



Summary

TELESCOPING THE TIMES *The Conservative Tide*

CHAPTER OVERVIEW A growing conservatism brings Ronald Reagan and George Bush to the presidency. Their policies change the American economy, while other forces transform American society and changes reshape the world.

❶ A Conservative Movement Emerges

MAIN IDEA Conservatism reached a high point with the election in 1980 of President Ronald Reagan and Vice President George Bush.

American history has been marked by swings between liberal and conservative policies. In liberal times—such as the New Deal and the Great Society—activist government tried to reform society. In conservative times—such as the 1920s and 1950s—concern for freedom led many to oppose governmental involvement. Such a swing in the 1970s led conservatives to take control of the government in 1980.

More and more Americans were unhappy with high inflation and felt their taxes were too high. Groups arose across the country opposed to government involvement in economic, cultural, or social life. The New Right was born. Starting in the mid-1960s, this movement grew. Conservatives aimed to reduce the power of the federal government, cutting benefit programs, and drawing a more narrow definition of civil rights. They criticized affirmative action policies, viewing them as reverse discrimination. Many voters joined a religious movement led by television preachers called the Moral Majority that criticized a decline in national morality.

These conservatives found a strong presidential candidate in Ronald Reagan. An effective speaker with a winning personality, Reagan was a strong campaigner. With President Carter hobbled by high inflation and the Iranian hostage crisis, Reagan won the 1980 election. He touted the conservative beliefs in less government, lower taxes, and traditional values. The conservative tide also swept Republicans into control of the Senate.

❷ Conservative Policies Under Reagan and Bush

MAIN IDEA Presidents Reagan and Bush pursued a conservative agenda that included tax cuts, budget cuts, and increased defense spending.

Reagan aimed to reduce the size and power of the federal government. He hoped to encourage businesses to invest more, thus expanding the economy and increasing jobs. He cut deeply into spending on a wide range of domestic programs. He persuaded Congress to agree to large tax cuts to free money for personal investment. Reagan also greatly increased defense spending.

These policies, termed “Reaganomics,” helped fuel economic growth. Tax revenues did not increase as much as had been expected, however, and the government had to borrow huge sums. During the Reagan presidency, government debt more than doubled.

Reagan also tried to promote conservative moral values. He and George Bush, who succeeded him, appointed five new Supreme Court justices. All were conservatives. In many decisions, the Court tended away from the more liberal rulings of the previous four decades.

Another Reagan goal was to end government control of business. He ended government regulation of the savings and loan industry. Savings and loan associations, or “thrifts,” were allowed to compete with banks. Just a few years later, however, the economy slowed and poor investments forced many thrifts into bankruptcy. The government absorbed the cost of rescuing depositors’ accounts. The administration also made efforts to reduce environmental regulation.

Reagan’s policies won support with business people, Southerners and Westerners, and many former Democrats. These voters combined to re-elect Reagan in 1984 and to elect George Bush as president in 1988.

3 Social Concerns in the 1980s

MAIN IDEA *Beneath the surge of prosperity that marked the conservative era of the 1980s lay serious social problems.*

A number of health issues arose to trouble Americans in the 1980s. Foremost among them was AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), a viral disease that destroys the immune system. Another issue of much debate was abortion. The Supreme Court gave women the right to an abortion in a 1973 ruling. Later decisions allowed states to limit that right. Reagan and Bush declared a war on drugs that included tough law enforcement.

Education became an increasingly important issue, especially after the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. The report was highly critical of the nation's schools. People generally agreed that the nation's public schools were not doing an adequate job. They did not agree on solutions.

The nation's cities were also in crisis. Cities were increasingly home to the poor and unemployed. Budget cuts had eliminated earlier federal programs to aid the cities. Welfare payments to the poor had not kept up with rising prices. Thousands of people, unable to afford housing, slept on the streets or in parks.

Throughout the 1980s, women tried to improve their position. When women's groups were unable to secure ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, they tried urging more women to run for political office. The number of women in the House doubled; the number of women senators tripled—from two to six. In 1984, Geraldine Ferraro, a Democrat, became the first woman candidate for vice president for a major party.

By 1992 nearly 58 percent of women had entered the workforce. But women still earned only 76 cents for every dollar a man earned. New divorce laws and social conditions increased the number of single women heading a household—many of whom lived in poverty. Women's groups pushed for pay equity and for benefits to help working mothers.

Members of many minority groups also achieved greater political power during the 1980s. African Americans experienced continuing economic problems. Latinos—the fastest growing minority—also gained political power although they were sometimes divided over the issue of bilingual education. Some Native Americans, facing the end of federal aid, opened gambling facilities on their reservation lands. Asian Americans made economic advances but did not gain as much politi-

cal power as other groups. Gay rights activists pushed for an end to discrimination and by 1993, had made headway.

4 Foreign Policy After the Cold War

MAIN IDEA *The end of the Cold War, marked by the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, led to a redirection of many U.S. goals and policies.*

The Soviet Union underwent dramatic changes in the 1980s. Mikhail Gorbachev took power and tried to reform Soviet society. His policies led to a splitting of the Soviet Union into 15 different republics. Communists were swept out of power there and throughout Eastern Europe. Germany, long divided, became one nation again. The Cold War had ended, and U.S. leaders had to devise new policies. They approved when Communist Chinese leaders, while still keeping tight political control, liberalized the economy. However, they were horrified when student activists were slaughtered in Tiananmen Square.

Before the Cold War had ended, conflict in Central America led to U.S. involvement. Communist guerrillas seized control of Nicaragua. President Reagan supported the Contras, a group trying to defeat the Communists. After years of conflict, a peace was signed and free elections were held in 1990. Reagan sent American troops to Grenada and Bush sent them to Panama to promote American interests.

Problems in the Middle East showed the difficulty of post-Cold War diplomacy. Terrorist Muslim groups held some Americans as hostages. Hoping to gain favor with Iran—and then use its influence to win release of the hostages—the Reagan administration sold weapons to Iran. Money from the sale was then used to aid the Contras fighting in Nicaragua. Revelation of the deal caused a scandal.

The Middle East was also the scene for a major war in 1991. Iraq had seized oil-rich Kuwait in 1990. President Bush led a United Nations effort to fight Iraq and liberate Kuwait. It was called Operation Desert Storm.

Review

1. What factors led to the rise of conservatism?
2. What policy changes did Reagan make?
3. What issues arose during the 1980s?
4. How did foreign changes present new challenges for the United States?