

AP United States History
Units 8 and 9: The Rise of Conservatism
Topic- The Rise of Conservatism, 1964-1992

The Great Society

Explain the causes and effects of continuing policy debates about the role of the federal government over time.

Despite an overall affluence in postwar America, advocates raised concerns about the prevalence and persistence of poverty as a national problem.

Liberalism, based on anti-communism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of government power to achieve social goals at home, reached a high point of political influence by the mid-1960s.

Liberal ideas found expression in Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, which attempted to use federal legislation and programs to end racial discrimination, eliminate poverty, and address other social issues.

If we are to trace the arc of America in the present (America by 2016), our first step to take would be back in time to the Election of 1964. In that election, Lyndon Baines Johnson of Texas, who had just become the President of the United States following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, was running against Barry Goldwater, the Senator from Arizona. The two candidates were both anti-communist, but in their philosophy of government, they differed greatly. In early 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act ending segregation in every public place in American life. Goldwater opposed it. In fact, Goldwater opposed the use of the power of the federal government to impact either social or economic change in American life. The keynote address at the Republican National Convention where Goldwater was nominated for the presidency was given by an actor who had just entered into the political realm— Ronald Reagan. Reagan warned his listeners of the intrusion of government into the lives of the American people and of Johnson's domestic agenda, which LBJ termed, "The Great Society," in a speech on the campus of the University of Michigan. Johnson wanted to use the power of the federal government to declare war on poverty in America. He wanted to improve education, implement civil rights measures, and beautify the countryside. To that end, once he was elected to the presidency, he passed an avalanche of legislation which introduced programs that most of us would easily recognize today.

The Great Society programs can in some respects, be seen as extensions of the New Deal programs, such as Social Security, but each went a step further. For example, while Social Security provided old-age benefits, two new programs, Medicare and Medicaid were introduced which provided for medical care for both the elderly and the indigent. While the New Deal had offered public works programs, the Great Society created a new program, the Job Corps, which offered on the job training for young Americans. The New Deal did not however address civil rights, education, or the environment, but the programs of the Great Society made the attempt to do so. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act ended segregation in all public places in American life. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed which ended such discriminatory practices as poll taxes and literacy tests. In order to be able to give students in poverty an opportunity to start their education on a level playing field, the Johnson administration created the Head Start Program, and created programs for the arts and the humanities, plus offered grants, and work-study programs for those who were interested in obtaining a college degree for the very first time. The Great Society included programs to deal with such issues as pollution and environmental degradation. And in 1968, in order to be able to provide educational programming for all Americans— especially children, PBS was created. By 1972, the funding levels for some of the programs of the Great Society were reduced by the Nixon administration, but most of the programs were kept intact. Also, it is worth noting that

poverty in America had been slashed by almost 8% which is the greatest single short-term reduction in this economic indicator in American history. The Vietnam War also cut into the budget that would be used for the Great Society programs. Despite their success, the programs of the Great Society were also quite controversial and for conservatives, eliminating them became a major political goal even before 1980.

One major reason for the programs being controversial was their perceived lack of immediate success for some groups of people. But, some of the programs were controversial from the beginning. From 1965-1968, large-scale race riots engulfed many of America's major cities. While the roots of these riots were examined during the Kerner Commission Report which detailed racism, poverty, a lack of educational opportunities, fair housing, and access to the political process as the causes for them, its solutions— a massive amount of government intervention on the scale of the Marshall Plan— were its recommendations. However, the violence, looting, and crime sprees in America's major cities had another effect. It turned off huge swaths of voters who surmised that the Great Society programs, few of which had been implemented for more than a year or two and some that had not been implemented at all, were fully to blame for the crisis. In other words, despite their limited implementation, a sizable number of Americans saw them as problematic from the beginning. Plus, some of the programs were also controversial, such as Food Stamps, which conservatives viewed as leading to government dependency rather than helping people in poverty meet their basic needs. For conservatives, the educational programs also came under fire as college students openly resisted the draft and protested our involvement in the Vietnam War. By the time Johnson left office in 1969, his administration had clearly made a mark on the American landscape with increasing numbers of students attending and graduating from college, seniors benefitting from Medicare and Medicaid, the expansion of civil rights for all Americans, and a clear reduction in poverty in America. But, the opposition to each of the programs of the Great Society was just beginning.

