henry Kissinger, underestimated the threat that the Soviet Union still posed to the United States. The CPD’s successes included persuading Gerald Ford’s appointee as CIA director, George H. W. Bush, to order a review of the CIA’s assessment of the communist menace by a group of outside analysts. Ultimately known as “Team B” and dominated by people close to the CPD, this panel warned of CIA complacency in the face of Soviet aggressiveness.

Groups such as the CPD also operated effectively outside of the Washington, D.C., beltway. In 1975, activists who had worked for Goldwater’s 1964 campaign formed the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), the first of many similar organizations aimed at organizing at the grassroots. Initiatives by the NCPAC backed conservative political candidates and advocated a wide range of policies. Forging a political strategy aimed at defending “family values,” they opposed policies identified with feminism, such as legalized abortion, and with LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) lifestyles.

The New Right of the 1970s also attracted grassroots support from Protestants in fundamentalist and evangelical churches. People from these religious groups had generally stayed clear of overtly partisan politics since the 1920s but continued to express concern, exemplified in the work of Billy Graham’s organization, about public issues that involved spiritual and social matters. Already angered by Supreme Court decisions that seemed to eliminate religious prayers from public schools, many expressed greater outrage over *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the landmark abortion ruling. Reaching out to anti-abortion Catholics, people whom most members of southern Protestant congregations would have shunned a generation earlier, “Religious Right” slowly took shape. The Reverend Jerry Falwell of the Thomas Road Baptist Church and the Old Time Gospel Hour television ministry declared that *Roe* showed the necessity of political action. Anti-religious elites in Washington “have been imposing morality on us for the last fifty years,” Falwell proclaimed.

Leaders of the Religious Right insisted that sacred values should actively shape political policymaking. A clear separation between church and state, a guiding principle of constitutionalism during the era of Earl Warren’s Supreme Court, struck the Religious Right as a violation of a right specifically mentioned in the First Amendment: the “free exercise of religion.” Particularly in the South, conservatives embarked on a lengthy legal struggle to prevent the Internal Revenue Service from denying tax-exempt status to the private Christian colleges and academies that opposed racial integration. Challenging older constitutional precedents against state aid to religious institutions, they also urged that government should use tax monies to help fund church-centered education and “faith-based” social programming. Most spokespeople for the Religious Right championed foreign policies that maximized the use of U.S. military power, especially on behalf of Israel. Protestants who embraced “dispensational premillennialism,” the belief that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in their lifetimes, saw the survival of a Jewish state in the

Middle East as crucial to the future they expected to unfold according to Biblical prophesy.

Especially in the South, the process of a political switch to the GOP could almost seem comparable to that of a religious conversion. In 1976 most evangelicals and fundamentalists from the South, including Jerry Falwell, supported Jimmy Carter. His religious values made him seem less committed to the *Roe* decision than Gerald Ford, whose spouse, Betty Ford, often identified herself with women's issues. Very soon, however, Falwell and others on the Religious Right began realigning their politics with those of the GOP's conservative bloc, placing their growing movement behind a refashioned Republican party under the leadership of Ronald Reagan.

THE REAGAN REVOLUTION, 1981–1992

Ronald Reagan courted the New Right on national security, economic, and social issues. He used the hostage crisis with Iran as a symbol of Carter's failures, while his revitalized anticommunist rhetoric called for a stronger military posture and greater defense spending. At the same time, a taxpayer revolt that had swept through California politics during the late 1970s provided a model for Reagan's attack on "tax-and-spend" policymaking at the federal level. (The situation was ironic, however, because California's tax revolt had emerged in response to tax increases adopted while Reagan was the state's governor.) Across the country, people increasingly responded to the tax-reduction message. In addition to urging large tax cuts, Reagan opposed abortion rights, advocated prayer in school, and extolled conservative family values. Even Jimmy Carter's own Southern Baptists, who had rallied behind him in 1976, along with born-again Christians across the country, began flocking to Reagan.

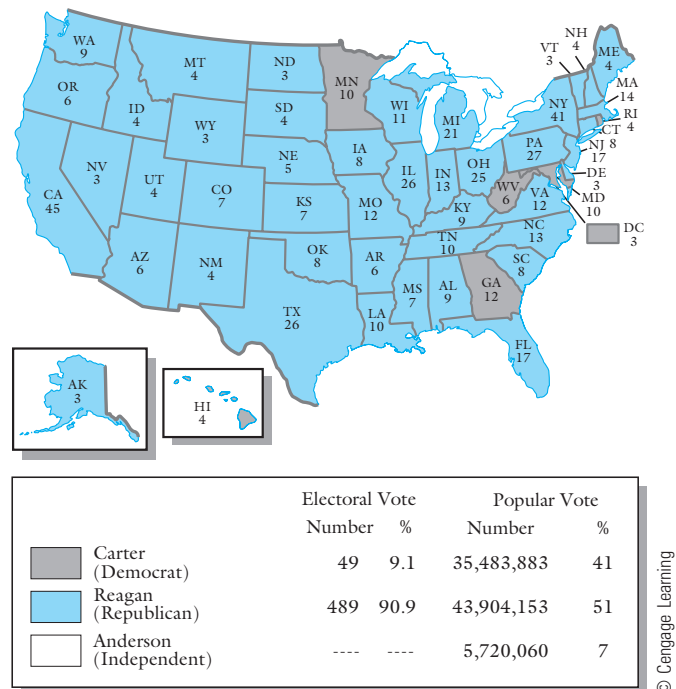
The Election of 1980

Easily capturing the Republican nomination, and anointing one of his defeated rivals, George H. W. Bush, as a running mate, Ronald Reagan advanced an optimistic vision of a rejuvenated America. Punctuating his speeches with quips inspired by Hollywood movies, he stressed his opposition to domestic social spending and high taxes while promising support for a stronger national defense. To underscore the nation's economic problems under Carter, Reagan asked repeatedly, "Are you better off now than you were four years ago?" Quickly offering his own answer, Reagan cited what he called a "misery index," which added the rate of inflation to the rate of unemployment.

Reagan also seized issues that the Democratic Party had long regarded its own: economic growth and increased personal consumption. In 1979 one of Jimmy Carter's advisers had gloomily portrayed the nation's economic and energy problems as so severe that there was "no way we can avoid a decline in our standard of living. All we can do is adapt to it." In contrast, Reagan promised that sharp tax cuts and policies to increase the supply of oil would restore robust economic expansion.

The Reagan-Bush team swept to victory. Although it gained only slightly more than 50 percent of the popular vote (John Anderson, a middle-of-the-road Republican who ran as an independent, won about 7 percent), the GOP ticket captured the Electoral College tally by a 489 to 49 margin. Moreover, Republicans took away 12 Democratic Senate seats, gaining control of the Senate, though not the House of Representatives.

Although conservative think tanks deluged the Reagan administration with policy suggestions, the president focused on three major priorities: cutting federal



MAP 30.1 Presidential Election, 1980

taxes, reducing the governmental regulatory structure, and boosting national security capabilities.

Supply-Side Economics

To justify cutting taxes, Reagan touted **supply-side economics**. This economic theory held that tax reductions targeted toward investors and businesses would stimulate production, create jobs, and ameliorate the economic stagnation of the 1970s. Reagan pushed a tax-reduction plan through Congress in 1981. Many Democrats, who had supported more limited tax cuts during Carter's presidency, endorsed the plan. At the same time, the Federal Reserve Board under Paul Volker, a Carter appointee, kept interest rates high to drive down inflation.

In the short run, high interest rates continued to choke off growth, and economic conditions deteriorated. A severe economic downturn in 1981 and 1982 sent Reagan's approval ratings diving below 40 percent, and the Republican Party experienced losses in the off-year election of 1982. Slowly, however, inflation moderated, and the economy rebounded to enter a period of non-inflationary growth. According to one study, the economy added nearly 17 million new jobs; figures on real income, after having declined throughout the 1970s, began to rise; and inflation dropped from double digits to around 2 percent. Although unemployment figures did not fall as sharply, Reagan's supporters hailed a "Reagan revolution" that had rescued the country from stagflation.

This revival and its causes, however, were controversial. Reagan had not matched tax cuts with sufficient spending reductions, and budget deficits soared. Reagan constantly inveighed against deficits and "big spenders," but his eight years

in Washington, even after some of the early tax reductions were rolled back, saw annual deficits triple to nearly \$300 billion. To finance such deficit spending, the United States borrowed abroad and piled up the largest foreign debt of any nation in the world at that time. Reagan's revolution, critical economists charged, stimulated recovery through unbalanced budgets but courted long-term problems with federal deficits and trade imbalances.

Moreover, the surge of the Reagan era prosperity brought upward mobility for some but growing uncertainty for others. Partisans of the Reagan revolution promised that its effects would ultimately “trickle down” and benefit everyone. Its detractors, however, countered that the country was developing a “Swiss-cheese” economy, in which many groups were falling through the holes. Farmers in the Midwest watched falling crop prices hamper their repayment of high-interest loans they had contracted during the inflation-ridden 1970s. Mortgage foreclosures, reminiscent of the 1930s, hit the farm states, and the ripple effect decimated the economies of small towns across the country. Urban areas fared even worse. Federal spending for urban areas declined, even as cities faced growing unemployment, population loss, and falling tax revenues. Federal funds for public transit and housing declined even as job-training programs such as CETA lost funding. One historian estimates that urban America bore two-thirds of the cost of Reagan-era budget cuts. The minimum wage, when adjusted for inflation, also declined in value during Reagan's presidency.

