APUSH UNIT 9 REVIEW GUIDE (1980–PRESENT)

For Students Preparing for the AP® United States History Exam

4–6%
of the APUSH exam

The ninth unit of the AP® United States History (APUSH) course focuses on the period from 1980 to the present. Key topics include conservatism, globalization, the digital age, and foreign policy.

This unit may be assessed on the multiple-choice section, LEQ #4, and SAQ #4 – NOT on the DBQ.

RONALD REAGAN AND THE TRIUMPH OF CONSERVATISM

Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 election represented a turning point in American politics. Arguably for the first time since the 1920s, the White House was occupied by a **conservative** who was committed to reducing the federal government's role in American economic life. Reagan's economic program, known as supply-side economics or **Reaganomics**, focused on tax cuts, privatization, and **deregulation**. Supporters of Reaganomics contended that these policies spurred economic growth by increasing productivity and ending the stagflation of the 1970s. However, liberals referred to Reagan's economic programs as **"trickle-down" economics**, contending that wealthy Americans reaped most of the economic benefits. The period from the 1980s to the present has been marked both by substantial economic growth and widening income inequality. One of Reagan's biggest political victories was the **PATCO Strike**, when he replaced striking air traffic controllers and decertified their union. The results of the PATCO Strike (and a decline in the domestic manufacturing sector) led to a decline in labor unions' membership and political power in the United States.

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 was a landmark victory for conservatives.

Reagan was supported by a broad coalition of voters that included evangelical Christians, libertarians, white Southerners, and security hawks who wanted a more muscular foreign policy. He sought to place **conservative justices** on the Supreme Court with the goal of overturning previous decisions on abortion and school prayer. His judicial nominees included **Sandra Day O'Connor**, who became the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court. Nancy Reagan's **"Just Say No"** campaign aimed to reduce drug use among young people. Although Reagan succeeded in cutting taxes, his proposals to slash government spending and welfare programs met with substantial opposition in Congress.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Reagan shares a laugh with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva (1985).

After over a decade of *détente* policy, Reagan reignited Cold War tensions with the goal of weakening global communism. In a famous speech, he denounced the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." His "**Peace through Strength**" initiative championed a strong national defense and increased military spending. This military spending contributed to large **budget deficits** (annual government spending exceeding tax revenues). In spite of his hard line toward the Soviet Union, Reagan cultivated a personal friendship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who he challenged to "tear down this wall" in a speech delivered in West Berlin. In 1989, shortly after Reagan left office, the world witnessed the **fall of the Berlin Wall**, ending Soviet dominance over the Eastern Bloc. Two years later, the Soviet Union collapsed, ending the Cold War and leaving the United States as the world's lone superpower.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE CHANGING ECONOMY

In the last decades of the 20th century, the United States led a wave of technological innovations that included **personal computers** and **the internet**. Advancements in computing and digital communications resulted in accelerated **globalization** with the growth of multinational corporations and foreign trade. The **service sector** of the economy grew while the manufacturing sector declined as a percentage of the economy, resulting in a rapid decline in labor union membership.

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush (41) concluded the negotiations that led to the signing of the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, which reduced trade barriers between Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Congress passed NAFTA despite significant bipartisan opposition. Third-party presidential candidate **Ross Perot** said that NAFTA would create a **"giant sucking sound"** of American manufacturing jobs moving to Mexico, resulting in a decrease in Americans' wages.

President George H.W. Bush stands with his Mexican and Canadian counterparts at the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1992.

