Course Learning Outcomes for Unit VIII

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

4. Summarize the impact of the civil rights movement on social, political, and economic infrastructure of society from the mid-20th century to today.
   4.1 Identify people, events, places, or key legislations that shaped the United States during the Civil Rights movements of the mid-20th century to today.

8. Describe the modern challenges and opportunities concerning terrorism, globalization, and technological progress.
   8.1 Identify people, events, places, or key legislation that shaped the United States in the face of terrorism, globalization, and technological changes.

Reading Assignment


In order to access the resources below, you must first log into the myCSU Student Portal and access the America: History and Life with Full Text database within the CSU Online Library.


Unit Lesson

Globalization refers to a growing economic dependence on a worldwide market, as opposed to a more traditional local, or even isolationist, economic strategy. This is one of the most significant concepts to consider when looking at this last unit.

The goal of this lesson is to look at where the United States has been and compare that to where it is going. Also significant to this unit is a look at personal experiences and expectations, namely what innovations and events have drastically evolved or outright changed daily life. One of the exercises in this unit will challenge you to look directly at an aspect of your daily life and consider which changes over the last 150 years are most significant to your day-to-day experiences. This will provide you with a perspective of the types of reforms, programs, and events and how they continue to affect people.
Decades of Change

With history being written every day, it is impossible to ensure coverage of the most recent of headlines, but when looking at the four decades of change in the United States between 1969 and 2009, it is clear that the generations of reform and civil rights had a significant impact, widening the scope and character of the “average” American. No longer was the voice of the White male overwhelmingly dominant over that of any other citizen, and no longer were persons in power unaccountable, hidden, or protected from scandals that ushered in a new cultural obsession across the nation. The American president has been, and still is, widely considered the single most powerful person on earth. However, during the decades of change, even Presidents would suffer from overexposure; the first real example of this would be Richard Milhous Nixon.

Recapping where we left off in the last unit, the United States was dealing with a crisis the likes of which it had never seen before. This was not just a failed attempt to secure victory on foreign shores (as was reminiscent of Teddy Roosevelt’s experience in the Philippines), but technology had evolved so quickly that footage of American ambassadors fleeing Vietnam in helicopters would be broadcast to a worldwide audience. Eisenhower had been able to secure his military legacy, Kennedy had his charisma, and Johnson had his confidence and success despite adversity. Nixon, despite his own victories, such as opening communications with China and conquering the resolute Democratic wall in the Southeast, would be doomed by the new age of technology, most notably for his role in the first great Presidential scandal of the modern age: Watergate.

There are many excellent in-depth resources about the Watergate scandal available to you, both in and outside of the course readings, but an important point to clarify here, before moving on, deals with the recent trend of dubbing modern corruption scandals with “gate” as a suffix. (For information, see http://watergate.info/) As effective as this type of catchy term can be for headlines, it has potential for misunderstanding. Watergate is not a reference to any body of water, as modern use may lead you to believe. Instead, it refers to an office and hotel complex in Washington D.C. where the notorious break-in by Nixon campaign assistants took place in June of 1972. It also refers to the arrests not long after the break-in.

For the purpose of this lesson, the Watergate scandal would lead to the eventual resignation of Nixon and the promotion of his Vice President, Gerald Ford, to the office of President. Ford would finish out Nixon’s second term, which was beset by economic problems. He is best remembered for publicly pardoning Nixon in 1974 for his role in the scandal, thus ensuring that the former President could retire in peace and not stand trial or serve jail time. This was not a popular move by Ford and would end up hurting the Republican Party. In 1976, in the wake of the scandal, and with the ongoing civil rights and tax battles, Jimmy Carter, a Georgia Democrat known for his southern charm and Christian morals, would win the office.

Nixon’s political legacy is significant, however. The infiltration of the Southeast into former “Dixiecrat” states meant that the Republican morals, which were generally pro-states’ rights and conservative, would also gain a new audience and foundation of support. This would lead to some immediate challenges to their predecessor’s liberal programs, including challenging some of the programs and issues that had lost Johnson his southern support base and swung the vote to elect Nixon in 1968.

