Chapter 30
The Reagan Revolution

Chapter Summary

Chapter 30 emphasizes the political, social, economic, and intellectual development of the United States between 1981 and 1992. Among the topics considered in this chapter are the Reagan revolution, the resolution of the Cold War, the emergence of a new regional economy, the women’s issues of the late twentieth century, the gay rights movement, and the culture wars in the American search for spiritual and personal values.

I. Reagan’s Domestic Revolution
   A. Reagan’s Majority
   B. The New Conservatism
      1. Downsizing the Great Society
      2. Free market utopians
      3. Conservative political tactics
   C. Reaganomics: Deficits and Deregulation
      1. Environmental regulation and federal lands
      2. Deregulation of the banking industry
   D. Crisis for Organized Labor
      1. Decline of union membership and blue-collar jobs
      2. Impact of economic restructuring
   E. An Acquisitive Society
   F. Poverty amid Prosperity
      1. Corporate downsizing and white-collar jobs
      2. Increase in the poverty rate
      3. The wage gap and the feminization of poverty
      4. Homelessness in America
   G. Consolidating the Revolution: George Bush

II. The Second (Short) Cold War
   A. Confronting the Soviet Union
   B. Risky Business: Foreign Policy Adventures
      1. Intervention and covert activities in Central America
      2. The war against drugs
      3. Intervention in the Middle East
      4. The Iran-Contra Affair
      5. U.S. policy in Asia
   C. Embracing Perestroika
   D. Crisis and Democracy in Eastern Europe
      1. The end of Communist regimes in eastern Europe
      2. German reunification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union
   E. The Persian Gulf War
III. Growth in the Sunbelt
   A. The Defense Economy
   B. New Americans
   C. Old Gateways and New
   D. The Graying of America

IV. Values in Collision
   A. Women’s Rights and Public Policy
      1. Abortion rights and the conservative backlash
      2. Women in the work force
   B. Coming Out
   C. Churches in Change
   D. Culture Wars

V. Conclusion

Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 30, students should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the populations that composed the Reagan majority.

2. Define the term neoconservatism and identify the major authors and publications that articulated the philosophy.

3. Identify and briefly explain the major parts of the Reagan economic agenda.

4. List the factors that contributed to diminishing power for labor unions during the last 30 years.

5. Discuss the impact of Reaganomics on the distribution of wealth in America during the 1980s.

6. Define the terms wage gap and feminization of poverty.

7. Identify and explain the historical significance of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

8. Explain the Reagan Doctrine as it related to the final stages of the Cold War.

9. Identify three limited military interventions undertaken by the Reagan administration during the 1980s. Explain the circumstances surrounding the Iran-contra affair and comment on how it impacted the Reagan administration.

10. Identify Mikhail Gorbachev and explain the meanings of the terms glasnost and perestroika.


12. Briefly describe the major events surrounding the final collapse of the Soviet Union.

13. Identify the factors used by the federal government to justify American military involvement in the Persian Gulf.

15. Discuss the importance of the defense economy to the economic growth of the South and the West.


17. Describe the impact of modern immigration on the racial and ethnic mix in the United States.

18. List the national urban areas that have been most impacted by modern-day immigration.

19. Discuss the impact of aging on the future of American politics, economics, and society.

20. Explain how the abortion issue has developed in the United States since 1973.

21. List two reasons for the increase in the number of American women entering the workplace during the 1970s and 1980s.

22. Identify and explain the historical significance of the Stonewall rebellion.

23. Identify and explain the historical significance of the AIDS epidemic.

24. Discuss the relative status of the American Catholic Church, the mainline Protestant denominations, and evangelical Protestant denominations during the last 30 years.

25. Identify the players and issues involved in the American culture wars between orthodoxy and progressivism.

**Topics for Classroom Lecture**

1. Address the issue of the emergence of the Sunbelt as the region of economic growth during the late twentieth century. What factors contributed to this regional shift in economic development? Aside from economic and/or financial issues, are there political, social, or cultural factors involved in the shift? What impact did World War II have on the modern transformation of the South? What impact did the civil rights movement have on the modern transformation of the South?

