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Chapter 40 - The Resurgence of Conservatism

1. President Jimmy Carter's administration seemed to be befuddled and bungling, since it could not control the rampant double-digit inflation or handle foreign affairs, and he would not remove regulatory controls from major industries such as airlines.
 - Late in 1979, Edward (Ted) Kennedy declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for 1980. But, he was hurt by his suspicious Chappaquiddick 1969 driving accident in which a young female passenger drowned and he delayed reporting the incident.
2. As the Democrats dueled it out, the Republicans chose conservative former actor Ronald Reagan, signaling the return of conservatism, since the average American was older than during the stormy sixties and was more likely to favor the right (conservatives).
3. New groups that spearheaded the "new right" movement included Moral Majority and other conservative Christian groups.
4. Ronald Reagan was a man whose values had been formed before the turbulent sixties, and Reagan adopted a stance that depicted "big government" as bad, federal intervention in local affairs as condemnable, and favoritism for minorities as negative.
 - He drew on the ideas of a group called the "neoconservatives," a group that included Norman Podhoretz, editor of *Commentary* magazine, and Irving Kristol, editor of *Public Interest*, two men who championed free-market capitalism.
5. Reagan had grown up in an impoverished family, become a B-movie actor in Hollywood in the 1940s, became president of the Screen Actors Guild, purged suspected "reds" in the McCarthy era, acted as spokesperson for General Electric, and become California governor.
6. Reagan's photogenic personality and good looks on televised debates, as well as his attacks on President Carter's problems, helped him win the election of 1980 by a landslide (489-49).
 - Also, Republicans regained control of the Senate.
7. Carter's farewell address talked of toning down the nuclear arms race, helping human rights, and protecting the environment (one of his last acts in office was to sign a bill protecting 100 million acres of Alaskan land as a wildlife preserve).

II. The Reagan Revolution

1. Reagan's inauguration day coincided with the release by the Iranians of their U.S. hostages, and Reagan also assembled a cabinet of the "best and brightest," including Secretary of the Interior James Watt, a controversial man with little regard to the environment.
 - Watt tried to hobble the Environmental Protection Agency and permit oil drilling in scenic places, but finally had to resign after telling an insulting ethnic joke in public.
2. For over two decades, the government budget had slowly and steadily risen, much to the disturbance of the tax-paying public. By the 1980s, the public was tired of the New Deal and the Great Society programs's costs and were ready to slash bills, just as Reagan proposed.
 - His federal budget had cuts of some \$35 billion, and he even wooed some Southern Democrats to abandon their own party and follow him.
 - But on March 30, 1981, the president was shot and wounded by a deranged John Hinckley. He recovered in only twelve days, showing his devotion to physical fitness despite his age (near 70) and gaining massive sympathy and support.

III. The Battle of the Budget

1. Reagan's budget was \$695 billion with a \$38 billion deficit. He planned cuts, and vast majority of budget cuts fell upon social programs, not on defense, but there were also sweeping tax cuts of 25% over three years.
 - The president appeared on national TV pleading for passage of the new tax-cut bill, and bolstered by "boll weevils," or Democrats who defected to the Republican side, Congress passed it.
 - The bill used "supply side economics" or "Reaganomics" (policies favorable to businesses) to lower individual taxes, almost eliminate federal estate taxes, and create new tax-free savings plans for small investors.
2. However, this theory backfired as the nation slid into its worst recession since the Great Depression, with unemployment reaching nearly 11% in 1982 and several banks failing.
 - Critics (Democrats) yapped that Reagan's programs and tax cuts had caused this mayhem, but in reality, it had been Carter's "tight money" policies that had led to the recession, and Reagan and his advisors sat out the storm, waiting for a recovery that seemed to come in 1983.
3. However, during the 1980s, income gaps widened between the rich and poor for the first time in the 20th century (this was mirrored by the emergence of "yuppies"—Young Urban Professionals, very materialistic professionals). And it was massive military spending (a \$100 billion annual deficit in 1982 and nearly \$200 billion annual deficits in the later years) that upped the American dollar. The trade deficit, also rose to a record \$152 billion in 1987. These facts helped make America the world's biggest borrowers.

