Chapter 29: Living with Less, 1968-1980

Overview

The crisis of the 1960s focused attention on the national weaknesses: the Great Society had not established racial harmony and equality, the war in Vietnam raged on, the deaths of two Kennedys and a King shook Americans’ faith in the democratic process. The 1970s did not end the worries or right the wrongs. A new threat endangered America: the economy. Richard Nixon was the first president to confront the decline of America’s post World War II prosperity and power. Not only was the nation’s economy in decline so, too, was its war in Southeast Asia. Nixon would not claim that the nation had unlimited power and his pragmatism helped guide the nation. He saw in the times an opportunity for new peoples and new political economic approaches. African-Americans, women, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and homosexuals organized and demonstrated for equality. In an era characterized by limits, American society had made incremental and reluctant commitments to equality for women and minorities. One result of the political activism of the 1960s was a conservative backlash which was encouraged by President Nixon. Nixon’s victory in 1972 was also his undoing. That the president’s re-election campaign had acted illegally was disclosed along with a number of other improprieties eventually led to Nixon’s resignation. His successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, could not master the nation’s problems.

Key Topics The information in chapter 29 introduces your students to the following key topics:

• The broad impact of economic decline on society and politics
• New foreign policies reflecting both the relaxation of Cold War tensions and the limits of American power abroad
• Less liberal federal domestic policy than in the 1960s
• The expanding struggle for equal rights and opportunities by women and minority groups
• The increasingly powerful conservative reaction to liberal policies and radical activism
• The crisis of the presidency fueled by weak leadership, the Watergate scandal, and other abuses of power

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The 1972 Election
Panic at the Pump, 1973-1974: If the automobile was the symbol of consumerism of the 1950s, long lines at gasoline pumps was the symbol of the 1970s. The U.S. had begun importing oil in the 1960s and by 1974 the U.S. imported over one third of its oil. The energy needs of the U.S. and other western nations had empowered the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Nations, a group of Third World nations that joined together to get higher prices for their oil. The Arab members refused to sell oil to the U.S. as long as it supported Israel. OPEC soon raised its oil prices nearly 400 percent.

A New Crisis: Economic Decline: The crisis of the 1960s focused attention on the national weaknesses: the Great Society had not established racial harmony and equality, the war in Vietnam raged on, the deaths of two Kennedys and a King shook American’s faith in the democratic process. The 1970s did not end the worries or right the wrongs. A new threat endangered America: the economy.

• Although the economy continued to grow in the 1970s, productivity declined along with corporate profits. The gross national product dropped. Unemployment and inflation increased. The energy crisis contributed to the economic predicament but so, too, did increased competition from European nations and Japan, which had rebuilt after World War II. The reduction in the nation’s defense spending also contributed to economic decline. American economists were unprepared for the novel problem of “stagflation”.

• Economic decline reshaped social life in the United States. American workers suffered the “deindustrialization” of the nation. Organized labor lost members. More women took jobs outside the home, but not all Americans who sought jobs found them. Americans abandoned the old industrialized regions, now called the “Rust Belt”, for opportunity in the South and West, the “Sun Belt”. Jobs there were in high-technology businesses.

Discuss the causes of the economic troubles of the 1970s. How did economic decline affect the lives of Americans?

What was President Richard Nixon’s strategy for helping Americans to live with less? Was that strategy successful?

Confronting Decline: Nixon’s Strategy: Richard Nixon was the first president to confront the decline of America’s post World War II prosperity and power. Not only was the nation’s economy in decline so, too, was its war in Southeast Asia. Nixon would not claim that the nation had unlimited power and his pragmatism helped guide the nation. He saw in the times an opportunity for new peoples and new political economic approaches.

