

## **CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: RIGHTING A NATION ADRIFT: AMERICA IN THE 1970s AND 1980s**

### **READING AND STUDY GUIDE**

- I. Downturn and Scandal
  - A. An Ailing Economy
  - B. Frustration at Home
  - C. The Watergate Scandal
  
- II. A Crisis of Presidential Leadership
  - A. A Weakened Presidency
  - B. The Leadership Crisis Continues: Carter in the White House
  - C. New Paths in Foreign Affairs
  
- III. The Rights Revolution
  - A. The Equal Rights Amendment and Abortion Controversies
  - B. Gay Rights
  - C. Environmentalism
  
- IV. The Rise of the Right
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  - C. Foreign Policy Triumphs and Scandals
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The vision of the United States as a great and powerful nation suddenly seemed less assured in the 1970s. In 1973, a dispute between the United States and oil-producing Arab nations led to an oil embargo that severely restricted oil imports. Gas stations across the nation posted signs as they ran out of gas, dotting the American landscape with humiliating reminders that foreign nations had the power to wreak havoc on the U.S. economy. Gas shortages also threatened the vision of America as a prosperous car culture where it was the birthright of every citizen to work, live, and shop wherever they liked thanks to the freedom of movement that automobiles provided. To many Americans, images of closed gas stations (which reappeared in 1979) were just one sign of a nation adrift. Domestic political scandals, a troubled economy, and lost international prestige made the future look dim.

Americans lost confidence in the federal government in the 1970s as the Watergate scandal and cover-up brought down President Richard Nixon and the post-World War II boom times finally ended, leaving high inflation and unemployment. Ongoing economic woes and troubles abroad hampered the efforts of presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter to restore respect for the presidency. Americans did not agree over how to move the nation back onto the path of glory. Women's and gay rights groups fought to extend the social justice campaigns of the sixties, while the environmental movement focused Americans' attention on conserving its natural heritage. A new and powerful conservative coalition, however, formed around a

competing vision that focused on protecting traditional values, limiting the role of the government in the economy, and flexing the nation's power overseas. In the 1980s, after two decades of grassroots activism, the conservative ascendancy was complete.

When Ronald Reagan, an ideologically committed conservative, became president in 1981, he rejected the notion that America had entered an age of limits. Reagan rejected the liberal vision and diagnosed government as part of the problem, not the solution to the nation's economic woes. He also moved aggressively to restore America's image as a powerful world power. An immensely popular president, Reagan restored the nation's confidence in the economy and the presidency, despite suffering some political scandals of his own.

## **Learning Objectives**

After a careful examination of Chapter 28, students should be able to do the following:

1. List the major accomplishments of the Nixon administration in foreign affairs outside the realm of the Vietnam War.
2. Identify and explain the significance of the term *New Federalism*.
3. List the factors that contributed to the economic inflation and "stagflation" of the 1970s.
4. List the major initiatives of the Nixon administration's environmental program.
5. Briefly outline the events that culminated in the Watergate scandal. Explain the ways in which the Watergate scandal gave Americans lessons in the workings of the Constitution and the value of a political system that provides for separation of powers.
6. Discuss the ways in which Carter attempted to handle the nation's economic crisis and energy shortage.
7. Explain the significance of the Camp David Agreement.
8. Summarize the events and significance of the Iranian hostage crisis.
9. Identify the populations that composed the Reagan majority.
10. Define the term *neoconservatism* and identify the major authors and publications that articulated the philosophy.
11. Identify and briefly explain the major components of the Reagan economic agenda.
12. List the factors that contributed to diminishing power for labor unions during the last 30 years.
13. Discuss the impact of Reaganomics on the distribution of wealth in America during the 1980s.

14. Identify and explain the historical significance of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).
15. Explain the Reagan Doctrine as it related to the final stages of the Cold War.
16. Identify three limited military interventions undertaken by the Reagan administration during the 1980s.
17. Briefly explain the impact of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 on the nature and extent of United States immigration.
18. Describe the impact of modern immigration on the racial and ethnic mix in the United States.
19. List the national urban areas that have been most impacted by modern-day immigration.
20. Discuss the impact of aging on the future of American politics, economics, and society.
21. Explain how the debate over abortion turned into a wedge issue in U.S. politics since 1973.
22. List two reasons for the increase in the number of American women entering the workplace during the 1970s and 1980s.
23. Identify HIV/AIDS and discuss its role in American political culture.
24. Discuss turning points in Americans' willingness to acknowledge gay sexuality.
25. Discuss the relative status of the American Catholic Church, the mainline Protestant denominations, and evangelical Protestant denominations during the last 30 years.
26. Identify the players and issues involved in the American "culture wars" between political and religious conservatism and liberalism.