These changes were not restricted to the Executive Branch, either. At the same time as Nixon’s election, the Republicans would gain a stronger representation in Congress. Also, the vocal Chief Justice Earl Warren
would be replaced by Warren E. Burger, who sought to limit federal intervention on issues at the local and state level, such as the ongoing abortion and equality debates.

One such case that would be impacted would be *Roe v. Wade* (1973), making it legal for a woman to get an abortion for reasons other than to spare her life. Another was *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), which forbade the requirement of quotas to ensure diversity, as had been outlined earlier by Affirmative Action laws. These programs and changes would make Nixon into a hero of sorts for Conservative America, and public enemy no. 1 for reform and counterculture-minded individuals, especially in traditionally liberal regions, such as the American west coast.

As a statesman, Carter lacked the necessary skill and charisma that had made his predecessors, excluding Ford, able to do so much during their administrations. He was not a salesman; he was a farmer, a veteran, and a man devoted to conservative values. His four years in office are generally remembered for their failures, which we will discuss shortly, but he also did a lot to renew confidence in the executive office in the wake of scandal. He took an eroding economy, and in the spirit of FDR, was able to implement works programs and lower taxes. However, this was only a temporary victory, as inflation and an oncoming energy crisis would quickly overshadow any economic positives. In addition, some of his programs would actually start to secure working support for the Republican platform. Bailouts, deregulation of transportation, and great benefits to private entrepreneurs, coupled with an inability to make good on his campaign promises, caused many in his own party to long for the more controversial yet charismatic Senator Ted Kennedy, whom Carter had overtaken in the Democratic primaries. It was that magnetism that he lacked and would never find.

On the world stage, Carter would take another series of blows because of a brewing energy crisis. Carter would focus on many ecological programs, including building refuges and limiting strip mining, but his desire to promote alternate fuels would be the most calamitous.

This fuel fight would initially manifest in the National Energy Act of 1978, but that only fueled the fire of the American people as conflict grew in the already fractured Middle East. In the previous unit, we introduced the Six Year War; following that war, tensions lessened between Israel and Egypt. However, farther east, fighting in Afghanistan by Russia endangered the oil-rich Persian Gulf, which, if captured by the Communist bloc, would threaten the future of the energy market across the world.

The introduction of the “Carter Doctrine,” along with the required draft registration of all male citizens of the age of 19, were a cold reminder of the harsh reality for many families who had lost fathers and older brothers less than a generation prior. Related issues that would test the resolve of the American people were Carter’s boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympic Games, and perhaps the most notable example of his limited statesmanship, and his last: a failed effort at ending the Iran hostage crisis, in which 66 Americans were held as POWs (beginning in 1979 because of U.S. support for the ousted Shah of Iran).

Carter would not survive this crisis, and in 1980, the Republicans would once again retake the Oval Office. The transition from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan has been from time to time compared with that of Hoover to FDR during the Great Depression. Without fixating on the obvious differences in national vs. international crisis and economic vs. diplomatic issues, this is an illustrative comparison of just how quick the American attitudes shifted. While serving as Governor of California, Reagan was a respected actor, charismatic with a strong stage presence. He was noted for his moral life and aptitude (capped by the support of the rising “Christian Right”) and his willingness to work with moderates. He was a fresh change from the string of reserved executives who had taken office following...
Kennedy’s assassination. With the change in the Executive, the Senate also switched to a Republican majority.