For African Americans, this mixed picture proved especially clear. The number of African American families earning a solid middle-class income, for example, more than doubled between 1970 and 1990. People with educational credentials and marketable skills made significant economic gains, and African American college graduates could expect incomes comparable to those of their white classmates. Partly as a result of affirmative action hiring plans put in place by the Nixon and Carter administrations, many could afford to leave problem-plagued inner-city neighborhoods. The situation looked different, however, for those who remained persistently unemployed, perhaps trapped in declining urban centers. At the end of the 1980s one-third of all African American families lived in poverty, and the number earning less than \$15,000 per year had doubled since 1970. In inner cities, fewer than half of African American children were completing high school, and more than 60 percent were unemployed. The gap between the well off and the disadvantaged widened during the 1980s.

Curtailing Unions, Regulations, and Welfare Meanwhile, Reagan pursued his second major goal: cutting back the role of the federal government in supporting labor unions and regulatory structures.

In 1981 Reagan fired the nation's air traffic controllers after their union refused to halt a nationwide strike. The action portended more aggressive anti-union strategies that both his administration and business interests would pursue during the 1980s. The percentage of unionized workers fell to just 16 percent by the end of Reagan's presidency. Recognizing the balance of power tilting against them, workers increasingly turned away from strikes as an economic weapon.

Reagan had entered office promising to tame OPEC by encouraging the development of new sources of supply. Rejecting environmentalists' calls to decrease U.S. dependence on fossil fuels by promotion of renewable sources, Reagan and his successor, George H. W. Bush, pursued a “cheap oil” policy. The tapping of new oil

fields at home and abroad, together with rivalries among OPEC's members, weakened the cartel's hold on the world market and reduced energy prices worldwide. Lower energy costs, in turn, helped moderate the inflationary pressures.

To oversee environmental issues, Reagan appointed James Watt, an outspoken critic of governmental regulation, as secretary of the interior. Watt supported the so-called "sagebrush rebellion," in which western states demanded fewer federal restrictions on the use of public lands within their borders. Particularly in the timber states of the Pacific Northwest, people hotly debated protection of endangered species, such as rare bird populations, if it interfered with lumber-related opportunities. Reagan's first two appointees to the Department of Energy actually proposed eliminating the cabinet office they headed—an idea that Congress blocked. In both the Interior and Energy Departments, the White House relaxed enforcement of federal safety and environmental regulations.

Reagan's agenda for **deregulation** focused especially on the financial system. His economic advisers insisted that financial markets were largely self-regulating and self-correcting. Minimal governmental interference in the marketplace, they argued, would bring greater economic efficiencies and therefore greater prosperity overall. The Carter administration had previously pursued programs of deregulation especially in the transportation sector, and many Democrats in Congress now joined Republicans in crafting a looser environment for banks. Before the 1980s, state usury laws limited the interest rates that lending institutions could charge their clients and "Savings and Loan" (S & L) institutions issued home mortgages under carefully controlled rules. Several pieces of legislation in the 1980s, however, wiped away these and other regulations, and the banking sector rapidly consolidated and transformed. More credit became available to more people, as a new "sub-prime loan" industry boomed. But there were hazards.

During Reagan's second term, corruption and mismanagement in the financial industry increasingly appeared as toxic byproducts of deregulation. S & L companies had ventured into risky loans, particularly in real estate. Regulators and politicians ignored forecasts of an impending meltdown until bankruptcies began to cascade through the S & L industry, eventually forcing the closure of 747 institutions. Finally, in 1989, Congress created a bailout plan designed to save some S & Ls and to transfer assets from already failed institutions to solvent ones. The plan proved astronomically expensive, and taxpayers footed costs that eventually reached around \$125 billion. Meanwhile, the process by which large, well-connected commercial banks purchased the remaining assets of bankrupt S & Ls at bargain-basement prices reeked of corruption and scandal. As a result of the S & L debacle of the 1980s, the banking industry went through a sudden, unplanned consolidation. Many people lost savings.

The Reagan administration also sought a somewhat more limited role for government in social welfare spending. It decreased funding for various kinds of public-benefit programs, particularly Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The Family Support Act of 1988 pressured states to inaugurate work-training programs and to begin moving people, including mothers receiving AFDC payments, off the welfare rolls. Reductions in food stamps and other programs increased poverty rates and fell disproportionately on female-headed households and on children. By the end of the 1980s, one of every five children was growing up in a household where the income fell below the official poverty line.

The president nevertheless steadfastly rejected suggestions of eliminating the basic set of New Deal programs that he called a “social safety net.” Specifically, he rejected calls for curtailing the Social Security or Medicare systems. During the 1970s Social Security payments had been “indexed” to automatically increase along with the rate of inflation. Larger Social Security checks, along with Medicare benefits, enabled millions of Americans over 65 to do relatively well during the Reagan years.

The Reagan administration also placed its stamp on the federal legal system, nudging it in a more conservative direction. Almost immediately, Reagan nominated a Supreme Court justice, **Sandra Day O’Connor** (the first woman to sit on the Court), who appeared to be a conservative. With the Republican Party controlling the Senate until 1986, Reagan also named prominent conservative jurists, such as Robert Bork and **Antonin Scalia**, to lower federal courts. The New Right, which had decried the “rights revolution” of the Warren Supreme Court, welcomed the influx of conservative judges. Civil libertarians, by contrast, complained that the federal courts were becoming less hospitable to the legal-constitutional arguments of criminal defendants, labor unions, and political dissenters.

In 1986 the resignation of Warren Burger allowed Reagan to elevate **William Rehnquist** to the position of chief justice and appoint Antonin Scalia, a staunch conservative, to replace Rehnquist as an associate justice. In 1987 however, the Senate, now with a Democratic majority following the 1986 elections, rebuffed Reagan’s attempt to place Robert Bork, a particular favorite of the New Right, on the High Court. Bork’s rejection enraged conservatives, some blaming Reagan for not working hard enough on Bork’s behalf. Still, by 1990, because of retirements, about half of all federal judges had reached the bench during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Reagan also sought out staunch conservatives for non-judicial appointments. He staffed the Justice Department with young attorneys, such as **John Roberts and Samuel Alito**, who expressed a desire to help conservative judges whittle back Warren-era judicial precedents.

Despite sometimes sharp criticism, especially over the soaring federal deficit, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the role that government should play in regulation and welfare, Reagan remained popular. His genial optimism seemed unshakable. His smile, jokes, and confident air disarmed and inspired many. He even appeared to rebound quickly—although close observers noted a clear decline in his energies—after being shot by a would-be assassin in March 1981. No matter what problems beset his administration, criticism rarely stuck to Reagan, whom one frustrated Democrat dubbed the “**Teflon president.**”

Reagan to Bush Democrats continually underestimated Reagan’s appeal—a miscalculation that doomed their 1984 presidential effort. Walter Mondale, Jimmy Carter’s vice president, ran on a platform calling for “the eradication of discrimination in all aspects of American life” and for an expansion of social welfare programs. Mondale proposed higher taxes to fund this agenda and chose as his running mate Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York, the first woman to stand for president or vice president on a major party ticket.

Republican campaign ads—often framed by the slogan “It’s Morning Again in America”—portrayed a glowing landscape of bustling small towns and lush farmlands. They attacked Mondale’s support from labor unions and civil rights groups as a vestige of the “old politics” of “special interests” and his tax proposal as a return to the policies popularly associated with the stagflation of the 1970s. The

1984 presidential election ended with Mondale, who projected the opposite of charisma, carrying only his home state of Minnesota and the District of Columbia.

Reagan never lacked for critics during his second term. Even some of his New Right supporters charged that he was insufficiently zealous in promoting Bork's appointment, antiabortion efforts, and other causes. Still, conservatives would increasingly hail Ronald Reagan as a giant of their movement. Indeed, the **Reagan revolution** succeeded in advancing a new Republican agenda that helped change the nation's political vocabulary. **Democrats had once invoked "liberalism" to stand for governmental initiatives to stimulate the economy, promote greater equality, and advance liberty for all. Republicans, however, deployed the term "liberal" as a code word for wasteful social programs devised by a bloated federal government that gouged hardworking people and squandered their tax dollars.** By contrast, the new Republican Party that coalesced behind Reagan advanced the term "conservative" to stand for economic growth through the curtailment of governmental power and support for traditional sociocultural values. By the end of Reagan's presidency, the once-dominant Democratic Party of the New Deal, Fair Deal, and Great Society confronted a strong and refashioned Republican Party.

In the election of 1988, the Reagan legacy fell to the president's heir-apparent, Vice President **George H. W. Bush**. Born into a wealthy Republican family and educated at Yale, Bush had prospered in the oil business, served in the House of Representatives, and headed the CIA. To court the New Right, decidedly lukewarm to his candidacy, he pledged "no new taxes" and chose Senator J. Danforth (Dan) Quayle, a youthful conservative from Indiana, as a running mate. Quayle would soon delight political comedians who highlighted his verbal blunders.

Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts emerged as the Democratic presidential candidate. Hoping to distance himself from the disastrous Mondale-Ferraro effort in 1984, Dukakis avoided talk of new domestic programs and higher taxes. Instead, he pledged to bring competence and honesty to the White House.

Although Bush emerged the winner, Democrats retained control of both houses of Congress. The turnout was the lowest for any national election since 1924, and polls suggested that many voters remained unimpressed with either Bush or Dukakis.

Once in the White House, Bush began to lose crucial support. He angered New Right Republicans by agreeing to an increase in the minimum wage and by failing to veto a law that allowed for some affirmative action in the hiring of women and people of color into occupations where they were underrepresented. The Religious Right detected tepid support from the president in its campaigns against abortion and in favor of religious prayers in public schools. Most important, in 1990 Bush broke his "no new taxes" campaign pledge. Taxation had emerged as one of the New Right's central issues, even though Reagan himself had raised taxes during his second term. When Bush agreed to an upward revision in tax rates, trying to deal with the still-rising federal deficit, the New Right bitterly denounced his decision.

Meanwhile, the Democratic-controlled Congress and the Republican-occupied White House deadlocked over how to address key domestic issues such as reorganization of the health care and social welfare systems. Worse for the president's political future, the economic growth of the Reagan years began slowing while the budget deficit continued to grow. George H. W. Bush's popularity and his chances for a second term dwindled. Meanwhile, both the Reagan and then Bush

presidencies participated in one of the most momentous changes of the 20th century—the end of the Cold War.