### **Key Terms & Definitions:**

**Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)** An international consortium of oil-producing nations that regulated the price and quantity of oil exported to the world market. (844)

**Rust Belt** Decaying industrial cities in the Midwest, places plagued with high unemployment, crumbling roads, bankrupt governments, and high welfare rolls. (846)

**Watergate scandal** An episode of presidential criminal wrongdoing that created a constitutional crisis and brought an end to Nixon's political career. (848)

**SALT I (1972)** The first treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States that limited the deployment of intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles and the creation of missile-defense systems. (852)

**mutually assured destruction** The claim that the guarantee of a devastating nuclear counter-attack would deter the United States and Soviet Union from ever employing their nuclear arsenals. (852)

**Camp David Accords (1978)** Israel agreed to give the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt; in return Egypt became the first Arab state to recognize Israel's right to exist. (856)

**Iranian hostage crisis** Defining event in Carter's presidency as Iranian revolutionaries held fifty-two Americans captive for 444 days (856)

**Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** A proposed constitutional amendment, which stated that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." (859)

**Roe v. Wade (1973)** Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion (861)

**Stonewall riot** A 1969 battle between patrons of a Greenwich Village male gay bar and police that became the catalyst for the gay rights movement (862)

**Proposition 13** Referendum in California that dramatically reduced property taxes, spearheading grassroots tax rebellion nationwide (865)

**Religious Right** A collection of right-wing Christian groups that defended traditional values and supported conservative political causes (865)

**Supply-side economics** Reagan administration theory that letting entrepreneurs keep more of their profits would fuel economic growth, job creation, and more tax revenue to offset military spending (867)

**Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)** Reagan's proposal to build a missile shield that used lasers from space satellites to destroy incoming missiles (869)

**Iran-Contra Scandal** A law breaking scheme that sold arms to Iran to secure the hostages' release and used the proceeds to support anti-Communists in Nicaragua (870)

**Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987)** Approved the destruction of all U.S and Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Europe (870)

### **Study Questions:**

Why did signs like this one provoke anxiety throughout the nation? (p.841)

How did domestic energy needs affect U.S. foreign policy? (844)

Why did Israel's troubled relations with its neighbors concern the United States? (845)

What economic problems plagued the United States in the 1970s? (846)

How did the concerns and views of the "silent majority" shape politics in the 1970s? (847)

How does this photograph compare to the images of racially-inspired violence in the South seen in earlier chapters? (848)

What competing views of presidential power emerged during the Watergate crisis? (849)

Are political cartoons an effective way to comment seriously on heady political issues of the day? (850)

How did Congress and Ford respond to Nixon's past wrongdoing? (851)

What competing visions arose over Nixon's efforts to reshape U.S.-Soviet relations? (852)

Why did the 1976 presidential election fail to engage the country? (853)

What different opinions surfaced about the root of America's energy problems? (854)

Did Carter's dealings with the Soviet Union continue or undo initiatives undertaken by Nixon and Ford? (855)

How did Carter respond to old and new problems in the Middle East? (856)

What larger significance did Carter's advisors attach to the Iranian hostage crisis? (857)

What were the social, cultural, and political consequences of shifting trends in the female workforce? (858)

What symbols does Kleinholz incorporate into his sculpture to present his view on abortion? (859)

Do Steinem and Schlafly offer realistic or clichéd depictions of women's lives, or a combination of both? (860)

What different visions separated the pro-life and pro-choice camps? (861)

How similar were the Gay Rights and Civil Rights Movements? (862)

What competing strategies did gay activists develop to publicize the AIDS crisis? (863)

Which environmental visions prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s? (864)

Did any significant tensions exist within the New Right? (865)

Why did the Religious Right thrive in the 1980s? (866)

What accounted for Reagan's popularity with the electorate? (867)

Why did Democrats and Republicans come to different conclusions about the state of the economy in the 1980s? (868)

Which of Reagan's foreign policy initiatives broke with policies set by Nixon and Carter? (869)

Why was Reagan able to weather the Iran-Contra scandal? (870)

How does Reagan's legacy compare to the one left by Franklin D. Roosevelt? (871)