Economics would again be the measuring stick for the Reagan administration, just as it had been for most Chief Executives since the Great Depression. Reagan was especially effective at addressing and fixing some of the issues that originated during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations by utilizing the more effective parts of their plans, but molding them to better address the nation’s needs. Perhaps the most famous example, supply-side economics or “Reaganomics,” used his predecessors’ theories of cutting taxes and deregulation to free up capital, but he did not exclude as wide a base. Though the higher classes would still benefit the most, appealing to the middle class proved to incentivize more meticulous production, thus leading to higher pay, greater supply, and a more fluid economic system. This tax break would become official in 1981, known as the “Economic Recovery Tax Act.” As the process unfolded, it would directly counter older policies to allow for greater entrepreneurial opportunity, including regulations related to monopolies, unions, and safety.

In the same way he revisited business reform, Reagan would also revise previous efforts with environmentalism, casting them as economic hindrances and acting with the resolve that the restoration of the U.S. economy was more important than traditional conservation standards. He also addressed other reforms in similar ways. The term “reverse discrimination” would become popular among Reagan’s support base. In essence, this was the feeling that reform laws for certain groups had gone too far and the nation was again out of balance, but now “majority” populations, namely White males and females, having fewer opportunities due to the requirements put on businesses, schools, and government institutions. Groups such as homosexuals, who were successful in increasing public vocalization and representation in society during the previous decades, were even put under attack by the strong Christian right support given by the executive branch.

On the home front in 1981, Reagan, along with the rest of the world would begin to fight an unseen war against a disease that was hitting homosexual males the hardest. What became known as the AIDS virus would put fear in society as a whole, and that fear would often be aimed at homosexuals in violent ways. Education and increased money for research have still not resulted in a cure, but those with the HIV virus can now live long and productive lives without going into full-blown AIDS.

Women were especially impacted by Regan’s administration, as the Equal Rights Amendment would not gain the necessary support by the 1982 cut-off for ratification, thus limiting opportunities, and providing smaller gains with the opportunities they won. The 1984 case Grove City v. Bell would be a testament to this and the growing Republican strength of the judicial branch, as once again Title IX and women’s equality on the collegiate level were challenged and weakened.

What the administration did do for women was strengthen legislation surrounding the care and claims for women who were entitled to pensions, child support, and alimony. Fearing Reagan was surpassing a line of fairness in favor of his constituents, Congress took up the fight against the other branches by passing the Civil Rights Restoration Act in 1988. The passing of this Act determined any action that directly discriminated against participation by an eligible candidate, in this case any enrolled student, as liable to the retraction of federal funding for the organization.

Just as Reagan had been able to turn around Carter’s limited economic success, he too proved to be a much stronger international presence. Just hours into the Reagan administration, the first crisis of office was dissolved with the freeing of the 66 hostages being held by the Ayatollah of Iran. As successful as that resolution was, Reagan was not without his negatives as well.

One of the more significant international blunders of the Reagan administration would be the 1985 Iran-Contra Affair, which would directly lead into a scandal in 1986 and the public dismissal of Oliver North. Even though Reagan would escape repercussion, this was a major black mark against the otherwise prosperous administration. Other international reactions included interference (called “peacekeeping”) in Lebanon in
1982, violent attacks in Beirut by the Muslim, and anti-Israel Hezbollah on the U.S. embassy and Marine installations in 1983, as well as quelling a rising Marxist threat in Grenada.

Reagan was not without his own flamboyant style, possibly aided by his movie star roots. He was successful in addressing some of the more aspiring, and dubiously named, projects in U.S. history during his administration. The last leg of the Cold War was also a golden age of cinema. One of the best would be the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) which earned the name “Star Wars” by detractors for its futuristic tenor, but its justification sounded almost worthy of a James Bond movie. It was a project intended to use lasers positioned in space that could aggressively stop a ballistic threat before endangering a target. As ambitious, and costly, as this was, it ultimately proved a failure, as it violated cease-fire agreements around the globe, and the technology was not yet capable of achieving what was needed.