IV. Reagan Renews the Cold War

1. Reagan took a get-tough stance against the USSR, especially when they continued to invade Afghanistan, and his plan to defeat the Soviets was to wage a super-expensive arms race that would eventually force the Soviets into bankruptcy and render them powerless.
 - He began this with his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as "Star Wars," which proposed a system of lasers that could fire from space and destroy any nuclear weapons fired by Moscow before they hit America—a system that many experts considered impossible as well as upsetting to the "balance of terror" (don't fire for fear of retaliation) that had kept nuclear war from being unleashed all these years. SDI was never built.
2. Late in 1981, the Soviets clamped down on Poland's massive union called "Solidarity" and received economic sanctions from the U.S.
 - The deaths of three different aging Soviet oligarchs from 1982-85 and the breaking of all arms-control negotiations in 1983 further complicated dealings with the Soviets.

V. Troubles Abroad

1. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 to destroy guerilla bases, and the next year, Reagan sent U.S. forces as part of an international peace-keeping force. But, when a suicide bomber crashed a bomb-filled truck into U.S. Marine barracks on October 23, 1983 killing over 200 marines, Reagan had to withdraw the troops, though he miraculously suffered no political damage.
 - Afterwards, he became known as the "Teflon president," the president to which nothing harmful would stick.
2. Reagan accused Nicaraguan "Sandinistas," a group of leftists that had taken over the Nicaraguan government, of turning the country into a forward base from which Communist forces could invade and conquer all of Latin America.
 - He also accused them of helping revolutionary forces in El Salvador, where violence had reigned since 1979, and Reagan then helped "contra" rebels in Nicaragua fight against the Sandinistas.
 - In October 1983, Reagan sent troops to Grenada, where a military coup had killed the prime minister and brought communists to power. The U.S. crushed the communist rebels.

VI. Round Two for Reagan

1. Reagan was opposed by Democrat Walter Mondale and V.P. candidate Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman to appear on a major-party presidential ticket, but won handily.
2. Foreign policy issues dominated Reagan's second term, one that saw the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, a personable, energetic leader who announced two new Soviet policies: glasnost, or "openness," which aimed to introduce free speech and political liberty to the Soviet Union, and perestroika, or "restructuring," which meant that the Soviets would move toward adopting free-market economies similar to those in the West.
3. At a summit meeting at Geneva in 1985, Gorbachev introduced the idea of ceasing the deployment of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF). At a second meeting at Reykjavik, Iceland, in November 1985, there was stalemate. At the third one in Washington D.C., the treaty was finally signed, banning all INF's from Europe.
 - The final summit at Moscow saw Reagan warmly praising the Soviet chief for trying to end the Cold War.
4. Also, Reagan supported Corazon Aquino's ousting of Filipino dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.
5. He also ordered a lightning raid on Libya, in 1986, in retaliation for Libya's state-sponsored terrorist attacks, and began escorting oil tankers through the Persian Gulf during the Iran—Iraq War.

VII. The Iran-Contra Imbroglio

1. In November 1986, it was revealed that a year before, American diplomats led by Col. Oliver North had secretly arranged arms sales to Iranian diplomats in return for the release of American hostages (at least one was) and had used that money to aid Nicaraguan contra rebels.
 - This brazenly violated the congressional ban on helping Nicaraguan rebels, not to mention Reagan's personal vow not to negotiate with terrorists.
 - An investigation concluded that even if Reagan had no knowledge of such events, as he claimed, he should have. This scandal not only cast a dark cloud over Reagan's foreign policy success, but also brought out a picture of Reagan as a somewhat senile old man who slept through important cabinet meetings.
 - Still, Reagan remained ever popular.