RENEWING AND ENDING THE COLD WAR

In foreign policy, Reagan promised to reverse what he derided as Carter's passivity. He declared that the Vietnam War had been a "noble cause" that politicians had refused to win. Renewing the rhetoric of strident anticommunism, Reagan denounced the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" and promised a military buildup to confront communism. This renewal of the Cold War, however, proved short lived. By the late 1980s, a variety of internal and external circumstances brought communist regimes under unsustainable pressure. Reagan had begun his presidency by renewing the Cold War; but he and his successor, George H. W. Bush, also presided over its end.

The Defense Buildup

In response to his campaign promises, Reagan's administration led off with dramatic increases in military spending, even as tax cuts reduced federal revenues. The Pentagon enlarged the Navy and expanded strategic nuclear forces, deploying new missiles throughout Western Europe. At the height of Reagan's military buildup, which produced gaping budget deficits, the Pentagon was purchasing about 20 percent of the nation's manufacturing output.

In 1983 Reagan proposed the most expensive defense system in history: a space-based shield against incoming missiles. Beginning as a vague hope, this **Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)** soon had its own Pentagon agency, which sought \$26 billion, over five years, for research costs alone. Controversy swirled around SDI. Skeptics dubbed it "Star Wars" and shuddered at its astronomical costs. Although most scientists dismissed the plan as too speculative, Congress voted appropriations for SDI, and Reagan steadfastly insisted that a defensive missile shield could work. Reagan also suggested that, as Moscow increased the burden on its own fragile economy in order to compete in the accelerating arms race, the Soviet Union might collapse under the economic strain. SDI dominated both strategic debates at home and arms talks with the Soviets.

Reagan's foreign policy agenda included numerous nonmilitary initiatives. A new "informational" offensive funded conservative media groups around the world and established Radio Martí, a Florida station beamed at Cuba and designed to discredit Fidel Castro's communist government. When the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted an allegedly anti-American tone, Reagan cut off U.S. contributions to this agency. The White House also championed free markets, pressing other nations to minimize tariffs and restrictions on foreign investment. The Caribbean Basin Initiative, for example, rewarded with aid small nations in the Caribbean region that adhered to free-market principles.

The CIA, headed by William Casey, stepped up its covert activities. Some became so obvious they hardly qualified as covert. It was no secret, for instance, that the United States sent aid to anticommunist forces in Afghanistan, many of them radical Islamic fundamentalist groups. The CIA also helped train and support the *contras* in Nicaragua, a military force fighting to topple the *Sandinista* government. To contain the power of Iran, assistance went to its bitter enemy, Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Many of these moves would, in the future, have unintended and unwelcome consequences for U.S. policy.

Deploying Military Power

In renewing the global Cold War, Reagan promised military support to “democratic” revolutions anywhere, a move designed to contain the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. Reagan’s UN ambassador, Jeane Kirkpatrick, wrote that “democratic” forces included almost any movement, no matter how autocratic, that was anticommunist. The United States thus funded opposition forces in countries aligned with the Soviet Union: Ethiopia, Angola, South Yemen, Cambodia, Guatemala, Grenada, Afghanistan, and Nicaragua. Reagan called the participants in such anticommunist insurgencies “freedom fighters,” although few displayed any visible commitment to democratic values or institutions.

The Reagan administration also deployed U.S. military power, initially in southern Lebanon in 1982. Here, Israeli troops faced off against Islamic groups supported by Syria and Iran. Fearing loss of influence within Lebanon, the Reagan administration convinced Israel to withdraw and sent 1,600 U.S. Marines as part of an international “peacekeeping force.” Islamic militias, however, turned against the U.S. forces. After a massive truck bomb attack against a military compound killed 241 U.S. troops, mostly Marines, in April 1983, Reagan decided to end this ill-defined undertaking. In February 1984 Reagan ordered the withdrawal of U.S. troops and disengaged from Lebanon.

Another military intervention seemed more successful. In October 1983 Reagan sent 2,000 U.S. troops to the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada, whose socialist leader was forging ties with Castro’s Cuba. U.S. troops swept aside Grenada’s government and installed one friendlier to U.S. policies.

Buoyed by Grenada, the Reagan administration fixed its sights on Nicaragua. Here, the Marxist-leaning *Sandinista* government was trying to break Nicaragua’s dependence on the United States. The Reagan administration responded with economic pressure, a propaganda campaign, and greater assistance to the *contras*. These initiatives stirred considerable controversy, however, because of mounting evidence of the *contras*’ corruption and brutality. Finally, Democrats in Congress broke with the president’s policy and barred additional military aid to the *contras*, a group that Reagan had once compared to America’s own Founding Fathers. Policymakers in the administration then encouraged wealthy American conservatives and foreign governments to help fund the *contra* cause.

Meanwhile, violence continued to escalate throughout the Middle East. Militant Islamic groups increased attacks against Israel and Western powers. Bombings and kidnappings of Westerners became more frequent. Apparently, Libya’s Muammar al-Qaddafi and Iranian leaders encouraged such activities. In the spring of 1986 the United States launched an air strike into Qaddafi’s personal compound. It killed his young daughter, but Qaddafi and his government survived. Despite what looked like a long-range assassination attempt against a foreign leader, an action outlawed by Congress, Americans generally approved of using strong measures against sponsors of terrorism and hostage taking.

The Iran-Contra Controversy

In November 1986 a magazine in Lebanon reported that the Reagan administration was selling arms to Iran in order to secure the release of Americans being held hostage by Islamic militants. These alleged deals violated the Reagan administration’s own pledges against selling arms to Iran or rewarding hostage taking by negotiating for the release of captives. During the 1980 campaign, of course, Reagan had made

HISTORY THROUGH FILM

The First Movie–Star President

Ronald Reagan began his presidency in Hollywood. The political career of the “Great Communicator” built on, rather than broke away from, his days in the entertainment industry. His media advisers could count on directing a seasoned professional. Reagan always knew where to stand; how to deliver lines effectively; how to convey emotions through both body language and dialogue; and when to melt into the background so that other players in the cast of his presidency might carry a crucial scene.

Several of Reagan’s movies provided rehearsals for roles he would play in the White House. Initially, Reagan’s opponents thought that his old film parts, particularly in *Bedtime for Bonzo* (1947), where he co-starred with a chimpanzee, would be political liabilities. Instead of disavowing his days in Hollywood, Reagan accentuated his fluency with film-related imagery. His efforts to cheer on the nation during the 1980s consciously invoked his favorite film role, that of the 1920s Notre Dame football star, George Gipp, who Reagan played in *Knute Rockne, All American* (1940). Similarly, when tilting with a Democratic-controlled Congress over tax policy, Reagan invoked Clint Eastwood’s famous screen character “Dirty Harry,” promising to shoot down any tax increase. “Go ahead, make my day,” he taunted. On another occasion, he cited *Rambo* (1982), an action thriller set in

post-1975 Vietnam as a possible blueprint for dealing with countries that had seized U.S. hostages. As he freely drew from Hollywood motion pictures, Reagan occasionally seemed unable to separate “reel” from “real” life. During one session with reporters, he referred to his own dog as “Lassie,” the canine performer who had been Reagan’s Hollywood contemporary during the 1940s and 1950s.

Life in Hollywood also provided a prologue to President Reagan’s conservative policies. Early in his film career, Reagan appeared in four films as the same character, a government agent named “Brass Bancroft.” In these B-grade thrillers, Reagan developed an image that he later deployed in politics: the action-oriented character who could distinguish (good) friends from (evil) foes. *Murder in the Air* (1940), one of the Brass Bancroft movies, even featured a science fiction-style “death ray” that resembled the SDI (“Star Wars”) armaments that President Reagan would champion more than 40 years later.

Subsequent film roles refined his Hollywood image. Poor eyesight kept Reagan out of combat during the Second World War, but he served long hours as an Army Air Corps officer, producing movies in support of the war effort. He appeared in several films, such as *For God and Country* (1943), and more often provided upbeat voiceovers, once even sharing a soundtrack with President

hostages in Iran a symbol of U.S. weakness under Carter. When Iranian-backed groups continued to kidnap Americans during Reagan’s own presidency, it seemed that Reagan had sought clandestine ways to recover hostages and avoid such charges being leveled at him.

As Congress began to investigate, the story became more bizarre. It appeared that the operatives in the Reagan administration had not only secretly sold arms

Ronald Reagan as the
“Gipper” in Knute
Rockne, All American.



© Bettmann/CORBIS

Franklin Roosevelt. He also starred, on loan from the Air Corps, in *This Is the Army* (1943), one of the most successful of wartime Hollywood’s military-oriented musicals. After the war, Reagan increasingly directed his energies toward Cold War politics in the film capital. His tenure as the anticommunist president of the Screen Actors Guild—and as a secret FBI informant—likely speeded his conversion from New Deal Democrat to right-leaning Republican. In his final onscreen roles Reagan usually portrayed the kind of

independent, rugged individualist—often in westerns such as *Law and Order* (1953)—that he would later lionize in his political speeches.

Nancy Reagan, who costarred with her husband in *Hellcats of the Navy* (1957) and later as the nation’s First Lady, offered her close-up view of the relationship between Reagan the actor and Reagan the politician: “There are not two Ronald Reagans.” During the 1980s Hollywood and Washington, D.C., became embodied in the same character, Ronald Wilson Reagan.

to Iran but had funneled profits from these back-channel deals to the *contra* forces in Nicaragua, thereby circumventing the congressional ban on U.S. military aid. Oliver North, an aide to the national security adviser, had directed the effort, working with international arms dealers and private go-betweens. North’s covert activities seemingly violated both the official policy of the White House and an act of Congress.