Explain the continuities and changes in immigration patterns over time.

Immigrants from around the world sought access to the political, social, and economic opportunities in the United States, especially after the passage of new immigration laws in 1965.

Another achievement of the Great Society and Johnson's administration was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, or the Hart-Celler Act. This act abolished the quota system which had been established with the Immigration Act of 1924. Instead of focusing on the nationality of the immigrant groups coming into the country, it focused on their skills and knowledge and familial relationships and or ties to Americans already living in the country. It prioritized the following: family reunification, employment, and refugees. However, though it sought to equalize the number of immigrants that could come into the country from any nation in the world, it narrowed the number of immigrants who could come into the country from the Western Hemisphere. Due to the fact that it lowered the number of immigrants from countries like Mexico, despite the great demand for their labor, especially in agriculture, it led to more and more immigrants attempting to come into the country illegally. However, it also led to more Asian immigrants being allowed to come into the country because of their job skills— particularly in high-tech. The act did however, encourage refugees to make their way into the United States from Cuba and Vietnam. It set the table for the immigration program that America still uses in the present.

While the programs of the Great Society had their supporters and detractors, most of them are still with us today. For example, PBS, Medicare, Medicaid, Job Corps, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Head Start are each programs and or agencies that are still very much a part of American life today. And while the Great Society programs did not end poverty in America, there was a measurable reduction in the poverty level in America after their implementation. It is important to note that the programs were administered in a bottom-up fashion, in that cities, and states would receive funding for the programs and then would use it accordingly. As such, it is easy to see how the quality of the implementation of the programs, much like the New Deal before them, depended heavily on the people who were administering them. But, it wasn't just the election of Richard Nixon in 1968 that brought them to lower levels of funding, the Vietnam War also was a

factor in the programs not being implemented in the manner in which the Johnson administration had intended. But while conservatives thought the Great Society programs went too far in terms of utilizing the power and reach of the federal government, there were also liberals in the 1960s who felt that they did not reach far enough in achieving a just society for all in America.

The Youth Culture of the 1960s and the Environmentalist Movement

Explain how and why opposition to existing policies and values developed and changed over the course of the 20th century.

Although anti-communist foreign policy faced little domestic opposition in previous years, the Vietnam War inspired sizable and passionate anti-war protests that became more numerous as the war escalated and sometimes led to violence.

Some groups on the left also rejected liberal policies, arguing that political leaders did too little to transform the racial and economic status quo at home and pursued immoral policies abroad.

Young people who participated in the counterculture of the 1960s rejected many of the social, economic, and political values of their parents' generation, introduced greater informality into U.S. culture, and advocated changes in sexual norms.

