

Chapter 41- The Resurgence of Conservatism

1980-2000

The Election of Ronald Reagan, 1980

- The average American was older than in the sixties and more likely to live in the South or West, the traditional bastions of the “Old Right,” where many harbored suspicions of federal power
- The conservative cause drew strength from the emergence of a “New Right” movement, partly in response to counter-cultural protests of the 1960s—evangelical Christian groups, social issues denouncing abortion, pornography, homosexuality, feminism, and affirmative action
- Ronald Reagan sided with the new right on social issues denounced the activist gov’t and failed “social engineering” of the 1960s—both Reagan and Roosevelt championed the “common man”
- Reagan preached a “populist” political philosophy that condemned federal intervention in local affairs, favoritism of minorities and elitism of arrogant bureaucrats (working-class, middle-class)
- Reagan drew ideas from the “neo-conservatives” who championed free-market capitalism liberated from gov’t restraints and took anti-Soviet positions in foreign policy, questioned liberal welfare programs, affirmative –action policies, and called for reassertion of traditional values
- An actor-turned-politician, Reagan enjoyed enormous popularity (governor of California)
- By 1980 the Republican party was ready to challenge the Democrats’ hold on the White House
- Disaffection with Carter ran in his own Democratic party where an “ABC” (Anybody but Carter) movement gathered and Senator Edward Kennedy emerged (Kennedy’s car accident in ’69)
- The Republican candidate proved to be a good campaigner (acting skills in televised debates)
- Reagan attacked the performance in foreign policy and blasted the big gov’t philosophy of the Democrats; Reagan won over 51 percent of the popular vote, moderate independent Anderson
- Carter was the first elected president to be unseated by the voters since Herbert Hoover
- Carter stressed in his Farewell Address his efforts to scale down the deadly arms race, to promote human rights, and to protect the environment (bill preserving Alaska land)

The Reagan Revolution

- On Reagan’s Inauguration Day, January 20, 1981, the Iranians released the hostages (444 days)
- Reagan assembled a conservative cabinet including James Watt who was a product of the “Sagebrush Rebellion,” an anti-Washington movement to protest federal control over resources
- Environmentalists pointed to Watt’s schemes to hobble the EPA and he resigned in 1983

- A major goal of Reagan was to reduce the size of the gov't by shrinking the federal budget and slashing taxes; by the early 1980s this antigovernment message found a receptive audience
- After four decades of advancing New Deal and Great Society programs, a strong countercurrent took hold and Californians staged a "tax revolt" in 1978 (Proposition 13) that slashed property taxes; the California "tax quake" jolted other state capitals and Reagan proceeded
- Reagan proposed a new federal budget that necessitated cuts of some \$35 billion mostly in social programs and federally funded centers (Reagan had a Republican majority in the Senate but in the Democratic House he wooed a group of southern conservative Democrats—boll weevils)
- On March 6, 1981, a gunman shot the president; Reagan recovered rapidly and when he appeared on national television to address Congress/public on his budget, support was enormous

The Battle of the Budget

- Congress swallowed Reagan's budget proposals, approving expenditures of \$695 billion with a projected deficit of \$38 billion, which Congress addressed by scalping Great Society programs
- Reagan exercised great power over Congress and the second part of his economic program called for deep tax cuts, amounting to 25 percent reductions over a period of three years (TV address)
- Thanks to the continued defection of the "boll weevils" from the Democratic camp, Reagan had his way; reforms lowered individual tax rates, reduced estate taxes, and created savings plans
- Reagan's "supply-side" economic advisers assured him that combination of budgetary discipline and tax reduction would stimulate new investment, boost productivity, foster dramatic economic growth, and reduce federal deficit (unemployment, automobile industry lagged, bank failures)
- The "tight money" policies that precipitated the "Reagan recession" of 1982 had been initiated by the Federal Reserve Board; advisers waited for their "Reaganomics" to produce results
- A healthy economic recovery finally got under way in 1983 but income gaps widened
- Symbolic of the new income stratification was the emergence of the "yuppies," or young, urban professionals who showcased the values of materialism and the pursuit of wealth of 1980s
- Massive military expenditures may have constituted the foundation of 1980s prosperity
- Reagan wanted to close "window of vulnerability"—gov't borrowing to cover deficits kept interest rates high, which elevated the value of the dollar; America heaviest borrower of '80s

