precious savings. The 1982 law left the government responsible for bailing out S&Ls out at an eventual cost of $132 billion.[65]

IX. Culture Wars of the 1980s

Popular culture of the 1980s offered another venue in which conservatives and liberals waged a battle of ideas. The militarism and patriotism of Reagan's presidency pervaded movies like *Top Gun* and the *Rambo* series, starring Sylvester Stallone as a Vietnam War veteran haunted by his country's failure to pursue victory in Southeast Asia. In contrast, director Oliver Stone offered searing condemnations of the war in *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*. Television shows like *Dynasty* and *Dallas* celebrated wealth and glamour, reflecting the pride in conspicuous consumption that emanated from the White House and corporate boardrooms during the decade. At the same time, films like *Wall Street* and novels like Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* skewered the excesses of the rich.

The most significant aspect of much popular culture in the 1980s, however, was its lack of politics altogether. Steven Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and his Indiana Jones adventure trilogy topped the box office. Cinematic escapism replaced the social films of the 1970s. Quintessential Hollywood leftist Jane Fonda appeared frequently on television but only to peddle exercise videos. Television viewership—once dominated by the big three networks of NBC, ABC, and CBS—fragmented with the rise of cable channels catering to particularized tastes. Few cable channels so captured the popular imagination as MTV, which debuted in 1981. Telegenic artists like Madonna, Prince, and Michael Jackson skillfully used MTV to boost their reputations and album sales. Conservatives condemned music videos for corrupting young people with vulgar, anti-authoritarian messages, but the medium only grew in stature. Critics of MTV targeted Madonna in particular. Her 1989 video "Like a Prayer" drew protests for what some people viewed as sexually suggestive and blasphemous scenes. The religious right increasingly perceived popular culture as hostile to Christian values.

The Apple II computer, introduced in 1977, was the first successful mass-produced microcomputer meant for home use. Cultural battles were even more heated in the realm of gender and sexual politics. American women pushed further into male-dominated spheres during the 1980s. By 1984, women in the workforce outnumbered those who worked at

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The Apple II was the smallest and sleekest personal computer model yet introduced. Indeed, it revolutionized both the substance and design of personal computers. Wikimedia.

home.[66] That same year, New York representative Geraldine Ferraro became the first woman to run on a major party's presidential ticket when Democratic candidate Walter Mondale named her his running mate. Yet the triumph of the right placed fundamental questions about women's rights near the center of American politics—particularly in regard to abortion. The issue increasingly divided Americans. Pro-life Democrats and pro-choice Republicans grew rare, as the National Abortion Rights Action League enforced pro-choice orthodoxy on the left and the National Right to Life Commission did the same with pro-life orthodoxy on the right. Religious conservatives took advantage of the Republican takeover of the White House and Senate in 1980 to push for new restrictions on abortion—with limited success. Senators Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Orrin Hatch of Utah introduced versions of a Human Life Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that defined life as beginning at conception. Both efforts failed.[67] Reagan, more interested in economic issues than social ones, provided only lukewarm support for the anti-abortion movement. He further outraged anti-abortion activists by appointing

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Sandra Day O'Connor, a supporter of abortion rights, to the Supreme Court. Despite these setbacks, anti-abortion forces succeeded in defunding some abortion providers. The 1976 Hyde Amendment prohibited the use of federal funds to pay for abortions; by 1990 almost every state had its own version of the Hyde Amendment. Yet some anti-abortion activists demanded more. In 1988 evangelical activist Randall Terry founded Operation Rescue, an organization that targeted abortion clinics and pro-choice politicians with confrontational—and sometimes violent—tactics. Operation Rescue demonstrated that the fight over abortion would grow only more heated in the 1990s.

The emergence of a deadly new illness, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), simultaneously devastated, stigmatized, and energized the nation's homosexual community. When AIDS appeared in the early 1980s, most of its victims were gay men. For a time the disease was known as GRID—gay-related immune deficiency. The epidemic rekindled older pseudoscientific ideas about the inherently diseased nature of homosexual bodies. The Reagan administration met the issue with indifference, leading liberal congressman Henry Waxman to rage that "if the same disease had appeared among Americans of Norwegian descent . . . rather than among gay males, the response of both the government and the medical community would be different."[68] Some religious figures seemed to relish the opportunity to condemn homosexual activity; Catholic columnist Patrick Buchanan remarked that "the sexual revolution has begun to devour its children."[69]