As more students went to college than ever before in the 1960s, by the end of the decade an educated group of young Americans were making their voices known more than ever before. The culture of the 1950s, with its suburban lifestyle— every house looked the same, the expectation for success in life were basically the same, and with the nuclear family at its center came under fire from young people during the late 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement and the progress that it made animated young Americans by the late 1960s. But, it was the Vietnam War which really brought these issues to the forefront in American society by 1967. In studying America during this period, we often look back at this generation of young Americans— baby boomers, all, and think that the majority of those who did not go to fight in the war in Vietnam, but who protested against it, instead, were hippies or a member of what is often referred to as the counterculture. Hippies during the period were a part of the social fabric during this tumultuous period in America during the late 1960s, but being a young person between the ages of 18-30 by 1969, for example, did not necessarily make you a member of the counterculture. In fact, though there were a large number of young people who did not agree with the way in which the nation was pursuing its foreign policy goals in the Vietnam War, the vast majority of them were not members of the counterculture. That said, there were young college students who did experiment with drugs, such as LSD, heroin, morphine, marijuana, and other hallucinogens. At the 1968, Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, there were tremendous riots against what was perceived as a political party that wanted to continue the fighting in Vietnam. The rise of the Black Power and too, the Black Power movements were created by young college-educated figures who believed that the civil rights movement had not done enough to correct the inequalities that they believed came from an abusive system of capitalism. The young people during the decade did become more vocal about both foreign and domestic policies than ever before, and many of these young voices wanted to push America to do more about the twin issues of civil rights and poverty at home, plus, wished to see the country become less involved in foreign conflicts such as the Vietnam War. By 1971, the persistence of young Americans paid off— in the form of a constitutional amendment, the 26th Amendment, which gave 18-year old Americans the right to vote. The American public viewed it as being inherently unfair that young people could be drafted to fight and die in the jungles of Vietnam, but at the time, could not vote for the public officials who had sent them to fight in it.

The youth of the period also rebelled against the ideals of conformity— that, in order to be able to fit into American society, they had to be exactly like their parents. To be like their parents meant to do the following: to obtain a college degree, get a high-paying job, marry within their socio-economic class, and start a family with multiple children. But, by the 1970s, with the economy struggling for the first time since the Great Depression and the women's movement for civil rights in full swing, a new generation of Americans pushed back on this ideal of the American lifestyle. As more and more young women became professionals, they began to marry

later in life and have fewer children, or in some cases, none at all. When the Supreme Court decided the case of *Roe vs. Wade* that meant that women had a right to privacy in terminating a pregnancy (or having an abortion), it further divided Americans by the end of the decade, as some in American began to see this step as a breakdown of the nuclear family and its values in America, while others saw it having even more dangerous implications. But, while the birth rate for white women, in particular, began to slowly decrease, immigration into the country slowly increased during the 1970s. The growth and independence of the women's movement led to a backlash against it, and not just against the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment). There was a tremendous fear that young women were abandoning the ideal of the importance of motherhood in American society. It was a major factor in leading to the rise of the conservative movement beginning in the late 1960s, which would culminate in the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Explain how and why policies related to the environment developed and changed from 1968 to 1980.

Ideological, military, and economic concerns shaped U.S. involvement in the Middle East, with several oil crises in the region eventually sparking attempts at creating a national energy policy.

Environmental problems and accidents led to a growing environmental movement that aimed to use legislative and public efforts to combat pollution and protect natural resources. The federal government established new environmental programs and regulations.

The Space Race changed the minds of many young Americans about the planet that we are living on by the late 1960s. The first flight to the Moon, Apollo 8, gave Americans not just images of the Moon up close for the first time, but also indelible pictures of the Earth. In the early 1960s, scientists and writers such as Rachel Carson had started a growing movement with her book, *Silent Spring*, about the dangers of pesticides and chemicals. But, a decade went past before the movement coalesced around the idea of protecting the planet, its people, and the animals which also inhabit it. The impulse for protecting the environment led to the development of the first Earth Day in 1970. It also led the Nixon administration to create the Environmental Protection Agency at the behest of a Democratic Congress. Plus, the following acts were passed which dealt with protecting the environment: the Endangered Species Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the creation of environmental codes and standards for pollution for the first time. Each of these acts were passed prior to the OPEC oil embargo. Though the embargo would lead to long gas lines and angry Americans, it also led to an awareness of the fact that America would need to look at alternative energy sources in the future—such as wind, solar, and geothermal power. However, a pair of environmental disasters also shook Americans at the end of the decade, including the near catastrophic accident at a nuclear power station— Three Mile Island in 1977, and the discovery in Buffalo, New York, in 1978, that the Monsanto chemical company had been dumping toxic waste near where children were living and playing in the Love Canal incident. But, environmentalism had its limits, too, as some Americans feared the regulations would hurt the economy and cost Americans their jobs. It was another major factor which led to the rise of conservatism in America and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

The Rise of Conservatism

Explain the causes and effects of continuing policy debates about the role of the federal government over time.