Reagan Renews the Cold War

- As the Soviets carried on war in Afghanistan, Reagan continued to condemn the Kremlin

- Reagan believed in negotiating with the Soviets but from a position of strength; by expanding US military capabilities, he could threaten the Soviets with arms race/economy stronger
- In March 1983 Reagan announced intention to pursue a missile-defense system called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), popularly known as Star Wars (overall Soviet strategy)
- SDI emphasized defense rather than offense; doubts constrained funding for SDI
- In late 1981, Poland clamped martial law on the troubled country and the Solidarity (union)
- Reagan saw the USSR inside Poland and imposed economic sanctions on Poland and the USSR
- In September 1983 a Korean passenger airliner was blasted from the sky for violating airspace and by the end of 1983, all arms-control negotiations with the Soviets was broken off;
- Deepening chill of the Cold War was felt in boycotted Moscow Olympics and LA Olympics

Troubles Abroad

- In June 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon seeking to suppress Palestinian fighter bases
- President Reagan was obliged to send American troops to Lebanon in 1983 as part of an international peacekeeping force and after a suicide bomber killed 200 US marines on October 23, 1983, the president soon after withdrew remaining American troops (no political damage)
- A leftist revolution deposed the dictator of Nicaragua in 1979 and while Carter tried to ignore anti-American revolutionaries known as “Sandinistas,” Reagan returned fire for fire
- Discovering aid sent to El Salvador, Reagan sent military “advisers” to prop up the pro-American gov’t of El Salvador and provided covert aid (invasion force to Grenada)

Round Two for Reagan

- Reagan won the Republican nomination in 1984 for a second White House term and his opponent was Democrat Walter Mondale whose running mate was Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro of New York who was the first woman ever to appear on a major-party presidential ticket
- Mondale was tainted by his service as vice president under Carter and Reagan won handily
- Foreign-policy issues dominated Reagan’s news in his second term; the president soon found himself contending for world’s attention with new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (1985)
- Gorbachev announced glasnost, or “openness” to introduce free speech and political liberty and perestroika, or “restructuring” to revive the Soviet economy with many free-market practices
- Soviet Union shrunk the size of its enormous military machine and wanted to end the Cold War

- Gorbachev made overtures to the West announcing in April 1985 that the Soviet Union would cease to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) targeted on Western Europe
- HE met with Reagan at four summit meetings, Geneva, Iceland, Washington, D.C. in December 1987 which produced the INF treaty, banning all INFs from Europe and the final summit Moscow in May 1988 that brought the Cold War to a kind of conclusion
- Reagan intervened in a civil war in the Philippines, ordered air raid against Libya in 1986 for sponsoring terrorist attacks and escort of oil tankers through the Persian Gulf (Iran vs. Iraq)

The Iran-Contra Imbroglio

- The continuing captivity of American hostages seized by Muslim extremists in Lebanon and the continuing grip on power of the left-wing Sandinista gov't in Nicaragua seemed unsolvable
- Reagan repeatedly requested Congress provide military aid to contra rebels but Congress refused
- In 1985 American diplomats arranged arms sales to Iranians in return for Iranian aid in obtaining the release of American hostages held by Middle Eastern terrorists (money from the payment for the arms was diverted to the contras which violated ban on military aid to Nicaraguan rebels)
- News of these secret dealings broke in November 1986 and President Reagan pleaded innocent; criminal indictments were brought against several individuals tarred by the Iran-contra scandal
- The Iran-contra affair cast a dark shadow over the Reagan record in foreign policy and despite revelations, Reagan remained among the most popular presidents in modern American history