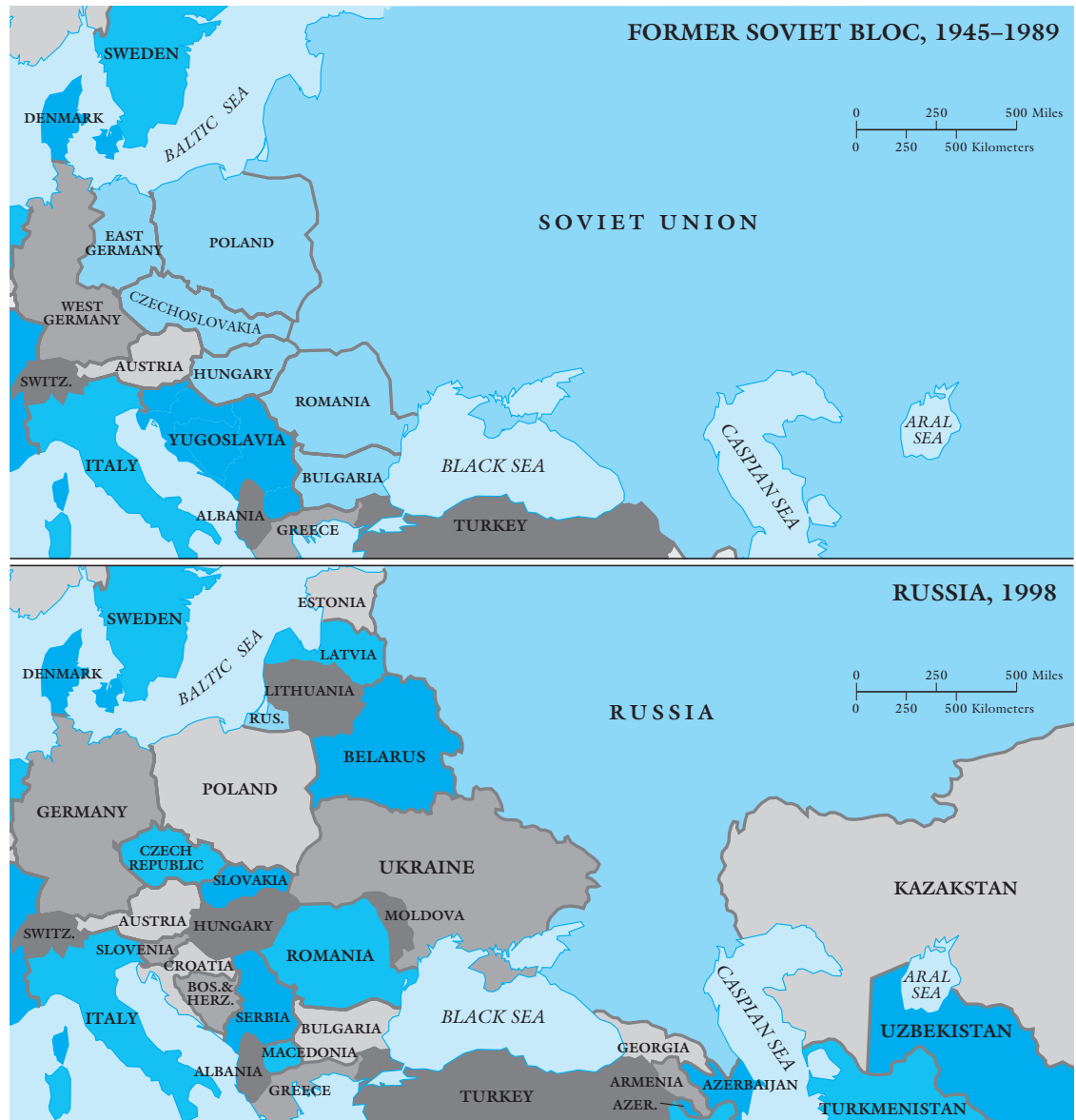
This **Iran-*contra* affair** never reached the proportions of the Watergate scandal. In contrast to Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan stepped forward and testified, through a deposition, that he could not recall any details about either the release of hostages or the funding of the *contras*. His management skills might deserve criticism, Reagan admitted, but he had never intended to break any laws or violate any presidential promise. Vice President George H. W. Bush, whom investigators initially linked to Oliver North's machinations, also claimed ignorance. North and several others in the Reagan administration were convicted of felonies, including falsification of documents and lying to Congress, but appellate courts later overturned these verdicts. North destroyed so many documents and left so many false paper trails that congressional investigators struggled even to compile a simple narrative of his activities. Finally, in 1992, just a few days before the end of his presidency, George H. W. Bush pardoned six former Reagan-era officials connected to the Iran-*contra* controversy.

The Cold War Eases

After six years of renewed Cold War confrontation, Reagan's last two years saw a sudden thaw in U.S.–Soviet relations. The economic cost of superpower rivalry was burdening both nations. Moreover, political change swept the Soviet Union and eliminated reasons for confrontation. **Mikhail Gorbachev**, who became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1985, promised a new style of Soviet leadership. He understood that his nation faced economic stagnation and environmental problems brought on by decades of poorly planned industrial development. To redirect the Soviet Union's course, he withdrew troops from Afghanistan, reduced commitments to Cuba and Nicaragua, proclaimed a policy of *glasnost* ("openness"), and began to implement *perestroika* ("economic liberalization") at home.

Gorbachev's policies gained him acclaim throughout the West, and summit meetings with the United States yielded breakthroughs in arms control. At Reykjavik, Iceland, in October 1986, Reagan shocked both Gorbachev and his own advisers by proposing a wholesale ban on nuclear weapons. Although negotiations at Reykjavik stumbled over Soviet insistence that the United States abandon SDI, Gorbachev later dropped that condition. In December 1987, Reagan and Gorbachev signed a major arms treaty that reduced each nation's supply of intermediate-range missiles and allowed for on-site verification, which the Soviets had never before permitted. The next year, Gorbachev scrapped the policy that forbade nations under Soviet influence from renouncing Communism. In effect, he declared an end to the Cold War.

Within the next few years, communist states began to topple like dominoes, falling out of the Soviet sphere of influence. In 1989, the first year of George H. W. Bush's presidency, Poland made the most significant move when its anticommunist labor movement, Solidarity, ousted a pro-Soviet regime. The pro-Moscow government in East Germany fell in November 1989. Both West and East Germans hacked down the Berlin Wall and then began the difficult process of reunifying Germany as a single nation. Popular movements similarly forced out communist governments throughout Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia quickly disintegrated, and warfare ensued as rival ethnic groups recreated separate states in Slovenia, Serbia,



MAP 30.2 Collapse of the Soviet Bloc

These contrasting maps show the Soviet Union and the countries it dominated before and after the fall of communist governments. What countries in Eastern Europe escaped Russian control after 1989? What new countries emerged out of the old Soviet Union?

Bosnia, and Croatia. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which had been under Soviet control since the Second World War, declared their independence.

Most dramatically, the major provinces that had anchored the Soviet Union assumed self-government. The president of the new state of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, put down a coup by hard-line communists in August 1991, and he soon solidified his political position. In December 1991 Yeltsin brokered a plan to abolish the Soviet Union and replace it with 11 separate republics, loosely joined in a commonwealth arrangement.

Post-Cold War Policy and the Persian Gulf War

In response, the Bush administration set about redefining U.S. national security in a post-Cold War era. The collapse of the Soviet Union weakened support for the leftist insurgencies in Central America that had so preoccupied the Reagan administration. Nicaraguans voted out the *Sandinistas*, who became just another political party in a multiparty system. The Pentagon pondered new military missions, imagining rapid, sharply targeted strikes rather than lengthy, conventional campaigns. The armed forces assessed how they would serve in the “war against drugs,” an effort that Bush had suggested during his 1988 presidential campaign.

General Manuel Noriega, the president of Panama, was deeply involved in the drug trade, and the Reagan administration had secured an indictment against him for international narcotics trafficking. Confronting Noriega posed a potentially embarrassing problem for the Bush administration. The anticommunist general had been recruited as a CIA “asset” during the mid-1970s, when Bush had headed the Agency. Nevertheless, the United States needed a friendly and a stable government in Panama in order to complete the transfer of the Panama Canal to Panamanian sovereignty in 2000. Bush finally decided to topple the mercurial Noriega. During “Operation Just Cause,” U.S. Marines landed in Panama in December 1989 and laid siege to the president’s headquarters. Noriega soon surrendered, was extradited to Florida, and went to prison after a 1992 conviction for trafficking in cocaine.

The Panamanian operation carried major implications. Deposing the leader of a foreign government by unilateral military action raised questions of international law, but this operation, which involved 25,000 U.S. troops and few casualties, provided a model for the post-Cold War era. The Pentagon firmed up plans for creating highly mobile, rapid deployment forces. A test of its new strategy came during the Persian Gulf War of 1991.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein ordered his troops to occupy the neighboring oil-rich emirate of Kuwait. U.S. intelligence analysts had been caught off guard, and they now warned that Iraq’s next target might be Saudi Arabia, the largest oil exporter in the Middle East and a longtime U.S. ally.

Moving swiftly, Bush orchestrated a multilateral, international response. Four days after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, he launched Operation Desert Shield by sending several hundred thousand U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. Bush convinced the Saudi government, concerned about allowing Western troops on sacred Islamic soil, to accept a U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia. After consulting with European leaders, Bush approached the UN, which denounced Iraqi aggression, ordered economic sanctions against Iraq, and authorized the United States to lead an international force into the Gulf region if Saddam Hussein’s troops did not withdraw from Kuwait.

Bush assembled a massive coalition force, ultimately nearly 500,000 troops from the United States and some 200,000 from other countries. He claimed a moral obligation to rescue Kuwait, and his policymakers also spoke frankly about the economic threat that Hussein’s aggression posed for the oil-dependent economies of the United States and its allies. These arguments persuaded Congress to approve a resolution backing the use of force.