2. Discuss the connection between the sexual revolution of the 1970s and the broader women's liberation movement. Although the sexual revolution is often considered part of the women's liberation movement, sexuality has historically been a divisive issue even among the most progressive women, with some feminists arguing that sexual liberation demeans the status of women and others arguing that sexual liberation allows women to behave as equals with men. How did this conflict play out for men and women in the late twentieth century? How has sexuality and the changing status of women impacted the culture wars of recent years?
 Topics for Class Discussion and Essays

1. Compare and contrast recent trends in American immigration with the New Immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Consider the following:
   a. Compare the two statistically. How many immigrants came into the country during these two periods, and what percentage of American population growth was accounted for by immigrant population during the two periods?
   b. Compare the impact of immigration on cities during these two periods. What aspects of the impact are similar? Which are different?
   c. Compare the native-born American response to the influx of foreign population during both periods. Again, to what extent is the response similar? To what extent is it different?

2. An enduring debate among southern historians of the past 20 years has been the question of whether, in modern times, the South has been nationalized or the nation has been southernerized. Have students consider this question today. Have the economic revitalization of the South and the movement of people from other regions and countries into the South diminished its unique character and made it more comparable to the rest of the nation? Or, has the exposure of more Americans to southern culture and to problems formerly identified primarily with the South, such as race problems, made the nation more southern (i.e., more politically, socially, religiously, and racially conservative)?

3. Have students compare and contrast the two major economic revolutions of modern American history. How does the modern transition from an industrial economy to a service, a technology, and an information economy compare to the late nineteenth century transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy? Consider the following issues:
   a. The challenges presented to those working in the old economic sector. How are those trained and positioned for the past brought into the future?
   b. The impact on the size and location of major national urban centers. How did the changing economy define the regions that would prosper and the regions that would decline?
   c. The impact of the change on personal values and beliefs. How did economic revolution revolutionize social philosophy and religious faith?
   d. The impact on the position of the United States in the global economy. Did the economic revolution strengthen the economic position of the United States, weaken it, or simply redefine it?

4. Have students discuss the impact of the end of the Cold War on the future of American diplomacy. Review the major trends in modern American diplomatic history, including the imperialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the moral diplomacy of the world war eras, and the Cold War policy of the post-1945 era. What have been some of the challenges facing the United States as it attempts to develop a new foreign policy? Has the United States continued to organize its foreign policy around the issue of good guys and bad guys? Has it continued to define foreign policy morally, or has the United States embraced a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy? Has the 2003 war in Iraq shed light on a new American foreign policy? Ask students what they see as the role of the United States in the global affairs of the twenty-first century.

 Topics for Class Projects and Term Papers

1. Have students investigate the ongoing debates regarding the future of Social Security. What are the demographic problems facing the future of the program? What are the generational issues at stake? How does the demographic phenomenon of the baby boom fit into the picture? This would work well as a class debate.
2. Have students write a paper researching the impact of one of the prominent evangelists of the modern era such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker, or Jimmy Swaggart. In the paper, they can address the contribution of the person to the popularization of evangelical Protestantism as well as the extent to which each evangelist had a political agenda attached to his ministry.

3. Examine the image of the white male in American popular culture during the 1980s. Consider particularly the film industry and the popularity of Clint Eastwood, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Is there a connection between the popularity of these leading men and the Reagan presidency? Is there a connection between the popularity of the characters these actors portrayed and the rising influence of women and minorities in American society?

Resources for Lectures and Research Projects


Audio-Visual Resources

This three-part series examines the history of American women from the nineteenth century to the present. Episodes focus on sexuality, politics, economics, and popular culture.

*The Twentieth Century with Mike Wallace: The Iran-Contra Scandal*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
The History Channel examines the scandal that failed to derail Ronald Reagan.

*The American Experience* examines the life and presidency of Ronald Reagan.

*The Twentieth Century with Mike Wallace: The Persian Gulf War*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
This video examines George Bush's efforts against Saddam Hussein.

This video examines Reagan's rise to the presidency as a reflection of the emerging New Right.