VIII. Reagan's Economic Legacy

1. Supply-side economics claimed that cutting taxes would actually increase government revenue, but instead, during his eight years in office, Reagan accumulated a \$2 trillion debt—more than all his presidential predecessors combined.
 - Much of the debt was financed by foreign bankers like the Japanese, creating fear that future Americans would have to work harder or have lower standards of living to pay off such debts for the United States.
2. Reagan did triumph in containing the welfare state by incurring debts so large that future spending would be difficult, thus prevent any more welfare programs from being enacted successfully.
3. Another trend of "Reaganomics" was the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The idea of "trickle-down economics" (helping the rich who own business would see money trickle down to working classes) seemed to prove false.

IX. The Religious Right

1. Beginning in the 1980s, energized religious conservatives began to exert their political muscle in a cultural war.
 - Rev. Jerry Falwell started the Moral Majority, consisting of evangelical Christians.
 - 2-3 million registered as Moral Majority voters in its first two years.
 - Using the power of media, they opposed sexual permissiveness, abortion, feminism, and homosexuality.
2. In large part, the conservative movement of the 80s was an answer to the liberal movement of the 60s. The pendulum was swinging back.
 - Conservatives viewed America as being hijacked in the 60s by a minority of radicals with political aims; the conservatives saw themselves as taking back America.

X. Conservatism in the Courts

1. Reagan used the courts as his instrument against affirmative action and abortion, and by 1988, the year he left office, he had appointed a near-majority of all sitting federal judges.
 - Included among those were three conservative-minded judges, one of which was Sandra Day O'Connor, a brilliant Stanford Law School graduate and the first female Supreme Court justice in American history.
2. In a 1984 case involving Memphis firefighters, the Court ruled that union rules about job seniority could outweigh affirmative-action concerns.
3. In *Ward's Cove Packing v. Arizona* and *Martin v. Wilks*, the Court ruled it more difficult to prove that an employer practiced discrimination in hiring and made it easier for white males to argue that they were victims of reverse-discrimination.
4. The 1973 case of *Roe v. Wade* had basically legalized abortion, but the 1989 case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* seriously compromised protection of abortion rights.
 - In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), the Court ruled that states could restrict access to abortion as long as they didn't place an "undue burden" on the woman.

XI. Referendum on Reaganism in 1988

1. Democrats got back the Senate in 1986 and sought to harm Reagan with the Iran-Contra scandal and unethical behavior that tainted an oddly large number of Reagan's cabinet.
 - They even rejected Robert Bork, Reagan's ultraconservative choice to fill an empty space on the Supreme Court.
2. The federal budget and the international trade deficit continued to soar while falling oil prices hurt housing values in the Southwest and damaged savings-and-loans institutions, forcing Reagan to order a \$500 million rescue operation for the S&L institutions.
 - On October 19, 1987, the stock market fell 508 points, sparking fears of the end of the money culture, but this was premature.
3. In 1988, Gary Hart tried to get the Democratic nomination but had to drop out due to a sexual misconduct charge while Jesse Jackson assembled a "rainbow coalition" in hopes of becoming president. But, the Democrats finally chose Michael Dukakis, who lost badly to Republican candidate and Reagan's vice president George Herbert Walker Bush, 112 to 426.