• The Nixon administration had a preference for foreign policy issues rather than domestic issues and with the help of his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Nixon made use of the freedoms his predecessors had gained in military and diplomatic matters. The two were cold warriors like their predecessors and they regarded communism as a menace. But Nixon and Kissinger had to regard the Cold War from America’s declining power. That reality dictated a new approach. The “Nixon Doctrine” proclaimed that American allies would have to shoulder the burden of defending themselves against insurgents and aggressive neighbors. The other hallmark of Nixon’s foreign policy was called “détente”, a French word for the relaxation of tensions. The United States practiced détente with the Soviet Union and communist China. Nixon’s trip to China and diplomatic recognition of the legitimacy of the government of the People’s Republic of China eased tensions between the two nations. With the Soviet Union, Nixon wanted the Soviets to agree to limit their long-range nuclear arsenals. SALT negotiations between the United States and Soviet Union began in 1969. In 1972, Nixon traveled to Moscow. The Anti-Balistic Missile Treaty sharply limited each nation’s defensive missiles. The Americans and Soviets concluded that there was “no alternative to peaceful coexistence.”
Better relations with the Soviets and Chinese, Nixon hoped, would bring about an end to the war in Vietnam. Nixon faced a dilemma in Vietnam. Americans demanded that American forces be withdrawn but without American troops in Vietnam Nixon could not force the Vietnamese to recognize South Vietnam. “Vietnamization”, a policy designed to turn over the nation’s defense to South Vietnam, was the solution; or so Nixon hoped. Vietnamization never worked because the South Vietnamese could not beat back the North Vietnamese alone. Nixon turned to American airpower, authorizing bombing raids into Cambodia. The president kept these raids secret. The raids did not force the North Vietnamese to make peace. Anti war protests were staged across the nation in October after the information was leaked to the public. Anti war sentiment grew with news of the My Lai Massacre. Nixon’s escalation of the war into Cambodia did not find North Vietnamese troops and it enflamed anti-war protestors. On May 4, 1970, National Guard troops fired on student protestors at Kent State University killing students, two of whom where just walking to class. Ten days later state police shot and killed two black students at Jackson State College in Mississippi. The nation had erupted in violence. Troops were withdrawn and peace talks dragged on; Vietnamization foundered. The New York Times published the Pentagon Papers in 1971 despite Nixon’s attempts to have the Supreme Court block publication. Finally on January 27, 1973 American, South Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, and Viet Cong negotiators signed a peace agreement in Paris. For the United States, at least, the war in Vietnam was over. The peace agreement did not guarantee South Vietnam’s survival nor was North Vietnam required to withdraw its troops.

Détente did not end Soviet initiatives around the world. Like his predecessors, Nixon was particularly opposed to the expansion of communism in the Western Hemisphere. In 1970, he ordered the CIA to do whatever was necessary to prevent the Marxist Allende from becoming president of Chile. Following the Six-Day War (1967) when Israel defeated Egyptian and Syrian forces and the retaliatory 1973 Yom Kippur Arab-led attack on the Israelis, the United States sent supplies to the Israelis. The Arabs placed an embargo on oil and the Soviets, who aided the Arabs, pressed for a role in the region.

Nixon’s domestic policy record was mixed. In domestic issues Nixon had to work with a Democrat Congress. In some areas the president worked to dismantle Great Society programs; in others he accepted a liberal agenda. His “New Federalism” aimed to send more control of programs to state and local governments. New economic realities caused budget cuts and the space program was reduced despite Neil Armstrong’s walk on the moon on July 20, 1969. Revenue sharing programs and welfare reform were initiated.

Deteriorating economic conditions forced President Nixon to take a very un-Republican activist approach to the problems of rising unemployment and declining corporate profits. Nixon’s “New Economic Policy” took the United States off of the gold standard by ending the exchange of gold for dollars. He lowered the value of the dollar and added new tariffs on imports. He froze prices and wages. The economic moves did not work the changes Nixon hoped for. The cost of the war and the Arab oil embargo continued to drive up prices.

Discuss the foreign policies of the Nixon administration, including détente and the Nixon Doctrine. How did these policies mark a departure from previous American approaches to the Cold War?

Refusing to Settle for Less: Struggles for the Right: African-Americans, women, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, homosexuals organized and demonstrated for equality. In an era characterized by limits, American society had made incremental and reluctant commitments to equality for women and minorities.