In the 1960s, conservatives challenged liberal laws and court decisions and perceived moral and cultural decline, seeking to limit the role of the federal government and enact more assertive foreign policies.

Public confidence and trust in the government's ability to solve social and economic problems declined in the 1970s in the wake of economic challenges, political scandals, and foreign policy crises.

The 1970s saw growing clashes between conservatives and liberals over social and cultural issues, the power of the federal government, race, and movements for greater individual rights.

Explain the effects of the growth of religious movements over the course of the 20th century.

The rapid and substantial growth of evangelical Christian churches and organizations was accompanied by greater political and social activism on the part of religious conservatives.

The rise of conservatism began in the early 1960s, out of the backlash against the Civil Rights Movement. The first major candidate who espoused the views of conservatism was Barry Goldwater who ran unsuccessfully for the presidency in 1964. A major focus of conservatism were the decisions made by the Warren Court. The court made decisions which stated that public prayers did not require participation, allowed for interracial marriage, and stated that both obscene materials and the burning of the American flag in public were forms of free speech. The riots in America's major cities played a major factor in the rise of conservatism, as many viewed the money flowing into the cities from the programs of the Great Society as partly to blame. The protests against the Vietnam War also played a major factor in the rise of the conservative movement, as conservatives wanted to see America succeed in its fight against the spread of communism. Conservatives blamed the setback in the Vietnam War on the efforts of the anti-war movement. The rise of the women's movement— though abortion would not become a major issue until the end of the decade, and its attack on the nuclear family was a major component of their anger. The rise of conservatism in the 1970s also coincided with the growth of environmentalism which they attacked as killing jobs and an unnecessary use of resources. The forced bussing of students to achieve racial integration in major American cities was also an issue in which conservatives felt that the federal government had stepped into what was a local issue. But, the final straw came when the Carter administration threatened to deny tax exemptions to private schools which had battled against desegregation. In each case, conservatives viewed the power of the federal government as being intrusive into their private lives and public interests. Throughout the period, conservatives viewed the Democratic Party as being increasingly hostile to their interests. By 1980, the conservatives had created powerful organizations, such as the Moral Majority and Faith in the Family, which mobilized voters in evangelical Christian churches across the country to— for the first time, vote for political candidates who shared their values. In 1980, those voters, millions of them, would throw their support behind the candidacy of Ronald Reagan, and this would help him win the White House in a landslide victory that year.

The Vietnam War also underscored a major divide that was growing in American life. Class had never defined a conflict more so than it would during the war in Vietnam. Race had also divided Americans throughout the period. The ability of college students who made up the bulk of the anti-war movement and who were disproportionately white and either middle or upper class to either defer their status, or choose their branch of service as an officer because of their level of education was a dividing point for many Americans. Though laws had desegregated American public life, in terms where Americans could afford to live, segregation still occurred by socio-economic status. While laws or statutes could compel people to experience restaurants, hotels, and even schools, in the private sphere, poverty often determined the quality of those experiences. Race also, at times, played a major factor, as well. The riots of the 1960s in America's major cities and the experience of the Vietnam War drove lower and middle class whites— especially those who were embittered by the protests against the war and who lived in the Southern states out of the Democratic Party and directly into the Republican Party, a dynamic that still exists today. Another dynamic which changed was that African-Americans had always been strong supporters of the Republican Party, as the party of Lincoln, but with the conservative opposition to civil rights in the South, African-American voters began switching their allegiance to the Democratic Party which under LBJ had championed civil rights. These two political shifts underscored a new reality in American politics, as America's rural areas and small towns particularly in the South grew more conservative and more Republican, its major cities grew more liberal and more in line with the policies of the Democratic Party. Therefore, the final battleground in American life would occur in the suburbs— which were disproportionately white, wealthier than their rural and small town counterparts, and well-educated. The first election to showcase this growing dynamic occurred in 1968, when the segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace ran as a third-party candidate and carried most of the lower southern states, taking them away from the Democratic Party for the first time since the 1820s. It resulted in the election of Richard Nixon in 1968. In 1972, Nixon, as the Republican incumbent president, courted these voters for the first time (who had

