

SSUSH23 – Assess the political, economic, and technological changes during the Reagan, Bush, Sr., Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations.

a. Analyze challenges by recent presidents including the collapse of the Soviet Union, Clinton's impeachment, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war against terrorism.

The modern Presidencies of Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama all dealt with challenges. Some challenges were more significant than others. The Reagan years in the White House began with the continuation of the Cold War division of international power and influence between the United States and the Soviet Union. The nuclear weapon capability of both sides was massive. Over the course of Reagan's two terms in office, the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The events leading up to the collapse were rapid and surprising. The Soviet Union built up its military arsenal in the late 1970s and early 1980s but the United States still maintained a qualitative edge. President Reagan began modernizing U.S. forces and contemplating a new anti-ballistic missile shield called the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which was sometimes referred to as "Star Wars." The Soviets could not respond to this modernization because the cost was beyond their resources. The Soviet Union's economy was in great decline after years of failure in agricultural and industrial production. Reagan put further pressure on his Cold War rivals by persuading the Saudi Arabians to lower the price of crude oil, thereby undercutting the Soviet Union's chief source of revenue - oil exports. The Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, decided to begin a policy of Perestroika (economic rebuilding) and Glasnost (political reform).

President Gorbachev set up policies allowing free speech, free press, and other reforms. The changes put the Soviet Union on a path to democratic government. President Reagan played on these changes and began open dialogue with Gorbachev. The more cooperative relationship between the Cold War rivals resulted in a nuclear arms agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev's reforms led to a **collapse of the Soviet Union** through a reduction in the Kremlin's control over the various states that comprised the Soviet Union. The Eastern European nations, which had been satellite states of the Soviet Union since the close of World War II, also rebelled against their oppressor and established their own democratic states. By 1989, the Cold War was over. The effort of President Reagan to foster the relationship with Gorbachev helped to end the Cold War and was a highlight of his presidency. After Ronald Reagan served two terms as President, his Vice President George H.W. Bush was elected in 1988. He served one term, which included a costly economic downturn and the successful use of military resources in the 1991 Gulf War against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. President George H.W. Bush lost his reelection bid to the Democratic Candidate, Bill Clinton, in 1992.

Like George H.W. Bush, Clinton's presidency had successes and challenges. One of Clinton's highlights was the end of the national budget deficit, which resulted in a budget surplus. This economic success was achieved through tax cuts and reduced government spending. However, Clinton's presidency was challenged by a scandal that led to his impeachment. Bill Clinton became the second president in United States history to be **impeached**. The House of Representatives charged him with perjury and obstruction of justice. The impeachment charges were based on accusations of improper use of money from a real estate deal and allegations that Clinton lied under oath about the improper relationship he had with a White House intern. Clinton denied the charges and the Senate acquitted him, allowing the President to remain in office and finish his second term. Clinton's second term ended with the 2000 election of the Republican candidate George W. Bush.

George W. Bush entered the White House after a tumultuous 2000 Presidential Election that ended with legal challenges of the result. The Democratic Candidate was Clinton's Vice President, Al Gore. Although Bush won the Electoral College vote, Gore won the popular vote in the election. The contested vote centered on Florida's election results. The margin of victory in Florida was so close that a mandatory recount occurred. Gore requested a hand count of questionable ballots. All of these processes ran afoul of Florida election law and resulted in lawsuits filed in both state and federal courts over the appropriateness of vote recounts. Ultimately, the Supreme Court ruled that a statewide vote recount would be unconstitutional and Bush was declared the winner in Florida. The nation was greatly divided moving forward to the 2001 inauguration of George W. Bush.

The political division caused by the controversial election quickly came to an end with the national tragedy experienced on **September 11, 2001**. On that fateful day, an Islamist terrorist group launched a series of attacks on the United States using airplanes as weapons. The World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. were hit and another airliner crashed after passengers and crewmembers forced the terrorists to crash prior to reaching an unspecified Washington D.C. target.

In response, and with overwhelming support of both Congress and the American people, Bush quickly signed the Patriot Act. The law allowed the United States government to hold foreign citizens suspected of being terrorists for up to seven days without charging them with a crime. The law also increased the ability of American law enforcement agencies to search private communications and personal records to thwart future terrorist attacks. The Patriot Act later came under scrutiny as questions of privacy emerged. Bush's administration also created the Department of Homeland Security in the wake of the terrorist attack and tasked the agency with protecting the United States from terrorist attacks and responding to natural disasters. Most of these responses to the 9/11 attack were supported by Americans at the time. In October 2001, Bush took another step in his response to the September 11th attack. He authorized Operation Enduring Freedom, which was an invasion of Afghanistan by the United States military and allied forces. Afghanistan's Taliban government was harboring the al-Qaeda leadership. The allied forces quickly defeated the Taliban government and destroyed the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan; however, al-Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden escaped. The invasion of Afghanistan was part of President Bush's larger **War on Terrorism**, for which he built an international coalition to fight the al-Qaeda network and other terrorist groups responsible for the attack on the United States. In March 2003, American and British troops invaded Iraq in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Iraq's president, Saddam Hussein, went into hiding while U.S. forces searched for weapons of mass destruction. Bush feared Hussein had the weapons and could supply them to terrorists for use against the United States. No weapons of mass destruction were found during the operation. However, Hussein was captured, convicted of crimes against humanity, and executed in 2006. Bush's presidency was challenging from the beginning. He had the support of most Americans immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks but lost some support when no weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq.

Define

War on Terror

1. What led to the collapse of the Soviet Union?
2. What did the House of Representatives charge Clinton with?
3. What happened on September 11th?
4. What was the war on Terrorism?