The civil rights movement of the 1970s focused the nation’s attention on two controversial means of promoting racial equality -- affirmative action and mandatory school busing. Affirmative action required institutions receiving funds to provide opportunities for women and nonwhites. By the end of the decade it had become an important means for increasing diversity in schools and other institutions but it was not widely supported. School busing was more controversial. A decade after the Brown decision, the Supreme Court had become impatient with the speed that American public schools were integrating. It upheld the constitutionality of mandatory busing to achieve desegregation.

Women’s liberation as a movement was gaining supporters and acceptance. The movement was diversified in its goals and its methods for attaining those goals. Three of those goals were access to abortion, equal treatment in schools and the workplace, and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.
The actions and gains of African-Americans inspired other ethnic American groups. In the 1960s and 1970s Mexican-Americans, the nation’s second largest racial minority, developed a new self-consciousness. Many of those who organized to protest discrimination and poverty called themselves Chicanos. The rising Mexican-American population grew rapidly and by the 1980s most lived in urban, not rural, areas. One in four Mexican-American families lived in poverty. They too, faced de facto segregation in barrios and discrimination. Chicano activists focused on the plight of migrant workers. César Chávez organized Chicano farm workers in California using many of the same tactics as Martin Luther King, Jr. Other Chicanos were influenced by the Black Power movement and advocated separatism and the restoring of land taken by the United States in the nineteenth century. Still others organized to implement social and political change.

Like black and Chicano activists, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and other Americans of Asian origin, Asian Americans pressed for rights and recognition in the late 1960s. They confronted a tradition of racism, discrimination, and segregation. After passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 the number of Asian immigrants to the United States increased due in part to the opportunity the United States offered. The majority of Asian immigrants lived in the Pacific states. Asian American activism followed the same pattern as other ethnic groups. New organizations helped empower students, workers, and politicians.

Native Americans also demanded social and political change. Unlike other ethnic Americans, Native Americans have a distinctive relationship with the federal government. High unemployment rates, poverty, poor health care, discrimination, and segregation united American Indians even though they are politically divided by tribal membership and the reservation system. The Indian Self-Determination Act (1972) tried to return power to tribal government. But as with other racial and ethnic groups, there was no group solidarity. Despite divisions, Americans were forced to recognize Indians’ claims.

By the late 1960s homosexual men and women had begun to fight back from the invisibility forced upon them during previous decades. Gay activists began to demand equal rights. And their crusade joined those already in progress demanding full protection and recognition. By the end of the 1970s and because of the actions of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, women, gays and lesbians American society was more committed to equal rights than ever before.

Compare the movements for rights and recognition created by African Americans, Chicanos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, women, and gays. Were these movements different in important ways?

**Backlash: From Radical Action to Conservative Reaction:** One result of the political activism of the 1960s was a conservative backlash which was encouraged by President Nixon.

With the diversity of protest groups it was impossible for them to organize collectively despite the hopes and fears of some. There were factions within groups that struggled for power as groups struggled against one another. The “new American revolution” never happened because some protest movements lost their targets. The 1970s was the “me decade.” Part of the impetus for this change was economic decline. No longer optimistic and affluent, Americans looked out for themselves.

One group alienated by the Great Society and the movements for social change were many lower-class and working-class Americans. For these Americans, the 1960s did bring a celebration of their ethnic European heritage but most importantly these people were seen by politicians as potential voters.

White ethnics became part of a conservative counterattack against radicalism, liberalism, and the Democratic Party. Richard Nixon and the Republicans capitalized on this sentiment and courted the white ethnic vote in the North and the Sunbelt. His election in 1972 was a landslide victory. President Nixon used the power of federal agencies to infiltrate various groups in an attempt to either destabilize or imprison the leaders. Nixon opposed school busing, rapid integration, crime, and radicalism. He filled Supreme Court vacancies with conservative jurists.