In mid-January 1991 the United States launched an air war against Iraq and, after a period of devastating aerial bombardment, began a ground offensive in late

February. Coalition forces, enjoying air supremacy, decimated Saddam Hussein's armies in a matter of days. U.S. casualties were relatively light (148 combat deaths). Estimates of Iraqi casualties ranged from 25,000 to 100,000 deaths. Although this **Persian Gulf War** lasted scarcely six weeks, it took an enormous toll on highways, bridges, communications, and other infrastructure facilities in both Iraq and Kuwait.

In a controversial decision, Bush stopped short of ousting Saddam Hussein, a goal that the UN had never approved and that U.S. military planners considered too costly and risky. Instead, the United States, backed by the UN, maintained its economic pressure, ordered the dismantling of Iraq's capability to produce nuclear and bacteriological weapons, and enforced "no-fly" zones over northern and southern Iraq to help protect the Kurds and Shi'a Muslims from Hussein's continued persecution. The Persian Gulf War temporarily boosted George H. W. Bush's popularity. An increasingly vocal and influential group of critics, however, argued that Saddam Hussein should have been overthrown. Ten years later, with President Bush's son as president, they would get another chance.

Bush's economic foreign policy, although less visible than his leadership during the Persian Gulf War, comprised a key part of his post-Cold War vision. It pressed a program of international economic integration. During the mid-1980s huge debts that Third World nations owed to U.S. institutions had threatened the international banking system, but most of these obligations had been renegotiated by the early 1990s. Market economies, which replaced centrally planned ones, began to emerge in former communist states. Western Europe moved toward economic integration. Most nations of the Pacific Rim experienced steady economic growth. The president supported (but was unable to pass) a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which proposed to eliminate tariff barriers and join Canada, the United States, and Mexico together in the largest free-market zone in the world.

Ultimately, however, voters judged Bush's record on foreign affairs as something of a muddle. He had organized an international coalition against Iraq, assisted a peaceful post-Cold War transition in Russia and Eastern Europe, and embraced global economic integration. Despite these successes, the president publicly projected indecisiveness. The United States remained on the sidelines as full-scale warfare erupted among the states of the former Yugoslavia, with Serbs launching a brutal campaign of territorial aggrandizement and "ethnic cleansing" against Bosnian Muslims. In Africa, when severe famine wracked Somalia, Bush ordered U.S. troops to secure supply lines for humanitarian aid, but the American public remained wary of this military mission. As the old goal of containing the Soviet Union became irrelevant, George H. W. Bush failed to effectively articulate new ones that might inspire voters.

The Election of 1992

The inability to project a coherent vision for either domestic or foreign policy threatened Bush's reelection and forced concessions to the New Right. Dan Quayle, although clearly a liability with voters outside his conservative constituency, returned as Bush's running mate. The president allowed New Right activists, who talked about "a religious war" for "the soul of America" and pictured Democrats as the enemy of family values, to dominate the 1992 Republican National Convention. Conservative Democrats and independents that supported Ronald Reagan and Bush in the previous three presidential elections, found this rhetoric unsettling and looked back toward the Democratic side.

Bush's Democratic challenger, Governor William Jefferson Clinton of Arkansas, stressed economic issues. Campaigning as a "New Democrat," Bill Clinton promised job creation, deficit reduction, and an overhaul of the nation's healthcare system. Sounding almost like a Republican, Clinton pledged to shrink the size of government and to "end this [welfare] system as we know it." "People who can work ought to go to work, and no one should be able to stay on welfare forever," he insisted. This rhetoric made it difficult for Bush to label Clinton as a "big government liberal."

Clinton's focus on the economy helped deflect attention from the sociocultural issues on which he was vulnerable. As a college student, he had avoided service in Vietnam and, while in England as a Rhodes Scholar, had demonstrated against the Vietnam War. When Bush, a decorated veteran of the Second World War, challenged the patriotism of his Democratic challenger, Clinton countered by emphasizing, rather than repudiating, his roots in the 1960s. He appeared on MTV and touted his devotion to (relatively soft) rock music. In addition, he chose Senator Albert Gore of Tennessee, a Vietnam veteran, as his running mate.

The 1992 election brought Clinton a surprisingly easy victory. The quixotic campaign of Ross Perot, a Texas billionaire who financed his own third-party run, took votes from both insider Bush and outsider Clinton. With Perot in the race, Clinton garnered only 43 percent of the popular vote but won 370 electoral votes by carrying 32 states and the District of Columbia. Bush won a majority only among white Protestants in the South. In contrast, Clinton carried the Jewish, African American, and Latino vote by large margins and even gained a plurality among people who had served in the Vietnam War. He also ran well among independents that had supported Reagan and Bush during the 1980s. Perhaps most surprising, about 55 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, a turnout that reversed 32 years of steady decline in voter participation.

THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The activism associated with the 1960s became firmly embedded in most areas of American life in the decades that followed. The proliferation of locally based activism, often focused on neighborhood-related projects, such as safer streets and cleaner parks, prompted one historian to see a "backyard revolution" taking place during the 1970s and 1980s. Even the U.S. Congress, hardly an institution inclined to fund domestic revolutions, recognized the value of locally based activism and created, in 1978, the National Consumer Cooperative Bank. Legislators envisioned it providing loans to support grass-roots enterprises. By the early 21st century, virtually every public forum featured the influence, and the clash, of activists who claimed to represent some particular constituency or goal.

Mass demonstrations reminiscent of those against the Vietnam War remained one tool of advocacy and protest. Both anti-abortion and pro-choice forces, for example, regularly demonstrated in Washington, D.C. During the 1980s, the Clamshell Alliance conducted a campaign of civil disobedience against a nuclear reactor being built in Seabrook, New Hampshire, and a coalition of West Coast activists waged a lengthy, unsuccessful struggle to close the University of California's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which was developing nuclear weapons. In nearly every major city and many smaller towns, women's groups staged annual Take Back the Night rallies to call attention to the issue of sexual assault.

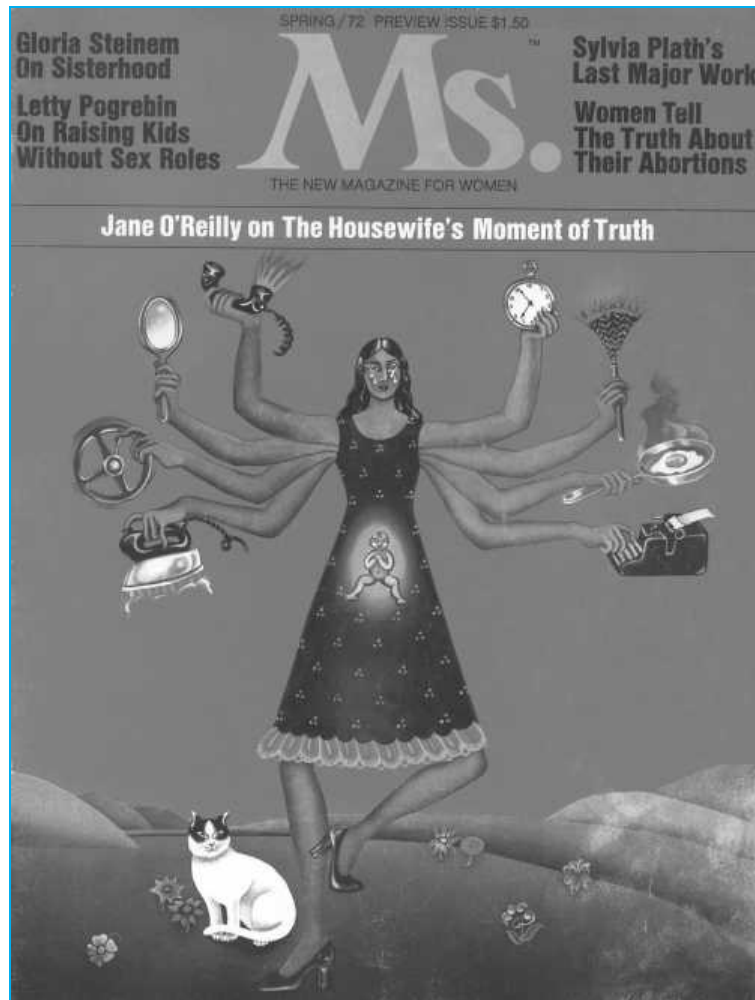
The media increasingly ignored most mass demonstrations, however, unless they sparked violent conflict. In 1991, for example, 30,000 Korean Americans staged a march for racial peace in Los Angeles. Although it was the largest demonstration ever conducted by any Asian American group, even the local media failed to cover it. Only C-Span, a niche network devoted to public affairs programming, provided minimal coverage of events of social and political protest. Social activism from all parts of the political spectrum and all sections of the country, in short, did not go away during the 1980s, but it did take forms less reliant than during the Sixties on media spectacles.

Women's Issues In this political environment, women's groups adopted a range of methods to rally new supporters and re-energize their core constituencies. Struggles over gender-related issues had emerged within the labor movement and the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s. Initially, many of the men involved in these causes complained that issues of gender equality interfered with broader fights to redirect labor, racial, or foreign policies. Women, however, insisted on calling attention to their second-class status in movements that claimed to be egalitarian. The spread of the birth control pill during the 1960s gave women greater control over reproductive choices but also complicated the meaning of "sexual freedom." Throughout the 1970s women promoted "consciousness-raising" sessions to discuss how *political* empowerment was inseparable from *personal* power relationships involving housework, child rearing, sexuality, and economic independence. "The personal is political" became a watchword for the new women's movement.

The number of groups addressing issues of concern to women continually expanded. As part of the new activism, the National Organization for Women (NOW) became generally identified with the rights-based agenda of the mainstream of the Democratic Party. African American women often formed separate organizations that emphasized issues of cultural and ethnic identity. Chicana groups coalesced within the United Farm Workers' (UFW) movement and other Mexican American organizations. Lesbians also organized their own groups, often allying with an emerging gay rights movement. Many U.S. feminist organizations joined with groups in other nations on behalf of international women's rights. Although never embracing the word "feminism," conservative women also played important leadership roles in causes associated with the New Right.