Reagan's Economic Legacy—"Reaganomics"

- Reagan eased many regulatory rules, pushed major tax reform bills through Congress but a balance budget remained out of reach (the combination of tax reduction and huge increases in military spending opened a vast "revenue hole" of \$200 billion annual deficits)
- The staggering deficits of the Reagan years assuredly constituted a great economic failure and foreign lenders financed much of the debt (legislation mandating balanced budget, 1986)
- The deficits contained the welfare state and there was a sharp reversal of a long-term trend toward a more equitable distribution of income and an increasing squeeze on the middle class

The Religious Right

- Religion pervaded American politics in the 1980s; especially conspicuous was a coalition of conservative, evangelical Christians known as the religious right (Moral Majority)

- Reverend Falwell preached against sexual permissiveness, abortion, feminism, and the gay rights and televangelists reached huge audiences in the 1980s, collected millions and were conservative
- Members of the religious right were sometimes called “movement conservatives,” a term that recalls the left-wing protest movements of the 1960s (response to sixties radicalism)
- The religious right practiced a form of “identity politics” but declared themselves Christian or pro-life voters; the right had prayer meetings; they mirrored tactics of civil disobedience
- Several leaders of the religious right fell from grace in the latter part of the decade (continued)

Conservatism in the Courts

- The courts became Reagan’s principle instrument in the “cultural wars” demanded by the religious right; by the time he had left office, Reagan had appointed many sitting judges and he had named three conservative-minded justices to the US Supreme Court who included Sandra Day O’Connor, who became the first woman to ascend to the high bench (9/25/81)
- Reaganism repudiated two great icons of the liberal political culture—affirmative action/abortion
- In 1984 the Court ruled that union rules about job seniority could outweigh affirmative action
- In two cases in 1989 (*Ward’s Cove Packing v. Antonia* and *Martin v. Wilks*), the Court made it more difficult to prove that an employer practiced racial discrimination in hiring and made it easier for white males to argue that they were the victims of reverse discrimination
- In the case of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the Supreme Court prohibited states from making laws that interfered with a woman’s right to an abortion during the early months of pregnancy and two decades later, that decision became the foundation for “pro-choice” advocates
- In *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, the Court in 1989 did not entirely overturn *Roe* but it approved state law imposing certain restrictions on abortion (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*)

Referendum on Reaganism in 1988

- Republicans lost control of the Senate in the elections of November 1986; hopes rose among Democrats that the “Reagan Revolution: might be showing signs of political vulnerability
- Democrats relished the prospect of making political hay out of both the Iran-contra scandal and the unethical behavior that tainted the Reagan administration and the “twin towers” of deficits, the federal budget deficit and international trade deficit that continued to mount ominously
- Falling oil prices blighted the economy of the Southwest, slashing real estate values and undermining hundreds of savings-and-loans (S&L) institutions—the damage was so massive that a federal rescue operation was estimated to have cost over \$500 billion to the S&Ls

- More banks and savings institutions were folding than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s; on “Black Monday,” October 19, 1987, the largest stock one-day decline occurred
- Democrats (“Seven Dwarfs”) chased after the party’s 1988 presidential nomination but the Democratic front-runner (Gary Hart) was forced to drop out after charges of sexual misconduct
- Black candidate Jesse Jackson had a rousing speech but the Democratic nomination went to the governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis while the Republicans nominated Reagan’s vice president, George Bush on won using Reagan’s record during his presidency