previously voted for Wallace) with his “Southern Strategy,” and he continued to erode support in the South from the Democratic Party. By 1980, the South had become even more conservative and with new evangelical groups courting these voters, Ronald Reagan would be the first candidate from the Republican Party to sweep the region— a feat which has changed on very few occasions since.

The election of Richard Nixon in 1972 also led to one of the greatest scandals in American history. Not since the Teapot Dome scandal, during the Harding administration in the early 1920s, had such a wide-ranging scandal impacted the trust that Americans would have in their government in such a profound manner. During the 1972 election campaign, former CIA operatives burglarized the Democratic Party headquarters at the Watergate complex in Washington D.C. where they were attempting to steal campaign secrets to benefit Nixon’s re-election campaign. They were stopped by a night watchman (a security guard) and promptly arrested. Once it was discovered that these men were working for the Nixon campaign, immediately an effort to cover up the incident began. Eventually, thanks to the digging of two Washington Post reporters (Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward) who used a secret government insider to uncover more facts about the case and to the televised hearings in the U.S. Senate which revealed that Nixon had installed a secret taping system in the White House, the American public would learn Nixon had offered to pay the burglars for their silence, so that their testimony would not implicate his administration. However, the taping system would implicate Nixon as he could be heard trying to bribe the burglars for their silence. While Nixon was never impeached or tried for his crimes, his own party— led by Barry Goldwater, would not defend his conduct while in office. On August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon became the first public figure to resign from the presidency in disgrace. Within a few months, his successor (since Nixon’s Vice President, Spiro Agnew was in jail for tax evasion) Gerald Ford, would pardon him. From that point forward, through two more presidents, the American public continued to grow more and more disillusioned as both Ford (a Republican) and Carter (a Democrat) had to deal with the fallout from the Watergate Scandal, the environmental crises of the decade, the setback in the Vietnam War, and an economy teetering on the edge of disaster thanks to the OPEC Oil embargo and crises in the Middle East, and failed to do so effectively. The Watergate Scandal led to an erosion of the public trust that Americans would have in their political institutions which lasts to this very day. In 1980, these factors would lead to the election of Ronald Reagan and the triumph of conservatism.

Reagan and Conservatism

Explain the causes and effects of continuing policy debates about the role of the federal government over time.

Ronald Reagan’s victory in the presidential election of 1980 represented an important milestone, allowing conservatives to enact significant tax cuts and continue the deregulation of many industries.

Conservatives argued that liberal programs were counterproductive in fighting poverty and stimulating economic growth. Some of their efforts to reduce the size and scope of government met with inertia and liberal opposition, as many programs remained popular with voters.

Policy debates continued over free-trade agreements, the scope of the government social safety net, and calls to reform the U.S. financial system.

Conservative beliefs regarding the need for traditional social values and a reduced role for government advanced in U.S. politics after 1980.

Intense political and cultural debates continued over issues such as immigration policy, diversity, gender roles, and family structures.