With agendas often varying along lines of class, race, ethnicity, and religion, the women's movement remained highly diverse, but women from different backgrounds often cooperated to build new institutions and networks. Their efforts included battered-women's shelters; health and birthing clinics specializing in women's medicine; rape crisis centers; economic development counseling for women-owned businesses; union-organizing efforts led by women; organizations of women in specific businesses or professions; women and gender studies programs in colleges and universities; and academic journals and popular magazines devoted to women's issues. Pressure for gender equity also affected existing institutions. Country clubs and service organizations began admitting women members. Many Protestant denominations came to accept women into the ministry, and Reform Judaism placed women in its pulpits. Educational institutions adopted "gender-fair" hiring practices and curricula. American women by the beginning of the 21st century lived in an environment significantly different from that of their mothers.

Ms. Debuts. Styling itself as “More than a Magazine—a Movement,” *Ms.* has always featured eye-catching covers that help to chart the changing priorities of feminist activists. Initially an experimental offshoot of *New York* magazine, *Ms.* debuted in January 1972, under the editorship of Gloria Steinem, with this surrealistic, vividly symbolic cover.



Reprinted by permission of Ms. Magazine, © 1972

Economic self-sufficiency became an especially pressing issue. Increases in AFDC payments and an expansion of the Food Stamp program had boosted social welfare payments for single mothers with children during the 1960s, but the economic dislocations of the following decades undercut the value, measured in constant dollars, of these benefits. Reagan-era budget cuts for social programs also took their toll, especially in urban locales. Homeless shelters, which once catered almost exclusively to single men, began serving growing numbers of women and children. As this feminization of poverty became of major concern, proposals proliferated on the state and federal levels for reshaping patterns of governmental support by limiting direct governmental payments and emphasizing strategies to move women, even those with young children, into the workforce.

The job market, however, remained laced with inequalities. Women constituted 30 percent of the labor force in 1950 and more than 45 percent in 2001. Although women increasingly entered the professions and gained unionized positions (by 2000 nearly 45 percent of union members were women, compared with 18 percent in 1960), the average female worker still earned around 75 cents for every dollar taken home by men. “Glass ceilings” limited women’s chances for promotion, and childcare expenses often fell disproportionately on women who worked outside the home.

Sexual harassment on the job became a controversial issue. Most women’s groups pressed government and private employers to curtail sexually charged behaviors that they saw demeaning women and exploiting their lack of power vis-à-vis male

supervisors and coworkers. In 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that sexual harassment constituted a form of discrimination covered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In 1991, the issue gained national attention when Anita Hill, an African American law professor, accused Clarence Thomas, an African American nominee for the U.S. Supreme Court, of having sexually harassed her when both worked for the federal government. Feminists denounced the all-male Senate Judiciary Committee, which was responsible for considering Thomas's nomination, for failing even to understand, let alone investigate seriously, the issue of sexual harassment. Although the Senate narrowly approved Thomas for the High Court, women's groups mobilized female voters and elected four women as U.S. senators in 1992.

Sexual harassment also became of concern to the U.S. military, which began to recruit women more actively. The service academies accepted female cadets, and women found places within the military hierarchy. Soon, however, revelations about harassment and even sexual assaults against female naval officers by male comrades revealed problems. Attempts by Navy officials to cover up sexual harassment during the 1991 "Tail-hook" convention provoked outrage, and several high-ranking officers were forced to step down.

Sexual Politics

Issues involving gays and lesbians also became more public and political. In 1969 New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a bar in Greenwich Village with a largely homosexual clientele. Patrons resisted arrest, and the resultant confrontations pitted the neighborhood's gay and lesbian activists, who claimed to be the victims of police harassment, against law enforcement officials.

Historians of sexuality have come to criticize what they call "the Stonewall Narrative," in which events at a single Greenwich Village bar ignited what would become known as the Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgendered (LGBT) movement. Recent studies emphasize that LGBT activism did not suddenly emerge in 1969 but instead grew out of earlier movements, such as the Mattachine Society, and cultural communities such as the Beats (see Chapter 29).

Still, the 1969 events at the Stonewall Inn, because of the prominence they received in mainstream and alternative media, marked an important benchmark in sexual politics. Gay and lesbian activism became an important part of the larger "movement of movements" that continued during the 1970s and 1980s. Thousands of advocacy and support groups, such as New York City's Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), sprang up. As many individuals "came out of the closet," newspapers, theaters, nightspots, and religious groups proudly identified themselves as activists. LGBT communities emerged particularly in larger cities and benefited from a general relaxation of legal and cultural controls over the portrayal and practice of sexuality. They demanded that law enforcement officials treat attacks against them no less seriously than attacks against all other communities. They also asserted constitutional claims to equal access to housing, jobs, and benefits for domestic partners.

One issue, with international implications, was especially urgent. A human immunodeficiency virus produced an immune deficiency syndrome, HIV-AIDS, a contagious disease for which medical science offered virtually nothing in the way of cure. The disease could be transmitted through the careless use of intravenous drugs, tainted blood supplies, and unprotected sexual intercourse. At first, the incidence of HIV-AIDS in the United States was primarily limited to gay men, and activists charged that, as a consequence, cultural and religious conservatives placed a low priority on medical efforts to

understand its causes, check its spread, or devise a cure. The resultant controversy over medical funding galvanized empowerment efforts among LGBT organizations, such as the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP. With the development of prevention programs and drugs that could combat HIV-AIDS, however, most public figures came to support new efforts both at home and overseas, particularly in Africa, to address HIV-AIDS. It has remained a modern scourge threatening advancement in many parts of the world, but its specific identification with LGBT rights has faded.

Activism Among African Americans

The emphasis on group identity as the fulcrum for social activism became especially strong among racial and ethnic communities. Extending the movement of movements of the 1960s, groups emphasized pride in their distinctive cultural traditions and insisted that differences should be affirmed rather than feared.

Having accomplished many of the legislative goals of the 1960s, African American activists, one observed, were “heading into a completely new era, and we don’t know what to make of it.” Mobilizing to promote political and economic advancement, however, continued in many directions.

African American leaders became increasingly prominent in national and local politics. One media spotlight fell on the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Jackson had spent the late 1960s in Chicago directing a local effort sponsored by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). After Dr. King’s 1968 assassination, Jackson soon clashed with the SCLC’s new leadership, and in 1971 he created his own Chicago-based organization, Operation PUSH. One of many local efforts, Operation PUSH pressured public officials and corporations to create jobs and promote community development projects. Abundant media coverage, however, made Reverend Jackson best known for addressing a wide range of national and international issues, including the status of the Palestinians and apartheid in South Africa. During the 1980s, he formed the National Rainbow Coalition to provide a broad geographic and ethnic umbrella for his movement and to facilitate his campaigns for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988. Jackson’s efforts garnered some primary victories but made only a minimal impact on national or even Democratic Party politics.

Other types of political activism, however, left a significant imprint on electoral politics during the 1970s and 1980s. The civil rights movement of the 1960s (see Chapter 29) provided the legal-constitutional basis for greater political participation by African Americans, and change came rapidly. In 1970, 13 African American members of Congress established the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) to form a common front on a wide range of foreign and domestic issues. Picking up the mantle of A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin’s “Freedom Budget” of the 1960s, the CBC regularly issued a hypothetical “Alternative Budget,” which targeted more money toward social initiatives. The caucus also campaigned on behalf of better relations between the United States and African nations and took stands on issues, such as inequities in drug sentencing, that particularly affected African Americans.

Hoping to create a more broadly based movement, a diverse group convened in 1972 at a National Black Political Convention in Gary, Indiana. They pieced together a National Black Political Agenda, a lengthy list of far-reaching social and economic initiatives. The document’s divergent goals and conflicting principles ultimately divided more than it unified, but the Gary gathering did anticipate African American

political movements that gained momentum during the two decades that followed. By the end of the 1980s, more than 7,000 African Americans (including nearly 1,500 women) held political office. The year the Voting Rights Act passed, 1965, there had been fewer than 200. Urban centers with significant African American populations, such as Gary and Detroit, elected black mayors, but so did cities such as Denver, where African American candidates successfully formed cross-ethnic alliances. The new direction pursued by the Republican Party during the 1970s and 1980s meant that virtually all of this political activity occurred within Democratic ranks.

In addition to experiencing ballot-box victories, African Americans also moved into government-related employment. By the end of the 1980s, nearly half of all black professionals worked at some level of government or in some public sector position. These jobs provided the economic basis for an expanding African American middle class.

This form of black political activism confronted clear limits. Few mayors, whatever their ethnic identity, could mobilize the economic resources that large cities required to deal with rising crime rates, decaying infrastructures, and galloping inflation. African American voters had been crucial to Jimmy Carter's 1976 victory, and his administration did use CETA job-training money and public works spending to try to stabilize employment opportunities. Still, the stagnant economy under Carter and the urban budget cutting, which characterized the Reagan years, hit African Americans in inner cities with severity.

In addition to political activism, a diverse set of cultural movements sought to build on the identity politics that had emerged during the 1960s. The hyper-violent cycle of "Blaxploitation movies," such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Coffy* (1973), of the 1970s prompted heated debate over whether representing urban black life "like it [supposedly] was," rather than "like it [supposedly] should be," advanced African American interests. The 1980s movies of Spike Lee also created controversy by tackling issues such as politics of gender and "light skin" in African American life. *Do the Right Thing* (1989), arguably an even more ambitious movie—though smaller budgeted—than the epic *Malcolm X* (1991), provided a complex meditation about African American heroes, multiculturalism, law enforcement patterns, and personal activism amidst the uncertainties of urban life in the 1980s.