Homosexuals were left to forge their own response to the crisis. Some turned to confrontation—like New York playwright Larry Kramer. Kramer founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis, which demanded a more proactive response to the epidemic. Others sought to humanize AIDS victims; this was the goal of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, a commemorative project begun in 1985. By the middle of the decade the federal government began to address the issue haltingly. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, an evangelical Christian, called for more federal funding on AIDS-related research, much to the dismay of critics on the religious right. By 1987 government spending on AIDS-related research reached $500 million—still only 25 percent of what experts advocated.[70] In 1987 Reagan convened a presidential commission on AIDS; the commission's report called for antidiscrimination laws to protect people with AIDS and for more federal spending on AIDS research. The shift encouraged activists. Nevertheless, on issues of abortion and gay rights—as with the push

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The AIDS epidemic hit gay and African American communities particularly hard in the 1980s, prompting widespread social stigmatization, but also prompting awareness campaigns, such as this poster featuring singer Patti LaBelle. Wikimedia.

for racial equality—activists spent the 1980s preserving the status quo rather than building on previous gains. This amounted to a significant victory for the New Right.

X. The New Right Abroad

The conservative movement gained ground on gender and sexual politics, but it captured the entire battlefield on American foreign policy in the 1980s, at least for a time. Ronald Reagan entered office a committed Cold Warrior. He held the Soviet Union in contempt, denouncing it in a 1983 speech as an "evil empire."[71] And he never doubted that the Soviet Union would end up "on the ash heap of history," as he said in a 1982 speech to the British Parliament.[72] Indeed, Reagan believed it was the duty of the United States to speed the Soviet Union to its inevitable demise. His Reagan Doctrine declared that the United States would supply aid to anticommunist forces everywhere in the world.[73] To give this

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doctrine force, Reagan oversaw an enormous expansion in the defense budget. Federal spending on defense rose from $171 billion in 1981 to $229 billion in 1985, the highest level since the Vietnam War.[74] He described this as a policy of "peace through strength," a phrase that appealed to Americans who, during the 1970s, feared that the United States was losing its status as the world's most powerful nation. Yet the irony is that Reagan, for all his militarism, helped bring the Cold War to an end through negotiation, a tactic he had once scorned.

Reagan's election came at a time when many Americans feared their country was in an irreversible decline. American forces withdrew in disarray from South Vietnam in 1975. The United States returned control of the Panama Canal to Panama in 1978, despite protests from conservatives. Pro-American dictators were toppled in Iran and Nicaragua in 1979. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan that same year, leading conservatives to warn about American weakness in the face of Soviet expansion. Reagan spoke to fears of decline and warned, in 1976, that "this nation has become Number Two in a world where it is dangerous—if not fatal—to be second best."[75]

The Reagan administration made Latin America a showcase for its newly assertive policies. Jimmy Carter had sought to promote human

Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, pictured here at Camp David in December 1984, led two of the world's most powerful countries and formed an alliance that benefited both throughout their tenures in office. Wikimedia.

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rights in the region, but Reagan and his advisors scrapped this approach and instead focused on fighting communism—a term they applied to all Latin American left-wing movements. And so when communists with ties to Cuba overthrew the government of the Caribbean nation of Grenada in October 1983, Reagan dispatched the U.S. Marines to the island. Dubbed Operation Urgent Fury, the Grenada invasion overthrew the leftist government after less than a week of fighting. Despite the relatively minor nature of the mission, its success gave victory-hungry Americans something to cheer about after the military debacles of the previous two decades.

Grenada was the only time Reagan deployed the American military in Latin America, but the United States also influenced the region by supporting right-wing, anticommunist movements there. From 1981 to 1990, the United States gave more than $4 billion to the government of El Salvador in a largely futile effort to defeat the guerrillas of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).[76] Salvadoran security forces equipped with American weapons committed numerous atrocities, including the slaughter of almost one thousand civilians at the village of El Mozote in December 1981.

Operation Urgent Fury, the U.S. invasion of Grenada, was broadly supported by the U.S. public. This photograph shows the deployment of U.S. Army Rangers on October 25, 1983. Wikimedia.

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The Reagan administration took a more cautious approach in the Middle East, where its policy was determined by a mix of anticommunism and hostility toward the Islamic government of Iran. When Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, the United States supplied Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein with military intelligence and business credits—even after it became clear that Iraqi forces were using chemical weapons. Reagan's greatest setback in the Middle East came in 1982, when, shortly after Israel invaded Lebanon, he dispatched Marines to the Lebanese city of Beirut to serve as a peacekeeping force. On October 23, 1983, a suicide bomber killed 241 Marines stationed in Beirut. Congressional pressure and anger from the American public forced Reagan to recall the Marines from Lebanon in March 1984. Reagan's decision demonstrated that, for all his talk of restoring American power, he took a pragmatic approach to foreign policy. He was unwilling to risk another Vietnam by committing American troops to Lebanon.