Ronald Reagan had been a fan of FDR, and of course, this meant that even though he was a conservative Republican, he admired someone who had been a highly successful liberal Democrat, as President of the United States. He admired FDR because of his ability to both deal with a crisis and for his knack of being able to communicate with the American people. Born in a small town in Illinois in 1911, Reagan, had not been a

great student, but after making his way through school and then through small Eureka College where he received his degree in communication in 1932, Reagan would begin the process of honing his own career, not as a politician, but as first a radio announcer, and then later, as Hollywood movie star by 1937. Before ever becoming a politician, Reagan, honed his talents, as a communicator. After leaving Hollywood filmmaking in 1957, he took a job endorsing General Electric products and speaking to their employees and in their television commercials. While working as a spokesperson for General Electric, he became more conservative in his political philosophy, so much so that he was invited to speak at the Republican National Convention on behalf of the presidential candidate in 1964, Barry Goldwater. The speech, in which he criticized the proposed Great Society initiatives of the Johnson administration, made him a household name among conservatives and in the Republican Party. In 1966, he ran and won the election to become the Governor of California, a position that he would hold until 1974. As the Governor of California, Reagan, tempered some of his conservative instincts to become a more pragmatic politician— someone admired by his fellow Republicans, but also respected by the Democrats on the other side of the aisle. In 1976, he ran for the Republican nomination for the presidency, but narrowly lost to the incumbent, Gerald Ford. Though he lost, he gained a tremendous amount of respect from Republicans across the country and in 1980, he would parlay that support into a landslide victory. Once he became president, Reagan, had the following conservative goals: to incorporate tax cuts to stimulate economic growth, to balance the budget, to shrink the size of the government, to deregulate key industries, to roll back environmental regulations, and to defeat the Soviet Union, which he regarded as an evil empire, by initiating an aggressive arms build-up rather than through the policies of detente that his predecessors had practiced.

His domestic vision was not perfectly executed through his two terms in office, nor was it without major hiccups— especially in the beginning of his first term in office, but by the end of his second term, Reagan was presiding over an economic boom. It is often referred to as “Reaganomics,” but in reality, supply-side economics simply meant that if you paid less in taxes, you would have more money in your pocket to spend back into the economy and this would lead to economic growth. The problem with this line of thinking is that if you do not cut government spending, due to the fact that you are bringing in less tax revenue, it will lead to a massive national debt. In 1981, 1983, and again, in 1986, the Reagan administration proposed tax cuts which were passed by Congress on a bipartisan basis. During that time, the tax rate on the wealthiest earners in American society dropped from about 70% to less than 40%. At the same time, the Federal Reserve also tightened both the money supply and interest rates. From 1981-1983, the nation experienced a mild recession. But, in 1984, unemployment dropped, wages grew, and inflation slowed. The nation was beginning a period of sustained economic growth and development that lasted into the early 1990s. During his two terms in office, Reagan never balanced the federal budget, nor did his administration keep this line of thinking as a priority. In fact, budget deficits soared during the Reagan years. The national debt stood at 900 billion dollars when he took office in 1981, by the time he left it in 1989, it had ballooned to 2.6 trillion dollars. While his administration did make cuts to a variety of Great Society programs, it left such popular programs as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid virtually untouched— because an early experiment with changing the formula for Social Security was met with a tremendous public backlash in 1983. The Reagan administration did not shrink the size of the federal government, in fact, during his two terms in office the size of the federal government actually expanded. Reagan’s economic program not only led to an economic boom, but his pragmatism with some New Deal and Great Society programs gained admirers from both sides of the political aisle, so much so that in 1984 he was re-elected in a landslide. The deregulation of industries was not met with tremendous political opposition, and in fact had started prior to him taking office. But, the Reagan administration did take a hardline approach to dealing with labor unions as shown in the PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) Strike of 1981. He fired each of the striking air traffic controllers and replaced them. This action had a chilling effect on labor unions, but it sent the message to big business leaders that the administration had their interests at heart. Reagan, himself, made no effort to roll back environmental regulations, and when his first Secretary of the Interior tried to do so, the backlash in Congress and from the public was so swift that he resigned. Reagan replaced him with an official who would take a more pragmatic approach to environmental regulations. But, his strength as an American president was not just in developing an economic boom, or taking a pragmatic political approach on certain issues, it was in his ability to communicate with the American people.

