

## AP US History Notes: Period 9 (1980-Present)

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### Five Things to Know about Period 9:

1. President Reagan's victory in 1980 was a defining moment for the new conservative movement that had gained strength in the 1970s. Led by Reagan, conservatives pro-moted tax cuts and the deregulation of many private industries.
2. Through an increased military buildup and a more assertive foreign policy, the Reagan administration sought to end the Cold War. Ultimately, this stronger interventionist U.S. policy, coupled with economic trouble and political changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, brought the Cold War to an end.
3. Advances in science and technology soared to new heights, especially in the 1990s. Developments in digital technology and the birth of the Internet revolutionized the economy and transformed the world, leading to a new era of globalization.
4. The United States continued to see large shifts in demographics and populations. Intense debates continued over social issues such as immigration, race, gender, family structures, and diversity.
5. Conflict in the Middle East increased. After the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States engaged in military action against Afghanistan and Iraq. The War on Terrorism presented new challenges for U.S. leadership and led to changes in both domestic and foreign policy. Efforts to improve security led to new debates in America over the issue of civil liberties and human rights.

### Key Topics-- Period 9 (1980-Present)

Remember that the AP US History exam tests you on the depth of your knowledge, not just your ability to recall facts. While we have provided brief definitions here, you will need to know these terms in even more depth for the AP US History exam, including how terms connect to broader historical themes and understandings.

### New Conservatism

- **Jimmy Carter:** Thirty-ninth President. The former governor of Georgia, he ran as an outsider in the 1976 Presidential election. Served one term. Carter

pardoned Vietnam War draft dodgers, established the Departments of Energy and Education, and returned the Panama Canal to Panama. Internationally, he oversaw the Camp David Accords, ended détente in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and was dogged by the Iranian Hostage Crisis.

- **Ronald Reagan:** Fortieth President. Served 1981–1989. Former two-term governor of California, he heralded a shift within the Republican Party toward an ideological conservatism. Domestically, he oversaw massive tax cuts, economic deregulation, and increased defense spending. Internationally, he took a hawkish line with the Soviet Union while also negotiating arms limitations. His final years in office were dogged by the Iran-Contra scandal.
- **Reagan Revolution:** A significant pivot point in U.S. political history, where the New Deal ideology of the 1930s was replaced by a socially conservative, free market ideology. Began with the 1980 election of Ronald Reagan. The “New Democrats” of the 1990s were a response to the Reagan Revolution, as leftwing policies were perceived to be unpopular with modern voters.
- **Sandra Day O’Connor:** The first female Justice of the Supreme Court. Appointed by Ronald Reagan in 1981, she was a moderate Republican regarded as a swing vote, favoring narrow rulings. Retired in 2006 and replaced by Samuel Alito.
- **Iran-Contra Scandal:** A scandal where the Reagan administration secretly sold arms to Iran in exchange for the release of Americans held hostage, and then used the profits from that sale to illegally support right-wing insurgents in Nicaragua. Led to calls for Reagan’s impeachment. In late 1992, President George H. W. Bush pardoned those under trial for their part in Iran-Contra.

## The End of the Cold War

- **Star Wars (Strategic Defense Initiative):** A proposal by Ronald Reagan to intercept incoming nuclear missiles using lasers fired from orbital platforms. Popularly known as “Star Wars,” it was considered technologically infeasible by scientists.
- **Mikhail Gorbachev:** Eighth and final leader of the Soviet Union (1985–1991). He sought reform with his glasnost and perestroika policies. Oversaw the democratisation of Eastern Europe. However, the revival of nationalism throughout the Warsaw Pact proved problematic for him. The failed August Coup of 1991 by hardline communists fatally wounded his power base. Resigned on December 25, 1991. Transferred power over Russia to Boris Yeltsin.

- **Glasnost:** (“openness”) A policy instituted by Gorbachev, it allowed Soviet citizens to publicly criticize the government and discuss social problems in the hope of finding solutions.
- **Perestroika:** (“restructuring”) A policy instituted by Gorbachev, it introduced limited free market reforms to the Soviet Union’s socialist planned economy. A key aspect of the Soviet Union’s fall.
- **George H. W. Bush:** Forty-first President. Served 1989–1993. Considered a moderate Republican, his presidency was defined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. He pushed for international cooperation in a “New World Order,” such as in Operation Desert Storm. Signed but did not ratify the NAFTA treaty. Breaking his “Read my lips: no new taxes” promise alienated conservatives ahead of the 1992 election.
- **Boris Yeltsin:** First President of the Russian Federation (1991–1999). Russian nationalist. Engineered his country’s transition from a socialist to capitalist economy via “shock therapy” reforms, such as rapid large-scale privatization. This effort led to massive social upheaval and a rise in powerful business oligarchs. Appointed Vladimir Putin as his successor.

### The Clinton Administration

- **Bill Clinton:** Forty-second President. Served 1993–2001. Clinton advocated for centrist reform as a “New Democrat,” signing NAFTA and welfare reform into law, but notably failed to reform health care. Intervened in the Kosovo War. Helped broker the Good Friday Agreement. Impeached in 1998 over allegations arising from his affair with Monica Lewinsky; he was not convicted.
- **Contract with America:** A pledge that listed specific conservative policies the GOP would enact if they gained control of the House of Representatives in the 1994 midterm elections.
- **Newt Gingrich:** Former Speaker of the House (1995–1999). He helped draft the Contract with America, which led to the 1994 Republican Revolution. Oversaw welfare reform, the 1995–1996 government shutdown, and the Clinton impeachment. Officially reprimanded for ethics violations, he resigned his seat in 1999.
- **Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996:** More commonly referred to as “welfare reform,” Bill Clinton signed it into law. It stopped open-ended benefits, instead favoring a limited work-based concept, and shifted control to the states.