XII. George H. W. Bush and the End of the Cold War

1. Bush had been born into a rich family, but he was committed to public service and vowed to sculpt "a kinder, gentler America."
2. In 1989, it seemed that Democracy was reviving in previously Communist hot-spots.
 - In China, thousands of democratic-seeking students protested in Tiananmen Square but they were brutally crushed by Chinese tanks and armed forces.
 - In Eastern Europe, Communist regimes fell in Poland (which saw Solidarity rise again), Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania.
 - Soon afterwards, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down.
 - In 1990, Boris Yeltsin stopped a military coup that tried to dislodge Gorbachev, then took over Russia when the Soviet Union fell and disintegrated into the Commonwealth of Independent States, of which Russia was the largest member. Thus, the Cold War was over.
 - This shocked experts who had predicted that the Cold War could only end violently.
3. Problems remained however, as the question remained of who would take over the U.S.S.R.'s nuclear stockpiles or its seat in the U.N. Security Council? Eventually, Russia did.
4. In 1993, Bush signed the START II accord with Yeltsin, pledging both nations to reduce their long-range nuclear arsenals by two-thirds within ten years.
 - Trouble was still present when the Chechnyen minority in Russia tried to declare independence and was resisted by Russia; that incident hasn't been resolved yet.
5. Europe found itself quite unstable when the economically weak former communist countries re-integrated with it.
6. America then had no rival to guard against, and it was possible that it would revert back to its isolationist policies. Also, military spending had soaked up so much money that upon the end of the Cold War, the Pentagon closed 34 military bases, canceled a \$52 billion order for a navy attack

plane, and forced scores of Californian defense plants to shut their doors.

7. However, in 1990, South Africa freed Nelson Mandela, and he was elected president 4 years later.
 1. Free elections removed the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1990, and in 1992, peace came to Ecuador at last.

XIII. The Persian Gulf Crisis

1. On August 2, 1990, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded oil-rich Kuwait with 100,000 men, hoping to annex it as a 19th province and use its oil fields to replenish debts incurred during the Iraq—Iran War, a war which oddly saw the U.S. supporting Hussein despite his bad reputation.
2. Saddam attacked swiftly, but the U.N. responded just as swiftly, placing economic embargoes on the aggressor and preparing for military punishment.
3. Fighting “Operation Desert Storm”
 - Some 539,000 U.S. military force members joined 270,000 troops from 28 other countries to attack Iraq in a war, which began on January 12, 1991, when Congress declared it.
 - On January 16, the U.S. and U.N. unleashed a hellish air war against Iraq for 37 days.
 - Iraq responded by launching several ultimately ineffective “scud” missiles at Saudi Arabia and Israel, but it had far darker strategies available, such as biological and chemical weapons and strong desert fortifications with oil-filled moats that could be lit afire if the enemy got too close.
 - American General Norman Schwarzkopf took nothing for granted, strategizing to suffocate Iraqis with an onslaught of air bombing raids and then rush them with troops.
 - On February 23, “Operation Desert Storm” began with an overwhelming land attack that lasted four days, saw really little casualties, and ended with Saddam’s forces surrender.
 - American cheered the war’s rapid end and well-fought duration and was relieved that this had not turned into another Vietnam, but Saddam Hussein had failed to be dislodged from power and was left to menace the world another day.
4. The U.S. found itself even more deeply ensnared in the region’s web of mortal hatreds.

XIV. Bush on the Home Front

1. President Bush’s 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act was a landmark law that banned discrimination against citizens with disabilities.
2. Bush also signed a major water projects bill in 1992 and agreed to sign a watered-down civil rights bill in 1991.
3. In 1991, Bush proposed Clarence Thomas (a Black man) to fill in the vacant seat left by retiring Thurgood Marshall (the first Black Supreme Court justice), but this choice was opposed by the NAACP since Thomas was a conservative and by the National Organization for Women (NOW), since Thomas was supposedly pro-abortion.
 - In early October 1991, Anita Hill charged Thomas with sexual harassment, and even though Thomas was still selected to be on the Court, Hill’s case publicized sexual harassment and tightened tolerance of it (Oregon’s Senator Robert Packwood had to step down in 1995 after a case of sexual harassment).
 - A gender gap arose between women in both parties.
4. In 1992, the economy stalled, and Bush was forced to break an explicit campaign promise (“Read my lips, no new taxes”) and add \$133 billion worth of new taxes to try to curb the \$250 billion annual budget.
 - When it was revealed that many House members had written bad checks from a private House “bank,” public confidence lessened even more.
5. The 27th Amendment banned congressional pay raises from taking effect until an election had seated a new session of Congress, an idea first proposed by James Madison in 1789.

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