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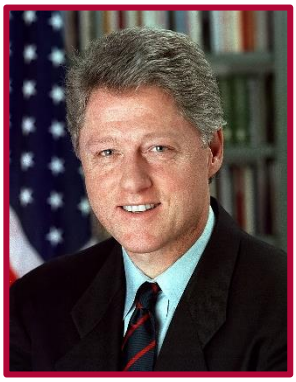
DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS (1988–2001)

In 1988, **George H.W. Bush (41)**, a Republican, was elected to succeed Ronald Reagan as president. Although he had campaigned on preserving Reagan's tax cuts, he signed a tax increase in an effort to reduce the federal budget deficit. While the tax increase hurt Bush's standing with conservative voters, an economic recession hurt his standing with voters generally. In 1992, Bush was challenged by both **Bill Clinton**, a centrist Democrat, and **Ross Perot**, an independent populist. Clinton won the election and signed liberal-leaning legislation, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and a **Federal Assault Weapons Ban**, in the early years of his administration. However, conservative Republicans gained control of Congress in the 1994 midterm election after campaigning on the **Contract with America**, promising American voters term limits, a balanced budget, and welfare reform. Although Clinton often clashed with conservative leaders, he worked with Republican leaders to pass **welfare reform** and achieve the first **balanced budget** (no deficit) in almost 30 years.



Bill Clinton's presidency was marked by both partisan conflict and bipartisan cooperation.

CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE WAR ON TERROR

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Americans debated the extent to which the United States should continue to project its military power around the globe. Those in favor of continued military interventions believed that the United States, as the world's only remaining superpower, had a responsibility to keep peace and order in the world. After Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990, President George H.W. Bush (41) sent U.S. military forces into the Middle East to liberate Kuwait and protect U.S. interests in the region. The **[First] Gulf War** resulted in the liberation of Kuwait but did not remove Saddam from power. Bill Clinton deployed U.S. military forces in Bosnia and Kosovo to support NATO-led peacekeeping forces, provoking criticism from Republicans who saw these interventions as frivolous uses of U.S. military power. These critics included **George W. Bush (43)**, the Republican governor of Texas who was elected president in 2000 after a close and contested election that was ultimately decided by the Supreme Court.

UNIT TIMELINE

- **1980** Ronald Reagan is elected as president.
- **1981** Reagan ends the PATCO strike and decertifies the union.
- **1989** The Berlin Wall falls, ending Soviet control of East Germany.
- **1991** The Soviet Union collapses.
- **1992** Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).
- **1994** Republicans take control of Congress after promoting the Contract with America.
- **2001** The War on Terror begins after the 9/11 attacks.
- Congress passes the Patriot Act.
- **2003** The Iraq War begins.

After the **September 11 (9/11) attacks**, in which the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were attacked by planes hijacked by members of the **al-Qaeda** terrorist organization, the Bush administration responded by declaring **War on Terror** and toppling Afghanistan's Taliban-led government. Although the 9/11 attacks led to a surge of patriotism in the United States, political conflict resumed in 2003 by the controversial **Iraq War**, which ousted Saddam from power but renewed questions about the proper use of U.S. military power.

The 9/11 attacks led to a resurgence of American military interventions in the world.

IMMIGRATION AND MIGRATION FROM 1980

After 1980, an increasing number of immigrants came to the United States from Asia and Latin America, partly as a result of the **Immigration Act of 1965**, which eliminated preferences for Northern European immigrants for the first time. These immigrants have contributed to greater cultural diversity in the United States and bolstered the labor force in fields including agriculture, engineering, and medicine.

Internally, Americans continued the post-WWII trend of migrating to the **Sun Belt**, which resulted in states in the South and West (such as Texas and California) increasing in population and becoming centers of economic growth and innovation. Meanwhile, the Northeast and Midwest (sometimes branded as the **Rust Belt**) struggled economically as manufacturing jobs moved overseas.

CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In an age of technological innovation and increased threats to national security, Americans have clashed over surveillance programs that were authorized by the **Patriot Act**, which was passed shortly after the 9/11 attacks. During the recent presidencies of Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden, Americans have grappled with increasing **political polarization** (differences between liberals and conservatives) as well as the impact of emerging technologies, such as **social media** and artificial intelligence (AI) on society, politics, and the workforce.

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