Nixon’s election in 1972 came about because of his strategy to capitalize on conservative issues and the Democrats’ choice of a liberal candidate, Senator George McGovern. The 1972 election victory for the conservative Republican did not reflect a national political reorganization. Even though Nixon’s election was almost as big as Johnson’s in 1964, the Democrats still controlled Congress. But, the glory days of radicalism and liberalism were over even though women and minorities continued to push their agendas.
Why did a conservative backlash develop from the late 1960s through the 1970s? Did this conservative reaction have a major effect on American life?

**Political Crisis: Three Troubled Presidencies:** Nixon’s victory in 1972 was also his undoing. That the president’s re-election campaign had acted illegally was disclosed along with a number of other improprieties eventually led to Nixon’s resignation. His successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, could not master the nation’s problems.

- President Richard Nixon resigned his office on August 9, 1974. He resigned because the Senate was about to begin an impeachment trial, a trial he would certainly lose. He had conspired to obstruct justice and he had lied repeatedly to the American people. At the core of Nixon’s crimes was an illegal burglary of the Democrat National Committee Headquarters in Washington D.C. The burglarized offices were in an office building known as the Watergate complex. As a result of the break-in and a long list of illegal activities by a Senate investigating committee, many of Nixon’s aides were forced to resign. Vice President Agnew was found to have accepted bribes while governor of Maine. He resigned and was replaced by Republican Congressman Gerald R. Ford. Once tape recordings finally proved Nixon’s participation in the cover up of the burglary as early as June, 1972, Nixon had no future as president. Nixon was a victim of his own anger and insecurities. In many ways his fall from power was seen as just another example of America’s decline.

- President Ford was likeable but unimaginative. He had no mandate -- in fact President Ford was the nation’s first unelected vice president to become president. His vice president, Nelson M. Rockefeller, had not been elected either. Together they faced a skeptical public shell-shocked by Johnson’s deceit about the Vietnam War and Nixon’s violations of the law. Congress passed the War Powers Act (1973) to prevent presidents from conducting undeclared wars. It also investigated the CIA. Ford’s administration lost all credibility when he granted Nixon a full pardon for all of the crimes he may have committed as president. The Republicans nominated Ford in 1976 and he ran with a new vice presidential candidate, Robert Dole of Kansas. The Democrats nominated Jimmy Carter of Georgia who ran with Walter Mondale of Minnesota. Carter ran as a moderate who could appeal to southerners and businessmen. Low voter turn-out favored Jimmy Carter. Ford became the first sitting president to lose an election since Herbert Hoover.

- Jimmy Carter seemed efficient and capable. He was more imaginative and energetic than Ford when dealing with the nation’s problems. He had the advantage of working with a Democrat Congress but he was soon seen to be a weak and uncertain leader who could neither manage Congress nor inspire the American people. He still had to face the same economic, political, and diplomatic crises as his predecessors. Americans had grown resentful of government regulation and taxation. Voluntary wage and price controls did not stop soaring inflation. Natural gas shortages caused businesses and schools to close during the harsh winter of 1976-77. Other environmental disasters caused Americans to re-evaluate the long-term costs of industrial capitalism. President Carter continued Nixon’s programs of détente but Carter was also interested in supporting human rights and building harmony around the world. In 1978, the Senate ratified a treaty yielding ownership of the Panama Canal to Panama and Carter mediated the first peace agreement between Israel and an Arab nation. This was President Carter’s greatest achievement as president. Détente collapsed during Carter’s administration when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Carter’s popularity in 1979 was very low. In early 1979, a revolution in Iran overthrew the pro-American Shah of Iran in favor of the religious leader the Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini. The revolution in oil-rich Iran underscored American powerlessness and oil prices escalated again. On November 4, students loyal to Khomeini overran the United States embassy in Tehran and took 60 Americans hostage. A failed rescue mission left eight dead soldiers and four helicopters in Iran with the hostages.

Why did Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter have such troubled presidencies? Did these three presidents create their own problems, or did they face impossible situations?

**Feature: Deindustrialization in Youngstown, Ohio:** Youngstown, Ohio, once called “Steel City” symbolized the power of American industry and labor. In 1977 that dream came to an end as up to 5,000 steel workers lost their jobs because American steel could not compete with foreign-made steel. Workers not only lost
their jobs but lost a way of life. Youngstown represented the “deindustrialization” of the nation’s economy and Youngstown became one of the “rust belt” cities – once strong and vital.