Reagan has often been referred to as the Great Communicator for his way of being able to both connect to and console the American people. He was an excellent speaker who, of course, understood how to use a camera—remember he had been a Hollywood actor prior to becoming a political figure. Two events showcased his ability to connect with the American people. In 1984, at the fortieth anniversary of the Normandy Invasion of Europe during World War II, he gave us a sense of the sacrifice that so many young American men gave on the beaches of Normandy, so that Europe might be free from Nazi tyranny. It is one of the most memorable speeches ever given by an American president. But, perhaps his finest speech is not one that is replayed over and over again, as was his famous Brandenburg Gate Speech in 1987, where he said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,” while standing in front of the Berlin Wall. It was address to the nation after the Challenger disaster in 1986. That day, millions of American school children were watching live on television, as the first teacher— an elementary school teacher named Christa McAuliffe, was supposed to fly into space on the Space Shuttle. However, less than two minutes into the flight, the Challenger exploded with millions of children witnessing the instant death of the astronauts, including a beloved school teacher, live on television. It was that evening that Reagan, at the time, the oldest president in American history, became a loving and caring grandfather for every American child— reminding them of the importance of space flight and giving the nation the confidence to continue to go back into space, but also, room to grieve. Though Reagan is often remembered for his ability to connect with the American people and his speeches were often memorable for those who heard them, it was in foreign policy where his administration would notch both its greatest failures and its most important achievements.

The End of the Cold War

Explain the causes and effects of the end of the Cold War and its legacy.

Reagan asserted U.S. opposition to communism through speeches, diplomatic efforts, limited military interventions, and a buildup of nuclear and conventional weapons.

Increased U.S. military spending, Reagan’s diplomatic initiatives, and political changes and economic problems in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were all important in ending the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War led to new diplomatic relationships but also new U.S. military and peacekeeping interventions, as well as continued debates over the appropriate use of American power in the world.

The Cold War did not come to an end by the time Reagan left the office of the presidency in 1989. While it was the administration of President George H.W. Bush that saw the Cold War come to a conclusion, it was the Reagan administration that played an important role in the process of bringing the Cold War to an end. In foreign policy, Reagan’s administration oversaw a military build-up that brought an end to the Cold War, intervened in Latin America and the Caribbean, and dealt with issues in the Middle East.

From 1981-1989, Reagan and his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Gorbachev met several times in an effort to de-escalate tensions and to find a pathway forward for the two countries. The military build-up which was a part of the Reagan administration’s strategy for forcing the collapse of the Soviet Union that was based on Reagan’s reasoning that the Soviet economy was weaker than what the rest of the world believed it to be at the time. Reagan proved to be correct. The build-up also had another effect— it strengthened American morale and public confidence in our military at a time when the nation was still stinging from the setback in the Vietnam War. But, the Reagan administration also introduced a new initiative which changed the trajectory of the Cold War in 1983. It was the Strategic Defense Initiative, SDI, or as it was dubbed in the press, “Star Wars,” which was a scheme that would use American satellites to shoot down nuclear missiles while they were in flight, thus ending the threat of a nuclear war. It was a stroke of genius. Though the United States did not have this type of highly advanced weapons system technology, the Soviets bought the idea that it was in development. Knowing that the Soviet Union could not compete with these new technologies, it forced Gorbachev to the negotiation table. It is critical to note that Reagan and Gorbachev became friends and in 1985, the Soviet leader introduced two new reform programs— glasnost (openness) and perestroika (a restructuring) which began to open up the

communist nation to the West for the very first time, to allow for discussions with Reagan, and to try to prevent the collapse of the Soviet economy. Reagan and Gorbachev met on multiple occasions, but the most important component of those meetings resulted in the creation of the INF Treaty. This treaty led to a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons for the very first time and the destruction of more 2,600 of them by both sides. It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War. By 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet economy, the Cold War came to an end. The costs of the Space Race, a proxy war in Afghanistan, and in trying to prop up the economies of its satellite nations in Eastern Europe, led to the crumbling of the Soviet economy. But, the friendship between Reagan and Gorbachev and the arms build-up of the United States— plus, the introduction of SDI, also sealed the fate of the Soviet Union, which as Reagan spoke to Russian students just before leaving office in 1988, meant that a new era was dawning in global affairs, one which would not include the two superpowers as deadly rivals to one another.