Prominent academics such as **Henry Lewis Gates, Jr.** worked in another venue to complicate the study of the African American experience and to challenge the movement that advocated creating an "Afrocentric" school curriculum. African American culture, in the view of Gates, was not "a thing apart, separate from the whole, having no influence on the shape and shaping of American culture." Gates insisted on viewing African American authors, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, as writers who take "the blackness of the culture for granted" and use this as "a springboard to write about those human emotions that we share with everyone else." The cultural works of African Americans, in short, could simultaneously be seen as unique and different, *and also* be viewed in relationship to broader cultural traditions.

Activism Among American Indians

Native Americans mounted activist movements along two broad fronts. Indians had, of course, longstanding identities based on their tribal affiliation, and many issues, particularly those involving land and treaty disputes, turned on specific, tribal-based claims. Other questions, which seemed to require strategies that extended beyond a single tribe or band, became identified as "pan-Indian" in nature.

In 1969 people from several tribes began a two-year sit-in designed to dramatize a history of broken treaty promises, at the former federal prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco harbor. Expanding on this tactic, the American Indian Movement (AIM), created in 1968 by young activists from several Northern Plains tribes, adopted even more confrontational approaches. Violent clashes with both federal officials and older American Indian leaders erupted in 1973 on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. In response, federal officials targeted members of AIM with illegal surveillance and a series of controversial criminal prosecutions.

Meanwhile, important social and legal changes were taking place. In the Civil Rights Act of 1968, which contained several sections that became known as the “Indian Bill of Rights,” Congress extended most of the provisions of the constitutional Bill of Rights to Native Americans living on reservations, while reconfirming the legitimacy of tribal laws. Federal legislation and several Supreme Court decisions in the 1970s subsequently reinforced the principle of “tribal self-determination.” Tribal identification itself required legal action. By the early 21st century, the federal government officially recognized nearly 600 separate tribes and bands. After 1978 Congress also provided funds for educational institutions that would teach job skills and preserve tribal cultures.

Tapping the expertise of the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), tribes pressed demands that derived from old treaties with the U.S. government. Some campaigns sought recognition of fishing and agricultural rights and often provoked resentment among non-Indians who argued that these claims, based on federal authority, should not take precedence over state and local laws. American Indians also sued to protect tribal water rights and traditional religious ceremonies, some of which included the ritualistic use of drugs such as peyote. In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which required universities and museums to return human remains and sacred objects to tribes that requested them.

Claiming exemption from state gaming laws, Native Americans began to open bingo halls and then full-blown casinos. In 1988 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could not prohibit gambling operations on tribal land, and Congress responded with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Gambling emerged as one of the most lucrative sectors of the nation’s entertainment business, and Indian-owned casinos thrived. Ironically, the glitzy, tribal-owned casinos often financed tribal powwows and other efforts to nurture traditional cultural practices. Sometimes the competition to establish casinos in prime locations prompted intertribal political and legal conflicts.

To forestall the disappearance of native languages, American Indian activists urged bilingualism and renewed attention to tribal rituals. Indian groups also denounced the use of stereotypical nicknames, such as “Chiefs” and “Redskins,” and Indian-related logos in amateur and professional sports. The federal government assisted this cultural-pride movement by funding two National Museums of the American Indian, one in New York and the other in Washington, D.C. The National Park Service changed the name of “Custer Battlefield” in Montana to “Little Bighorn Battlefield,” redesigning its exhibits to honor American Indian culture.

Activism in Spanish-Speaking Communities

Spanish-speaking Americans, who constituted the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, highlighted the diversity and complexity of identity. Many Spanish-speaking people, especially in the Southwest, preferred the umbrella term “Latino,” whereas others, particularly in Florida, used the term “Hispanic.” At the

same time, people the U.S. Census began (in 1980) labeling “Hispanic” most frequently identified themselves according to the specific Spanish-speaking country or commonwealth from which they or their ancestors had immigrated.

Mexican Americans, members of the oldest and most numerous Spanish-speaking group, could tap a long tradition of social activism. The late 1960s saw an emerging spirit of **Chicanismo**, a populist-style pride in a heritage that could be traced back to the ancient civilizations of Middle America. Young activists made “Chicano/a,” terms of derision that most Mexican Americans had generally avoided in the past, into a rallying cry.

In cities in the Southwest during the 1970s, advocates of *Chicanismo* gained considerable cultural influence. Members of La Raza Unida, a political party founded in 1967, began to win local elections. At the same time, Mexican American communities experienced a cultural flowering. New Spanish-language newspapers and journals reinforced a growing sense of pride, and many churches sponsored festivals with ethnic dancing, mural painting, poetry, and literature. Mexican Americans successfully pushed for programs in Chicano/a Studies at colleges and universities.

Developments in San Antonio, Texas, a city with a large Mexican American population, suggested the potential fruits of grassroots political organizing. In the 1970s Ernesto Cortes, Jr., took the lead in founding Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), a group that brought the energy and talents of Mexican Americans, particularly women, into the city’s public arena for the first time. Mexican American activists worked with Anglo business leaders and Democratic politicians such as Henry Cisneros, who became the city’s mayor in 1981. Other locally based organizations formed on the model of COPS, such as United Neighborhood Organization (UNO) in Los Angeles, also worked on community concerns.

On the national level, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), established in 1968, emerged as a highly visible advocacy group ready to lobby or litigate. Professional groups, such as the National Network of Hispanic Women, also proliferated. Mexican American activists, however, became especially well known for their labor-organizing efforts, particularly among farm workers and in the rapidly expanding service sector.

Efforts to organize agricultural workers, who were largely of Mexican and Filipino descent, dramatized both the successes and the difficulties of expanding the union movement to largely immigrant workers. **Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez**, charismatic leaders who emulated the nonviolent tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., vaulted the United Farm Workers (UFW) into public attention during the 1970s. Chavez undertook personal hunger strikes, and Huerta helped organize well-publicized consumer boycotts of lettuce and grapes to pressure growers into collective bargaining agreements with the UFW. Despite some successes, the UFW steadily lost ground during the later 1970s and the 1980s. Strong anti-union stands by growers and the continued influx of new immigrants eager for work undercut the UFW’s efforts. When Chavez died in April 1993, the UFW was struggling.

Social activism among Puerto Ricans in the United States emerged more slowly. Some stateside Puerto Ricans focused their political energy on the persistent “status” question—that is, whether Puerto Rico should seek independence, strive for statehood, or retain a commonwealth connection to the mainland. New York City’s Puerto Rican Day Parade became the city’s largest ethnic celebration and an important focus of cultural pride. A 1976 report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights,



© Ralf-Finn Hestoft/CORBIS

Mural Art in Chicago. Themes in Mexican history and culture, inspired by the great Mexican muralists, appeared in Mexican American communities throughout the country.

however, concluded that Puerto Ricans remained “the last in line” for government-funded benefits and opportunity programs. Over time, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and allied groups helped Puerto Ricans surmount obstacles to the ballot box and political office.

Cuban Americans, who had begun immigrating in large numbers to south Florida after Fidel Castro came to power, generally enjoyed greater access to education and higher incomes. These Cuban immigrants also tended to be politically conservative, generally voted Republican, and lobbied for a hard line toward Castro’s communist government. Cuban Americans quickly developed a dense network of institutions that leveraged them into positions of power in Florida politics and civic affairs.

Beneath a common Spanish language, then, lay great diversity in terms of economic status, national and cultural identification, political affiliation, and activist goals and organizations. Established communities that identified with Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba developed a wide range of mobilizing and organizing styles. More recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Central America, who were the most economically deprived and the least organized, also began to add their voices and concerns.

Activism Among Asian Americans

Americans of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and other backgrounds began to create an Asian American movement in the 1970s. Organizations such as the Asian Pacific Planning Council (APPCON), founded in 1976, lobbied to obtain government funding for projects that benefited Asian American communities. The Asian Law Caucus, founded during the early 1970s by opponents of U.S.

intervention in Vietnam, and the Committee against Anti-Asian Violence, created a decade later in response to a wave of racially motivated attacks, mobilized for a wide range of legal battles. During the 1970s Asian American studies programs also took shape at colleges and universities, particularly on the West Coast. By the early 1980s, Asian American political activists enjoyed growing influence, especially within the Democratic Party, and began gaining public office.

Emphasizing a broad, Asian American identity, however, raised questions of inclusion, exclusion, and rivalry. Filipino American activists, members of the second largest Asian American group in the United States in 1990, often resisted the Asian American label because they believed that Chinese Americans or Japanese Americans dominated groups such as APPCON. Many people of Filipino descent focused on specific goals, particularly an effort to obtain citizenship and veteran's benefits for former soldiers of the Second World War who had fought against Japan in the Philippines. Japanese American groups also lobbied on behalf of specific issues, and in 1988 Congress formally apologized and voted to approve a reparations payment of \$20,000 to every living Japanese American who had been confined in internment camps during the Second World War. Similarly, Hmong and Vietnamese groups pursued their own concerns related to the aftermath of the struggles in Indochina.

Socioeconomic differences often made it difficult to frame a single Asian American agenda. Although many groups showed remarkable upward educational and economic mobility during the late 1980s and early 1990s, immigrants who were especially recent or impoverished often struggled to find jobs that paid more than the minimum wage.

As a result of combined pressure from different ethnic groups, the federal government finally decided to designate "Asian or Pacific Islanders" (API) as a single pan-ethnic category in the censuses of 1990 and 2000. It also provided, however, nine specifically enumerated subcategories (such as Hawaiian or Filipino) and allowed other API groups (such as Hmong or Samoan) to write in their respective ethnic identifications. Thus, the term Asian American—which by the beginning of the 21st century applied to more than 10 million people and dozens of different ethnicities—both reflected, and was challenged by, the new emphasis on ethnic identity.