**Conclusion:** In 1980, many Americans and friends and enemies abroad viewed a weak United States. They had only to look at the economy, the presidency and the military for evidence of their conclusion.

**Making links to other ideas** Using the maps and websites, in addition to your prepared lectures and other assignments, can give you more resources to enable your students to see that history is much more than memorizing names and dates. You will find that the websites are even more comprehensive and adaptable than described and because they have been collected here in one volume you have a world of information no further away than the click of your mouse. If you are new to the web’s opportunities, you will be pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of the information available in these sites.

Map 01. What are the two maps illustrating? What are they comparing?
Map 02. This map indicates yes and no votes on what? Which states rescinded their initial vote?
Map 03. What does this map indicate? Why would some states, especially in the West, have no measurable Indian population?
Map 04. Fill in the blanks. Jimmie Carter acquired 297 electoral college votes by:_____ Although Gerald Ford polled 45 electoral votes, they all came from the west which were_____ states.

**Web connections and resources** Consider using these websites to supplement your students’ reading and analytical skills. The sites were chosen because of their relevance to the material in the chapter -- not just to mirror it but to provide additional materials and perspectives. Questions from the student study guide have been included so that you can use or amend them to your own needs. Your students may find it insightful for you to guide them through the site as you help them develop research strategies.

"Politics: The American Indian Movement” www.prenhall.com/boydston/AIM
In America's popular culture, most references to American Indians seem to be as sports icons. The images are usually set in 18th- or 19th-century clothing and activities, as if Indian cultures froze at the moment of U. S. conquest of Indian nations. They are represented as tragic heroes, clueless goofs, or spiritual mystics who aid the conquerors. It took the American Indian Movement (AIM) and similar 20th-century social and political organizations to raise public consciousness to a level where it became apparent that American Indians exist today as human as any one else, in cultures as dynamic and adaptive as every ethnic minority group must be. How did AIM help change the direction of public attention to native North Americans in the 20th century?

Offering an extensive overview of military conflicts in Vietnam from 1945 up through U.S engagement, this site offers full text of historical documents including the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and excerpts for American presidential speeches.
1. Compare the Geneva Peace Accords July 21, 1954 and the Paris Accords January 29, 1973. What leaders and which nations were at each meeting? What ideology were they representing? What issue(s) was to be resolved at each meeting? What problems were left unresolved?

Read about the Watergate crisis, timelines, and biographies of the key players in the affair. Also, the site provides newspaper articles that correspond to the Watergate chronology.
1. Construct a chronology of events from 1972 to 1974. When is it clear that President Nixon was involved in the cover-up?
2. Summarize the reforms that came about as a consequence of Watergate.

“May 4” Kent State http://www.library.kent.edu/exhibits/4may95/index.html
Through their “May 4” collection, learn more about the Kent State student shootings. The site includes photos, links to various other sites, chronologies, and information on the aftermath of the incident.
1. What happened at Kent State on May 4? What events preceded the shootings?
2. How is Kent State symbolic of the larger issues of the day regarding the war in Southeast Asia?

Analytical reading  Your students may need more experience analyzing a short reading passage so that he or she can determine its component parts. They may need help identifying primary and supporting information as well as the author’s analysis. The analytical reading passages and the questions from the student study guide have been duplicated in the instructor’s manual for your use. Your students may need direction and encouragement in using them.

There were several major reasons for American economic decline. Along with the energy crisis, the United States suffered from increasing international competition. From the end of World War II until the Vietnam War, the United States had been the world’s greatest economic power. No other nation rivaled the size and productivity of the American economy. But European industrial countries, devastated by the war, had rebuilt their economies. So had Japan. Anxious to stop the spread of communism in the 1940s and 1950s, American policymakers had channeled billions of dollars in aid to these countries. The military protection provided by the United States had allowed Japan, West Germany, and other nations to save money on defense and concentrate resources on rebuilding. They now had efficient, up-to-date industries. As a result, these nations rivaled the United States, not only abroad but even in the American market.