George Bush and the End of the Cold War

- George Herbert Walker Bush attended Yale, was part of WW II and owned his own oil business in Texas before he was a congressman, ambassador to the UN, director of the CIA and vice president and was inaugurated as president in January 1989 (communist world’s attention)
- In China prodemocracy demonstrators protested in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989 but China’s rulers brutally crushed the prodemocracy movement publicly executing people
- World opinion condemned the bloody suppression of the prodemocracy demonstrators
- In 1989, the Solidarity movement in Poland toppled Poland’s communist gov’t and with speed, communist regimes collapsed in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania
- In December 1989, Germans danced atop the hated Berlin Wall, symbol of the division; the Wall soon came down and with the approval of the Allied power, Germany reunited in October ‘90
- Old guard hard-liners to preserve the communist system attempted to dislodge Gorbachev with a military coup in August 1991 and with the support of Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Republic, Gorbachev foiled the plotters; in December 1991, Gorbachev resigned as president Boris Yeltsin headed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Soviet Union dissolved)
- The demise of the Soviet Union wrote a definitive finish to the Cold War era; Bush spoke of a “new world order” where democracy would reign and diplomacy would supersede weaponry
- In 1993 President Bush signed the START II accord with Russian president Boris Yeltsin committing both powers to reduce their long-range nuclear arsenals by two-thirds in 10 years
- Waves of nationalistic fervor and ethnic and racial hatreds rolled across the Soviet empire
- A conflict erupted in the Russian Caucasus in 1991 when the Chechnyan minority tried to declare their independence from Russia, prompting President Yeltsin to send in Russian troops
- Refugees from the strife-torn regions flooded into Western Europe (ethnic antagonisms)
- The German economy wobbled, the stability of the entire European continent seemed at risk

- The Soviet-American rivalry had created huge economic sectors such as aerospace which were heavily sustained by military contracts; military closings and cancellations followed
- Elsewhere in the world, democracy marched triumphantly forward (Nelson Mandela in South Africa, free elections in Nicaragua removed Sandinistas from power, peace to El Salvador)

The Persian Gulf Crisis

- President Bush sent in airborne troops to capture dictator Manuel Noriega in Panama in 1989
- On August 2, 1990, Saddam Hussein, ruler of Iraq, sent his armies to overrun Kuwait; oil fueled Saddam's aggression—Iraq needed Kuwait's oil to pay its huge war bills (war with Iran)
- The United States and its allies had helped supply Saddam with the tools of aggression; but in the 1980s American enmity for Islamic-fundamentalist Iran was intense and American policy-makers helped build Saddam's military machine into a formidable force (speed and audacity)
- On August 3, the United Nations Security Council condemned the invasion and demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraq's troops, economic embargo failure
- The Security Council delivered an ultimatum to Saddam to leave Kuwait by 1/15/91 but as the day passed, some 539,000 US soldiers were assembled (all-volunteer) and 270,000 other troops
- US Congress voted regretfully on January 12 to approve the use of force

Fighting "Operation Desert Storm"

- On January 16, 1991, the UN unleashed an air war against Iraq that responded by launching several dozen "Scud" short-range ballistic missiles in Saudi Arabia and Israel
- The allied commander, American general Norman Schwarzkopf's strategy was to soften the Iraq with relentless bombing, and then to suffocate them on the ground with a rush of troops
- Iraq had stockpiled tons of chemical and biological weapons (ecological warfare)
- On February 23, the land war began with Operation Desert Storm that lasted only four days
- Allied casualties were amazingly light, and on February 27, Saddam accepted a cease-fire
- The end of the war had come so suddenly that antiwar sentiment never crystallized
- The war had nevertheless failed to dislodge Saddam from power (internal conflicts)

Bush on the Home Front

- George Bush signed Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 (kinder, gentler America)
- The president signed a major water projects bill in 1992 that reformed the distribution of subsidized federal water in the West that put the interests of the environment ahead of agriculture

- Bush repeatedly threatened to veto civil rights legislation (prevent discrimination in hiring)
- In 1991 Bush nominated for the Supreme Court the conservative African-American jurist Clarence Thomas who was slated to fill a seat vacated by the retirement of Thurgood Marshall
- Thomas' nomination was opposed by the liberal groups, NAACP and NOW (abortion rights)
- In October 1991, a press leak revealed that Anita Hill, a law professor, had accused Thomas of sexual harassment; the public outcry forced the Senate Judiciary Committee to reopen hearings
- Hill's charges had failed to block Thomas' nomination; the furor over Clarence Thomas' confirmation suggested that the social issues that had helped produce Republican presidential victories in the 1980s were losing some of their electoral appeal; many women opposed Bush
- The unemployment rate increased and the federal budget deficit continued to grow
- Bush agreed in 1990 to a budget agreement with Congress that included \$133 billion in new taxes; In his presidential campaign Bush had promised no new taxes but he had broken it
- In 1991 it was revealed that many members of the House had written bad checks—distrust