Anti-Government Activism

Ronald Reagan's first Inaugural Address declared that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." As president, Reagan exempted national security institutions from this principle and rarely applied it literally to basic safety-net programs such as Social Security and Medicare. In the face of budget deficits, Reagan proved willing to raise taxes to support government's expenditures. His claim that government action was almost always harmful, however, did appeal to the all-important New Right segment of the larger Reagan coalition, reason enough for its titular leader to lace his speeches with condemnations of the same government over which he presided. During the 1980s, denunciations of federal power spread throughout the culture, propelled especially by controversies over affirmative action and various regulatory rules.

Affirmative action programs had grown from bi-partisan roots in the administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. Public officials, proponents argued, should act affirmatively to help people who belonged to groups with a shared history of discrimination—especially African Americans, Latinos, and

women—obtain an equitable share of the nation’s jobs, public spending, and educational programs. Affirmative action would help compensate for past discrimination and for continued, sometimes hidden, prejudice that laws merely guaranteeing formal equality failed to reach. Advocates of affirmative action emphasized that *any* process of selection inevitably “affirmed” some qualities, such as family or old school lineages, at the expense of others. Efforts at undoing years of discrimination against entire groups of people, in this view, required a complicated, seemingly paradoxical view of what counted as “equal” treatment by government.

Critics of affirmative action, however, began to identify it as one of the most dangerous examples of increased governmental power. They delighted in noting that until the mid-1960s even supporters of civil rights had opposed government officials categorizing individuals according to group identities based on race or ethnicity. They often quoted Dr. King’s words about judging people by the “content of their character” rather than the “color of their skin” and argued that government should remain “blind” to color and gender by treating everyone equally. They rejected the claim that policymakers needed to craft special rules or programs in order to eliminate discriminatory barriers to individual opportunity. Even some beneficiaries of these programs, such as the Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, charged that the derogatory label of “affirmative action applicant” threw into question the talents and capabilities of individuals. More broadly, critics of affirmative action programs denounced “set aside” job programs and special educational admission procedures for previously disadvantaged groups as examples of illegal quotas, violations of constitutional guarantees, and even harbingers of totalitarianism. Did not affirmative action *on behalf of* people in some groups always constitute “reverse discrimination” *against* those in others? The claim of reverse discrimination became particularly emotional when members of one affirmative action group, despite apparently inferior scores on aptitude or admissions exams, received preferences for employment or for entry into educational institutions.

In the midst of this controversy, federal courts managed to square affirmative action programs with older antidiscrimination precedents. They struck down affirmative action plans that contained inflexible quotas but upheld ones that made group identity only one of several criteria for making hiring or educational decisions. In the celebrated Supreme Court decision popularly known as the *Bakke* case (1978), a majority of justices endorsed affirmative action. Affirmative action programs in educational settings could pass constitutional muster because they aimed at redressing past discrimination *and* because they contributed to “diversity,” an intangible social and psychological quality important in any social, educational, or business environment. Many leaders of corporations, educational establishments, and the military came to endorse this *Bakke* principle: Diversity benefited not just applicants from historically discriminated groups but *all* people who worked within those environments as well as *all* those who relied on their services and expertise.

This apparent acceptance of affirmative action programs, which government power would ultimately enforce, mobilized anti-government activists who opposed such programs. They mounted new informational, as well as political offensives, and found a close ally in New Right radio. During the 1970s the FM dial had become dominated by musical programming, and many AM radio stations switched to an all-talk format. One of the personalities who made the switch was Rush Hudson

Limbaugh, III. Raised in a staunchly conservative Republican family, Limbaugh broke into AM as a radio host in several different markets under (as was the custom) several different names. Then in 1984 Limbaugh took over an already-prominent New Right talk show in California. Four years later, Limbaugh's ability to galvanize anti-government listeners earned him a spot in New York City and propelled him to the top ranks of a rapidly expanding, informal network for anti-government activism.

New Right radio also thrived by attacking federal environmental regulations in the name of defending property rights. During the 1970s, western entrepreneurs associated with the sagebrush rebellion advocated transferring to state and private hands some of the vast amount of land held by the federal government for recreational parks and environmental purposes. Freed of restrictions from Washington, the rebels argued, the land could be developed. As part of a broader effort sometimes called the "wise use movement," they insisted that westerners knew better than far-away government bureaucrats how to make productive use of lands that lay within their states. A parallel effort, the "property rights movement" emerged across much of the country, particularly in areas of scenic beauty and where plans of suburban developers encountered environmental restrictions. Private builders denounced government for insisting on environmental impact assessments, thus limiting the ability of property owners to do what they thought best with their land. In this movement, anti-government activists fought not only regulations from Washington but from any governmental body that claimed the power to regulate the use of private property in the name of some larger public purpose.

The New Right radio programs that denounced government rules flourished within a freshly deregulated communications industry. Beginning in 1949, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the government agency that regulated broadcasting, had required stations to represent a diversity of viewpoints. This "Fairness Doctrine" survived constitutional challenge in the courts. Anti-government activists in the legal community, however, persevered in their effort to overturn the doctrine. In 1986, two conservative jurists, Antonin Scalia and Robert Bork, authored a federal court decision ruling that congress had never given the FCC any authority to mandate fairness. One year later, this decision prompted an FCC dominated by members appointed by Ronald Reagan to eliminate the Fairness Doctrine. New Right radio now enjoyed freedom to ramp up its rhetoric against governmental power.

The overturning of the Fairness Doctrine dovetailed with perhaps the central tenet of the new anti-government activism: "Free markets," not government, provided the best structure for enhancing individual freedom and ensuring social-economic progress. The faith that markets served people better than governments, an idea older than the U.S. Constitution, had taken a considerable hit during the economic disarray of the 1930s. As a consequence, New Dealers had built on a very different conviction popularized under the label of Keynesianism: that government regulation must tame market excesses and prevent them from unleashing irrational and self-destructive forces into the larger political economy (see Chapters 25, 27, and 28). In the 1950s and 1960s, conservative academics such as Milton Friedman had fired away at the Keynesian underpinnings of the New Deal-Great Society governmental structure, but during the 1970s and 1980s, conservatives rolled out much heavier weaponry.

A talented group of activist-academics in the fields of law and economics at the University of Chicago took the lead. The economists crafted highly technical,



Anti-Abortion Protest, 1989. *Legalized abortions became a major political issue after the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Here, on the 16th anniversary of *Roe*, protesters assemble in front of the Supreme Court building.*

mathematically complex arguments for ideas that soon became the new economic orthodoxy. Government regulators could never understand the risks from economic activities such as trading stocks or lending money as well as the people who actually worked in the marketplace. Markets almost always got things right, at least in the long run, while government regulators invariably got them wrong. Moreover, governmental bureaucracies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Federal Reserve Board were not really regulating markets in the public interest. Government bureaucrats were just another “special interest” looking out for themselves or for some other interest groups. They seldom acted as honest brokers between contending interests, as the interest-group pluralist model of the 1950s had claimed.

Most importantly, the argument went, bureaucrats armed with the power of government invariably interfered with the most magical quality of free markets—their ability to provide self-correcting mechanisms that allowed a complex economy to run efficiently with little intervention. On those rare occasions when economic markets seemingly failed, such as during the 1930s, the failure would be temporary. From this perspective, the flood of government regulations unleashed during the New Deal era had prolonged, rather than ended, the economic downturn by preventing the free market from correcting itself. Moreover, the continued reliance on government regulation explained the economic malaise of the early 1970s. The market’s ability to rebound during the deregulation of the 1980s seemed proof of the new economic assumptions.

A widening circle of academic and legal proponents of these anti-government ideas actively pressed this case. New economic textbooks challenged the Keynesian-oriented ones that had once dominated college and university classrooms. A new legal field, called “law and economics,” attracted lawyers and judges (including Bork and Scalia) who began to craft doctrines that accorded with free-market assumptions rather than the pro-regulatory ones that had guided New

Deal-Great Society jurisprudence. Economist-activists carried the case against government regulation into the conservative think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, which were helping to shape public policy during the late 1970s and 1980s. Taking advantage of the loosened regulations, the business and financial world began to test the theories of self-regulating markets on Wall Street by devising new modes of investment and creative financial instruments.

By the end of the 1980s, opposition to government had become a prominent feature of American political culture. Although the left-leaning movements of the 1960s still argued for an activist government to promote social equality and economic fairness, they found a significant challenge in those who claimed that reducing the power of government would be the best way to solve social-economic problems and preserve liberty. Within this debate, anti-government activists, like other activists, hardly moved in lockstep. Some cared deeply about opposing new rules for affirmative action; others placed greater priority on economic or environmental deregulation. While remaining a coalition of disparate parts, however, anti-government activism (always linked to anti-tax sentiment) became a powerful force. It drew populist strength from the expertly crafted speeches of Ronald Reagan and the bombast of New Right radio. It found justification within the mathematically informed papers of Nobel Prize winners and top-rung law professors. Successfully challenging the once-dominant political agendas of the Democratic Party, it propelled the mainstream of the Republican Party decidedly rightward, established a strong foothold in public policy and media discussions, and succeeded in remapping the nation's cultural and informational landscape.

CONCLUSION

The Reagan revolution of the 1980s rested on a conservative movement that had been taking shape for several decades. New Right Republicans distrusted extending federal government power, advocated sharp tax cuts with deregulation, and stressed a sociocultural agenda emphasizing “traditional” values. The dozen years of Republican dominance of the White House, from 1980 to 1992, helped shift the terms of political debate in the United States. The “liberal” label became one that most Democrats sought to avoid. In the international realm, the Reagan and Bush presidencies facilitated the end of the Cold War, a struggle that had defined U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Second World War.

Meanwhile, American society seemed to fragment into specialized identifications. Social activism increasingly organized around sexual, racial, ethnic, and ideological identities. The New Right's stress on limiting the power of government and promoting conservative values increasingly reconfigured discussions about how government power could best promote liberty and equality.