The rise of Japan was the most dramatic illustration of these developments. Americans had derided Japanese goods. The words “Made in Japan” were synonymous with poor quality. But by the 1970s, Japan’s modern factories turned out high-quality products that appealed to American consumers. Japanese telecommunications and other electronic goods filled American homes. Japanese cars - small, well made, and fuel-efficient --attracted American buyers worried about the high price of gas.
1. What caused the U. S. to lose its international economic superiority in the 1960s?
2. Explain why the label “Made in Japan” had lost its negative connotations by 1970.
3. The U. S. imported more goods than it exported by the end of the 1970s. Why was this a problem for the nation’s economy?

Writing  The questions or writing prompts from the student study guide have been duplicated here for your use. These writing topics make good lecture topics especially if you help your students see the development of the idea in lecture format before they refine the idea in their writing assignments.
1. What was détente? How did President Nixon implement it in his foreign affairs?
2. From the evidence, was President Nixon more concerned with foreign affairs or domestic issues? Was he better at one or the other? Use specific examples to support your answer.
3. Discuss the similarities of the different civil rights movements on the 1960s. Were there any striking differences in goals, tactics, objectives, or accomplishments between the various groups? Why could they not work together?
4. What contributed to the difficulties faced by Nixon, Ford, and Carter? Did they handle these difficulties differently from one another? For Americans, what was the consequence of these troubled presidencies?
5. In what ways did Nixon, Ford, and Carter further the Cold War, or did they reduce tensions between the combatants? Explain your answer.

Lecture Strategies Ultimately the lecture is where you impart, or profess, your knowledge for the benefit of your students. These strategies were designed around the textbook and if your classroom strategy is to use the organization of the text to organize your course content, these lecture ideas may prove helpful. However, if you lecture around themes please see the section entitled “Thematic Lecture Topics.” You may find that you are more comfortable with and your students are more responsive to a combination of the two.
A new era began with the administration of Richard Nixon. Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy and the Great Society were dead. In their place was economic decline and a conservative backlash at the achievements not just of the Great Society but also minority groups in the United States. Nixon continued to fight the Cold War taking the conflict to Chile and the Middle East. The war in Vietnam was finally over but it was a troubled peace. African Americans, women, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and gays and lesbians had made great strides in the 1960s and none were willing to give up any of their hard-fought rights or settle for anything less than continuing the positive gains. That their ability to fight for their rights emboldened the “silent majority” and white ethnic Americans to defend their’s is one of the interesting actions and reactions of the time.

Contrasts seem to be the theme for this chapter and your students may find it beneficial to contrast the advances of the 1960s with those of the 1970s. For all of the anti-war protests and rhetoric the war ended with a whimper. Ask your students to examine Kissinger’s actions while at the Paris peace talks. The Paris Accords can be viewed at the Vassar student web site (see addresses above). If you can contrast the horror of Kent State with the lack of peace celebrations perhaps your students can come to understand that studying recent American history can be rather challenging and its lessons less than obvious. The Pentagon Papers make a compelling backdrop to studying the different perspectives of the war.

If you are discussing presidential power and its use and misuse, there is no easier (and no more complicated) example of the use and misuse of power than the presidency of Richard Nixon. If you have been looking at his career since the Alger Hiss trial, your students will be prepared for the Watergate affair. The depths of emotional depression, coupled with the nation’s economic decline, Nixon’s Watergate could have been Nixon’s last public service. The Watergate site at the Washington Post brings together wonderful resources for you and your students.

Continuing the discussion of presidents, leadership, and power, your students can compare Nixon with Presidents Ford and Carter who confront economic decline and the decline of America’s position in the world.

Penguin Classics
Not necessarily a “standard” as an American history survey biography topic, Mao Zedong, provides a different life for the examination of the nation’s past. Consider Jonathan Spence, Mao Zedong, New York: A Lipper/Viking Book, 1999. Spence offers the study of a life as well as a critical evaluation of the leader and his effects.