Bill Clinton: The First Baby-Boomer President

- The slumbering economy, the widening gender gap, and the rising anti-incumbent spirit spelled opportunity for Democrats; Governor William Clinton of AK emerged as the standard-bearer
- He chose Al Gore of TN as his vice-presidential running mate; in 1984 Clinton and other Democrats had formed the Democratic Leadership Council to point the party away from its traditional antibusiness, dovish orientation and toward progrowth, strong defense, and anticrime
- Clinton promised to stimulate the economy, reform the welfare system, and overhaul the nation's health-care apparatus while the Republican strove on "family values" and renominated Bush
- Fear of the economic problems of the future swayed votes; Ross Perot emerged as independent
- Perot's presence accounted for a record turnout on election day (100 million) and the final tallies gave Clinton the win (Perot gathered almost 20 million votes, strongest third party showing)
- Democrats racked up clear majorities in both houses of Congress with great diversity while Carol Moseley-Braun became the first African-American woman elected to the US Senate
- Women figured prominently in President Clinton's cabinet including the first female attorney general, Janet Reno and Donna Shalala, the secretary of health and human services
- In 1993, Clinton nominated Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the Court to make a pair of women justices

A False Start for Reform

- Clinton entered office by advocating an end to the ban on gays and lesbians in the armed services and faced with fierce opposition, the president had to settle for the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy
- Clinton nominated his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton as the director of a task force charged with redesigning the medical-service industry, which was dead upon arrival and she stepped back
- Clinton had better luck with a deficit-reduction bill in 1993, which combined with a moderately buoyant economy to shrink the federal deficit to its lower level in more than a decade
- In 1993, he induced Congress to pass the gun-control law, the “Brady Bill” and in July of 1994 made further progress against the national plague of firearms with a \$30 billion anticrime bill
- The US struggled to hold the line against an epidemic of violence that rocked American society in the 1990s including a Muslim group bombing of New York’s World Trade Center in ‘93
- A still larger blast destroyed a federal office building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1995 taking 168 lives (linked to the fundamentalist sect known as the Branch Davidians)
- The confidence in the gov’t was in short supply by the century’s end

The Politics of Distrust

- Clinton’s failed initiatives and antigov’t sentiment offered conservative Republicans a golden opportunity in 1994; led by New Gingrich, conservatives offered voters a “Contract with America” that promised all-out assault on budget deficits/radical reductions in welfare programs
- The new Republican majority after the 1994 elections legislated federal laws that imposed new obligations on state and local gov’t without providing new revenues and in 1996 the Congress compelled Clinton to sign the Welfare Reform Bill that made deep cuts in welfare grants and required able-bodied welfare recipients to find employment (restricted immigration welfare)
- Clinton was at first stunned by the magnitude of the Republican congressional victory in 1994 and outlandishly partisan antics bred a backlash that helped President Clinton rebound
- Clinton’s reelection campaign raised spectacular sums of money and the eventual Republican standard-bearer was Robert Dole and buoyed by a healthy economy breezed to an easy victory

Clinton Again

- As Clinton began his second term, he proposed only modest legislative goals
- Clinton managed to put Republicans on the defensive by claiming the political middle ground

- HE now embraced the Welfare Reform Bill of 1996 and though Proposition 209 in CA (prohibiting affirmative action preferences in gov't and higher education) and the Hopwood v. Texas decision assaulted affirmative action, he did not try to reverse them (public opinion)
- Clinton's major political advantage continued to be the roaring economy, while unemployment crept down and inflationary pressure remained low (US driven by Internet businesses)