Though Reagan's policies toward Central America and the Middle East aroused protest, his policy on nuclear weapons generated the most controversy. Initially Reagan followed the examples of presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter by pursuing arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. American officials participated in the Intermediate-range Nuclear Force (INF) Talks that began in 1981 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in 1982. But the breakdown of these talks in 1983 led Reagan to proceed with plans to place Pershing II nuclear missiles in Western Europe to counter Soviet SS-20 missiles in Eastern Europe. Reagan went a step further in March 1983, when he announced plans for a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), a space-based system that could shoot down incoming Soviet missiles. Critics derided the program as a "Star Wars" fantasy, and even Reagan's advisors harbored doubts. "We don't have the technology to do this," secretary of state George Shultz told aides.[77] These aggressive policies fed a growing nuclear freeze movement throughout the world. In the United States, organizations like the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy organized protests that culminated in a June 1982 rally that drew almost a million people to New York City's Central Park.

Protests in the streets were echoed by resistance in Congress. Congressional Democrats opposed Reagan's policies on the merits; congressional Republicans, though they supported Reagan's anticommunism, were wary of the administration's fondness for circumventing Congress. In 1982, the House voted 411–0 to approve the Boland Amendment, which barred the United States from supplying funds to the contras, a

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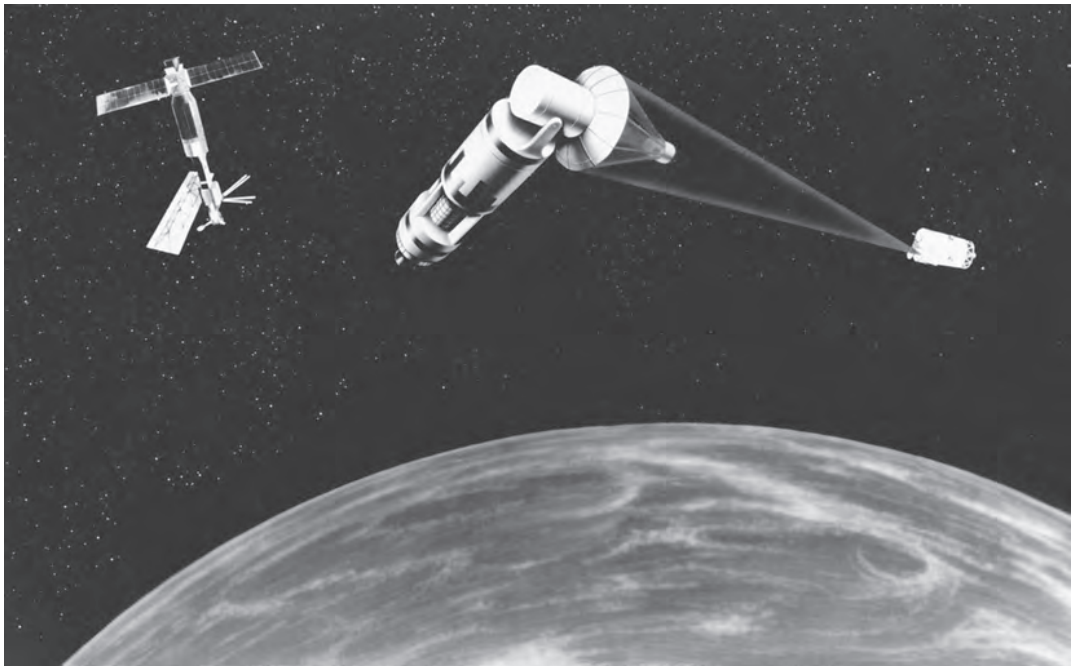

President Reagan proposed new space- and ground-based defense systems to protect the United States from nuclear missiles in his 1984 Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Scientists argued that it was technologically unfeasible, and it was lambasted in the media as the "Star Wars" program. Wikimedia.

right-wing insurgency fighting the leftist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. Reagan, overlooking the contras' brutal tactics, hailed them as the "moral equivalent of the Founding Fathers."[78] The Reagan administration's determination to flout these amendments led to a scandal that almost destroyed Reagan's presidency. Robert MacFarlane, the president's national security advisor, and Oliver North, a member of the National Security Council, raised money to support the contras by selling American missiles to Iran and funneling the money to Nicaragua. When their scheme was revealed in 1986, it was hugely embarrassing for Reagan. The president's underlings had not only violated the Boland Amendment but had also, by selling arms to Iran, made a mockery of Reagan's declaration that "America will never make concessions to the terrorists." But while the Iran-Contra affair generated comparisons to the Watergate scandal, investigators were never able to prove Reagan knew about the operation. Without such a "smoking gun," talk of impeaching Reagan remained simply talk.