What would be Reagan’s greatest legacy, though, would be his relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who in 1985 would open up the eroding steel curtain to allow for some Western influence, and in doing so, unhinged the door to progress for the entire Soviet bloc. Reagan had once used the phrase “Evil Empire” when talking about the U.S.S.R. In a public show of respect, the two met multiple times. The most notable of these occurred in Geneva in 1985 at the Fireside Summit, where they met to discuss the continued and waning tensions between the two Cold War superpowers. By the end of 1987, a ballistic disarmament, the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Agreement (INF), effectively ended the nuclear threat that had long endangered the two countries.

In 1988, the U.S.S.R. began to withdraw from the still hotly contested Afghanistan region. In November 1989, following Reagan’s public insistence, Gorbachev ordered the Berlin Wall, the physical symbol of Cold War division, to be torn down. In addition to finally reuniting East and West Berlin, this also symbolically ended the Cold War and the communist threat in Eastern Europe. Soon after, several Soviet bloc nations officially separated from what had been the U.S.S.R.

Today, there remains a strong cultural link between these fracturing nations and Russia that has helped to fund issues that still dominate headlines. In 1991, in the wake of the separation of the former Soviet states, and with Russia under the leadership of President Boris Yeltsin, the controversial Gorbachev resigned. With the last leader of the Soviet experiment out of power, the Cold War feud faded with a world dependent on a new economic alliance system.

In 1988, Reagan bid farewell to public service. Riding the wave of the previous administration’s approval, Reagan’s Vice President, George H.W. Bush (41) began his term of office. Though also a conservative, Bush was much more moderate in his own platform. He would oversee the reinstitution of some of the reform initiatives from previous administrations, such as pro-conservation efforts and programs such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, which did not conflict with the ideals of the Republican base.

Where he did meet opposition, though, was with an economic downturn that was the product of a busy Reagan administration and a pledge to not extend the tax burden on Americans, no matter what programs might suffer from the lack of funding. Both the groups who suffered and the voters who held him to his pledge rebelled, causing the Reagan momentum to finally stall. Bush (41) would also have the need to react to rising tensions in the Middle East, but his was a relatively easier draw than those of his predecessors.
War for Oil

In 1990, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded neighboring Kuwait, which, though a significantly smaller nation, owned a much larger coastline for shipping. Also, its location was directly on top of one of the world’s most plentiful oil fields. If Hussein had succeeded in overtaking Kuwait, the Iraqi government could have controlled the market for oil, the richest economic resource, for the rest of the world. This threat, unlike any seen before it in recent times, brought the world (including other oil-producing nations) together for a common goal, and in 1991, Congress formally declared war on Hussein’s Iraq.

The Kuwait conflict was quickly resolved after intense bombing campaigns and a coordinated invasion strategy. Perhaps the greater significance, though, was what this conflict provided in its wake: proof that Cold War tensions among Western nations had come to an end after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. two years prior, as well as a growing anti-American/anti-Western sentiment in the Middle East.

The latter issue, largely building on previous anti-Western attitudes, grew with the United States’ continued support of Israel and the stationing of troops in what were considered holy lands. These actions were more than just politics and economics; they were direct challenges to the philosophy and daily life of a culture that few Americans truly understood. This became a convenient rallying cry for growing extremist movements.

It was this negative cultural impact that was being propagated through the children. Privately run schools for youth in some Middle Eastern nations (madrassas) are in theory meant to be where they are taught the Qur'an, basic legibility and communication, and proper social habits. They were sometimes fed and clothed there as well, but all too often, they could be corruptive, depending on the leadership. It is through these lessons that anti-Americanism was often spread, and there was little Western pressure to reform/provide alternate education for future generations.

In 1992, an unexpected change would alter the political landscape. Despite the success of the Reagan and Bush years, the American people were once again embarking on a liberal swing, which meant a push against the heavy conservative values that had seen the nation grow in a post-Cold War world. Democratic Governor Bill Clinton emerged on the scene promising to keep the American values, which had been so successful in uniting the nation, but with a special focus on allowing the breaks to apply across all class structures while also moving away from earlier liberal “big government” platforms. This successful campaign would propel him, and his running mate, Senator Al Gore, into a bright economic time for the nation.

