**Period 9**

**1980 - Present**

**OVERVIEW**

The last decades of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of conservatism in the United States that stressed the importance of traditional values and rejected liberal views about society and the role of government. Conservatism was fueled by a loss of faith in the ability of the government to solve problems, a growth in religious fundamentalism, economic challenges, and disillusionment with elected officials. Evangelical Christian organizations became politically active and sought to limit the influence of liberal social and political trends of earlier decades.

Conservatives found that some of the government programs they wanted to end enjoyed wide popularity with the general public. They were more successful in their efforts to limit taxes and deregulate industries than they were with their moral and social initiatives. Many “big government” programs were too popular for Republicans to cut or eliminate.

The Reagan administration made anticommunism a centerpiece of its foreign policy, though the president’s cordial relations with the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, led to productive talks and arms reductions on both sides. With the end of the Cold War, the role of the United States changed dramatically from one of the two superpowers to a nation expected to be a global peacekeeper.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon by Al Qaeda on September 11, 2001, however, placed the Middle East and the war on terrorism at the center of U.S. concerns. U.S. policy was refocused as the United States launched military attacks on both Afghanistan and Iraq, and efforts to achieve security and safety at home raised questions about the protection of civil liberties and the safeguarding of human rights.

As the twenty-first century dawned, the United States faced significant social, economic, and demographic changes. The country was now part of the global economy, and both information technology jobs and manufacturing jobs moved overseas. Union power declined, and real wages were stalled. Politicians were unable to agree on the right course concerning free trade agreements, tariffs, and government support for domestic industries. Continuing conflict in the Middle East threatened the oil supply, and local sources were not able to meet domestic demand. Computer technology and the Internet changed the way people did business, interacted socially, and were connected to the rest of the world.

The country’s population continued to move to the South and West, in search for jobs and friendlier climates. These same regions saw an influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia, who filled entry-level jobs in those parts of the country. Issues of citizenship and illegal immigration dominated political debates. These and other demographic changes led to further discussions over issues like gender roles, family makeup, and group identity.

**KEY TERMS**

Axis of evil Majority-minority nation

Bipolar world Multiculturalism

Culture wars Multinational corporation

Debtor nation Multipolar world

Entitlement programs National debt

Ethnic chauvinism Neoconservatism

Ethnic cleansing Pacific Rim

Faith-based agenda Reagan Democrats

Financial deregulation Religious Right

Free markets Rockefeller Republicans

Globalization States’ rights

Grassroots conservatives Supply-side economics

Libertarian spirit Trickle-down economics

**GUIDED QUESTIONS**

1. What is supply-side economics, and why was this a central element of Ronald Reagan’s economic policy?
2. How did President Reagan’s approach to dealing with the Soviets differ from that of his predecessors?
3. In what ways did the Iran-Contra affair threaten the Reagan presidency?
4. Describe social, economic, and demographic changes in the U.S. in the 21st century.
   1. social
   2. economic
   3. demographic
5. What demographic shifts have occurred since the 1980s, and what has been the impact of these changes?
6. What were Reagan’s domestic priorities?
7. What was Bill Clinton’s “third way,” and to what extent was he successful in changing the American political landscape?
8. What was the impact of the September 11 attacks on American foreign and domestic policy?
9. Describe the Bush Doctrine.
10. What electoral shifts were seen in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012?