Though the Iran-Contra scandal tarnished the Reagan administration's image, it did not derail Reagan's most significant achievement: easing tensions with the Soviet Union. This would have seemed impossible

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in Reagan's first term, when the president exchanged harsh words with a rapid succession of Soviet leaders—Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko. In 1985, however, the aged Chernenko's death handed leadership of the Soviet Union to Mikhail Gorbachev, who, while a true believer in socialism, nonetheless realized that the Soviet Union desperately needed to reform itself. He instituted a program of *perestroika*, which referred to the restructuring of the Soviet system, and of *glasnost*, which meant greater transparency in government. Gorbachev also reached out to Reagan in hopes of negotiating an end to the arms race, which was bankrupting the Soviet Union. Reagan and Gorbachev met in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1985 and Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1986. The summits failed to produce any concrete agreements, but the two leaders developed a relationship unprecedented in the history of U.S.-Soviet relations. This trust made possible the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1987, which committed both sides to a sharp reduction in their nuclear arsenal.

By the late 1980s the Soviet empire was crumbling. Reagan successfully combined anticommunist rhetoric (such as his 1987 speech at the Berlin Wall, where he declared, "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace . . . tear down this wall!") with a willingness to negotiate with Soviet leadership.[79] But the most significant causes of collapse lay within the Soviet empire itself. Soviet-allied governments in Eastern Europe tottered under pressure from dissident organizations like Poland's Solidarity and East Germany's Neues Forum. Some of these countries, such as Poland, were also pressured from within by the Roman Catholic Church, which had turned toward active anticommunism under Pope John Paul II. When Gorbachev made it clear that he would not send the Soviet military to prop up these regimes, they collapsed one by one in 1989—in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and East Germany. Within the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's proposed reforms unraveled the decaying Soviet system rather than bringing stability. By 1991 the Soviet Union itself had vanished, dissolving into a Commonwealth of Independent States.

XI. Conclusion

Reagan left office in 1988 with the Cold War waning and the economy booming. Unemployment had dipped to 5 percent by 1988.[80] Between 1981 and 1986, gas prices fell from $1.38 per gallon to 95¢.[81] The

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stock market recovered from the crash, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average—which stood at 950 in 1981—reached 2,239 by the end of Reagan's second term.[82] Yet the economic gains of the decade were unequally distributed. The top fifth of households enjoyed rising incomes while the rest stagnated or declined.[83] In constant dollars, annual chief executive officer (CEO) pay rose from $3 million in 1980 to roughly $12 million during Reagan's last year in the White House.[84] Between 1985 and 1989 the number of Americans living in poverty remained steady at thirty-three million.[85] Real per capita money income grew at only 2 percent per year, a rate roughly equal to the Carter years.[86] The American economy saw more jobs created than lost during the 1980s, but half of the jobs eliminated were in high-paying industries.[87] Furthermore, half of the new jobs failed to pay wages above the poverty line. The economic divide was most acute for African Americans and Latinos, one third of whom qualified as poor.

The triumph of the right proved incomplete. The number of government employees actually increased under Reagan. With more than 80 percent of the federal budget committed to defense, entitlement programs, and interest on the national debt, the right's goal of deficit elimination floundered for lack of substantial areas to cut.[88] Between 1980 and 1989 the national debt rose from $914 billion to $2.7 trillion.[89] Despite steep tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, the overall tax burden of the American public basically remained unchanged. Moreover, so-called regressive taxes on payroll and certain goods actually *increased* the tax burden on low- and middle-income Americans. Finally, Reagan slowed but failed to vanquish the five-decade legacy of economic liberalism. Most New Deal and Great Society proved durable. Government still offered its neediest citizens a safety net, if a now continually shrinking one.

Yet the discourse of American politics had irrevocably changed. The preeminence of conservative political ideas grew ever more pronounced, even when Democrats controlled Congress or the White House. In response to the conservative mood of the country, the Democratic Party adapted its own message to accommodate many of the Republicans' Reagan-era ideas and innovations. The United States was on a rightward path.

XII. Reference Material

This chapter was edited by Richard Anderson and William J. Schultz, with content contributions by Richard Anderson, Laila Ballout, Marsha Barrett, Seth Bartee,

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