Despite the strong economy, there were still greater pressures that limited the overall impact of Clinton’s time in office. There would be numerous small-scale threats both at home and abroad, including skirmishes in Bosnia and Israel, civil wars in Rwanda, Kosovo, and Yugoslavia, and early terror activity originating from the Middle East. Clinton also had to deal with homegrown terrorist Timothy McVeigh and his 1995 Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building.

Politically, Clinton’s terms had drawbacks due to overly complicated and ill-fated plans concerning Medicare, tax credits, homosexual rights, and insurance. Clinton would have some success overseas with the 1993 PLO Peace Accords held in Washington D.C. between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in working towards a peace treaty between the two long-feuding factions. What would become the greater legacy of this otherwise successful presidency, though, would be a personal scandal that emerged from the testimony of a White House intern leading to charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, and for only the second time ever, a presidential impeachment. Clinton, though, was acquitted and would not be forced to resign. But the damage was done, and this brief Democratic surge in American policy would come to an end at the turn of the millennium. After a highly controversial 2000 presidential election, where neither candidate clearly captured the majority vote, the Republicans retook the Oval Office under the leadership of George W. Bush (43), son of George H.W. Bush (41). Consequently, this would also be the closing of one era and the opening of a new era in American history.
As noted in the introduction, globalization is a reference to the growing dependence on world markets over previous individual markets. What had really enabled this change was the way that citizens of the world were now able to communicate with one another.

Technological advances in the previous four decades had made the computer small and inexpensive enough to become a staple in any home. During that progression, the combined efforts of scientists and engineers across the globe would ensure that the computer would change the way we live with the creation of a stable, instant, and comparatively cheap communication system: the Internet.

Two other important changes dealt directly with trade and U.S. neighbors. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were regional and worldwide agreements, respectively, that encouraged stronger trade partnerships and benefits for buying and selling abroad. What they also did, however, was draw expected sales from American markets. Some companies even moved to these trading countries where their cost of production would be lower due to less strict safety and pay laws.

While jobs left, immigration continued to rise, leading to even fewer opportunities. Attitudes about language, housing, and cultural differences reflective of antebellum America began to emerge once again.

George W. Bush joined the Republican-controlled Congress in Washington D.C. Several of the same issues that carried over from the Clinton administration, such as schools, Medicare, and taxation, would immediately capture the attention of the American people. Early into this new administration, the first controversial act would pass, a federal education initiative named "No Child Left Behind." Like another controversial program, Medicare, the flaw of this system would end up being the reason for its expected success: standardization. These failures would quickly remind the U.S. population of concerns from the previous Republican administration, and lead to concern over the government’s ability to successfully care for the “melting pot” of citizens, which now comprised the fifty states.

It remained politics as usual until an early Tuesday morning in September 11, 2001, when the United States, not having had a military action in its borders since Pearl Harbor, was suddenly attacked at one of the landmarks of its biggest city. After many previous attempts, the terror leaders who had spread anti-Americanism since the 1970s successfully struck at the hearts of American citizens. In all, four planes were hijacked by members of the radical terrorist network known as the Al Qaeda and flown directly into strategic targets. Two in New York City were intended to level the World Trade complex, while the other two were bound for Washington D.C., where the first destroyed a side of the Pentagon, but the second plane was retaken by the passengers before crashing in a rural part of Pennsylvania.

Thus, a decade after Bush (41) left Kuwait, the harsh feelings were manifest against the United States and on a scale that caught the world’s attention. In the wake of this destruction, a second controversial act, the U.S.A. Patriot Act, would be passed. This Act stripped U.S. citizens of certain civil liberties, including the right to privacy and personal information. It would take another ten years to finally retaliate for these attacks.

By 2003, the U.S. was officially at war again in the Middle East, but unlike previous conflicts, this was a fight with rebel groups instead of governments. Support for the war quickly waned, causing increased pressures on Bush’s leadership.