### The George W. Bush Administration

- **George W. Bush:** Forty-third President. Served 2001–2009. He won election after the 2000 recount. The 9/11 attacks defined his presidency. Directed the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Domestically, he signed the No Child Left Behind Act, Patriot Act, and an expansion of Medicare into law. The final months of his presidency were marked by the 2008 Financial Crisis. He signed the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, which bailed out failing banks.
- **No Child Left Behind Act:** Also known as NCLB. Established federal standards in education and test-based performance measurement. Passed in 2001 with bipartisan support. Replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, which reverted standards to the states.

## The Fear of Terrorism

- **Timothy McVeigh:** A right-wing anti-government domestic terrorist, McVeigh helped orchestrate the Oklahoma City bombing, which targeted the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. 168 people were killed and nearly 700 were injured. McVeigh was executed on June 11, 2001.
- **Al-Qaeda:** A Salafist jihadist transnational terrorist organization. Formed in 1988 by veteran mujahideen fighting against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Orchestrated the 9/11 attacks, along with other attacks in several other countries over the years.
- **Osama Bin Laden:** A Saudi national infamous for orchestrating the September 11th Terrorist Attacks. Born into a family of billionaires, in 1979 he joined the mujahideen opposed to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Later founded al-Qaeda. Killed on May 2, 2011 in a U.S. Navy SEALs raid on his compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan.
- **September 11th:** Also known as the September 11 attacks or 9/11. Using four hijacked airliners, al-Qaeda destroyed the Twin Towers in New York City and severely damaged the Pentagon. A fourth plane crashed into a Pennsylvania field after its passengers attempted to retake the cockpit. 2,977 victims died. Over 6,000 were injured. Sparked the War on Terror.
- **Department of Homeland Security:** A cabinet-level department formed in 2002 in response to the 9/11 attacks, it consolidated various public security agencies. It has since been criticized on several grounds, ranging from ineffectiveness to violating civil liberties.
- **Weapons of mass destruction:** Typically refers to a nuclear, biological, or chemical weapon that can kill a large number of people in a single action. Also known as WMD.

## The Obama Administration

- **Barack Obama:** Forty-fourth President. Served 2009–2017. A freshman senator from Illinois, he defeated Hillary Clinton in a protracted 2008 primary fight and went on to a landslide general election victory. First African American President. Along with George W. Bush, he oversaw the response to the 2008 Financial Crisis. Signed the Affordable Care Act into law in 2010. His foreign policy was marked by a multilateral approach and the targeted use of military force.
- **Hillary Rodham Clinton:** Served as First Lady to Bill Clinton 1993–2001. Served as Senator from New York 2001–2009. Served as Secretary of State 2009–2013. Ran for the Democratic Party's nomination for President in 2008 but lost to Barack Obama after a protracted campaign. Won the nomination in 2016, becoming the first female nominee for a major party, but lost the presidential election. Politically, she advocated for health care reform and women's rights, and was considered a foreign policy hawk.
- **Affordable Care Act (Obamacare):** A health care reform act that reduced the uninsured population via expanded Medicaid eligibility and a reworking of the individual insurance marketplace. The Obama administration's signature legislation. Contentious in the 2010s.

## Ongoing Demographic Shifts

- **Immigration and Control Act:** A 1986 law signed by Ronald Reagan. It made it a crime to knowingly hire an illegal immigrant, but also legalized millions of immigrants who had unlawfully entered the U.S. before January 1, 1982.
- **Rust Belt:** A region of the United States centered around the Great Lakes and upper Midwest. The term references the economic decline of the country's former industrial heartland.
- **Affirmative action:** The policy of favoring members of a historically disadvantaged group, usually in the context of employment or education. Came into practice in the United States in the 1960s but has become the subject of increasing controversy. It is banned in several states by law.

## Technological Advances

- **Bill Gates:** Co-founded the Microsoft Corporation. A pioneer in the personal computer revolution, his business tactics led to an antitrust case where Microsoft

was ruled a monopoly. However, the court order to break up Microsoft was reversed upon appeal.

- **Internet:** A worldwide computer network that uses the standard Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP). Grew out of ARPANET, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Defense.
- **World Wide Web:** Distinct from but related to the Internet. It is a system by which documents are coded in HTML, identified by URLs, and linked together by hypertext. Invented by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989.

## **Environmental Issues**

- **Three Mile Island:** The name refers to a March 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. Led to the decline of the U.S. nuclear power industry.

## **Globalization and the United States**

- **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA):** Beginning in 1994, it created a free trade bloc between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Negotiated by George H. W. Bush and ratified with the approval of Bill Clinton. Opposed in the 1992 election by Ross Perot.
- **International Monetary Fund (IMF):** Formed in 1944 at the Bretton Woods Conference, the IMF facilitates global trade to avoid another Great Depression.
- **2008 Financial Crisis:** A global banking crisis that arose from the collapse of the U.S. subprime mortgage market. Resulted in the federal bailout of U.S. banks. Led to the Great Recession.