The United States was active in both Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Middle East from 1981-1992. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration only intervened on the ground once, in the tiny Caribbean Island of Grenada in 1983 to protect American medical students who were on a resident internship and to keep the island nation from falling under the influence of the communist regime in Cuba. However, the Reagan administration did send weapons and supplies to aid those who were fighting against communist-leaning regimes in El Salvador and in Nicaragua. While sending aid to Nicaraguan rebels, the Contras (which had been forbidden by Congress) the Reagan administration overstepped their responsibilities. In what became known as the Iran-Contra Affair, the Reagan administration secretly sold weapons to Iran (a nation that since 1979 we had had a testy relationship with and who had supported terrorists who had killed American soldiers), and then used the money from the sale of those weapons to send aid illegally to the Contras who were fighting against a communist-leaning group in Nicaragua. The affair led to hearings which were televised and almost led to real trouble for the Reagan administration. Reagan went on national television and apologized to the nation for the incident. In the Middle East, by the time Reagan assumed the presidency, the Iranian Hostage Crisis had come to an end (Remember, we removed the elected leader of Iran in 1953 and replaced him with the Shah. When the Shah came to America for cancer treatment, a revolution occurred in Iran which removed him from power and established the Ayatollah Khomeini— a Muslim cleric hardliner who distrusted the United States, into power. Once he came to power, the workers in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the capital of Iran, were taken hostage for more than 500 days, as Americans at home watched helplessly. A military mission to rescue them met with disaster as the helicopter crashed in the desert sands of Iran. Though the Carter administration begged for their release, it was when Reagan was taking the oath of office for the presidency when they were finally allowed to board a plane and come back to America. The incident helped elect Reagan in 1980.) But, trouble between Israel and its neighbors still stymied American interests in the region. In 1983, while trying to stabilize the situation in Lebanon and to keep terrorist groups from attacking Israel— an American ally in the region, the Reagan administration stationed troops in Beirut, the capital city. A terrorist bombing in the city killed more than 200 American Marines. But, the U.S. kept its presence in the Middle East— however, when Iran and Iraq went to war against one another, America sent aid to Saddam Hussein's forces from 1980-1988, a decision that would come back to haunt it later. The Reagan administration also sent aid to the freedom fighters in Afghanistan, including groups led by Osama Bin Laden who were fighting against the Soviets in the Soviet-Afghan War from 1979-1989, another decision that would come back to haunt Americans in the future. By 1989, as Reagan was leaving office, the Berlin Wall was soon to collapse, communism was crumbling across Eastern Europe and America was becoming increasingly more involved in the Middle East. Though the Cold War would come to an end in 1991, America would that year blunt an invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein of Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. It was just the beginning of America's involvement in a long and bloody struggle against Islamic extremists in the Middle East— an issue which would come to define the beginning of the next century for America in global affairs. From 1996-1998, during the Clinton administration, America would become involved in a peace-keeping mission (along with the other NATO member nations) in the nations of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Croatia, and the region of Kosovo). Despite the Cold War coming to an end, and the United States remaining as the world's lone superpower, persistent problems still remained as the country would become more involved in the Middle East in foreign affairs. Plus, major political battles remained as the

two sides— liberal and conservative became increasingly more entrenched in their ideas about the role of the federal government in the lives of the American people. The 1990s also saw a technological boom come to fruition which would propel both the American economy and its society forward as a new century dawned.