Reminiscent of the failed “standard” plans from early in Bush (43)’s terms, the next major issue would be how to handle natural disaster. In August 2005, Category 5 Hurricane Katrina tore through the heart of the U.S. Gulf region, creating disaster areas in parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

There were delays in action, which made vocal local leaders quick to criticize the federal efforts of dealing with this disaster, which, in all, claimed 1,500 casualties. Entire sections of major cities would remain destroyed for years to come. Perhaps even more significant was that the communities that were impacted the worst were those of the same lower income classes who had suffered for much of the life of this course: immigrants, African Americans, Native Americans, and lower rent parts of the region. This disparity raised
serious question about the federal government’s interests in protecting the lower class citizens in other parts of the country in the case of future disasters.

By the end of Bush (43)’s second term, it was clear that a new form of leadership would be sought. The Republicans tabbed a war hero, Senator John McCain, and the Democrats would eventually decide to make history with the selection of Senator Barack Obama, the first presidential candidate who was half African American. Obama would eventually win, bringing the Democrats back to Washington D.C. in both the executive and legislative branches.

With the war overseas winding down, the focus of the nation went directly on to economy. Not unlike Hoover, Obama would immediately be faced with a crisis that was larger than could have been expected. 2007 saw the economic bubble burst, and it became clear that the economic records of many large banks and businesses did not add up. Now, with those institutions floundering, many Americans were stuck with heavy debts, and all too often, lost jobs. Attempted tactics of tax lowering and bailouts failed to bring back these businesses, and soon the government could do little but to pass new programs and requirements meant to produce opportunities. Most notable was a disputed medical insurance requirement nicknamed “Obamacare,” which ultimately required the American people to cover themselves in case the worst should happen.

Fighting would continue in the Middle East until the first troops were pulled out in 2011. This same year, the home of Osama bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, was raided, and he was killed in a covert Navy SEAL operation.

In 2012, despite poor approval ratings, Barack Obama did successfully retain his position, but with a strong opposition; the legislative Branch was dominated by Republicans which made the passage of any platform-related bill difficult. The American people were clearly divided and angered by the lack of success with recent acts, causing Obama to only receive fifty-one percent of the vote.

Troop deployment questions, universal reform questions, massive debt, and out-of-control immigration all came with this second term. Also, a new threat in old locations also started to emerge, as North Korea began aggressively showing off its new leader, Kim Jong-un, with military demonstrations that angered and threatened their southern neighbors. The Gaza Strip, and general relations between Palestine and Israel, once again began to flounder, and extremists from the Middle East once again began to organize after the death of their longtime leader. And lastly, there were honest nuclear concerns for the first time since the Cold War as members of the former Soviet bloc were again engaging in territory disputes, and multiple nations now boasted technology capable of building and using nuclear weapons.

In closing, David Tennant, as the tenth incarnation (regeneration) of Dr. Who, in the episode “Blink” in 2007, describes the nature of time and history in an interestingly circular fashion: “People assume time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear non-subjective point of view, it’s more of a big ball of wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey stuff.” As colorful a fantasy as this BBC television series is, the writers do make an interesting observation about the nature of the human experience of time and how the events we hold in greatest significance can often seem less distant than other memories, or they can be hauntingly familiar to other events on a more personal scale.

As this course has highlighted, the eras of American history leading to the present day have an interesting way of mirroring each other, and not always with the same outcome. It is important to see these connections and work to better the world around us. There are always going to be conflict, hurt feelings, and disputed beliefs, but can the world population now use the advanced communication tools to learn from failure and create better future outcomes?
References


Suggested Reading

To further your understanding on the Iran-Contra Affair, which was not limited to the country of Iran, please read the following below from PBS.


The following is a great film about Cold War politics, particularly politics that impacted the United States and Israel. This film traces the end of World War II and the creation of Israel all the way through the Cold War to the Twin Towers and 9/11.