

## SSUSH 25- The Student will describe changes in national politics since 1968.

From presidential scandals to Supreme Court decisions, and from international peace efforts to the outset of the war against terrorism, national politics have changed since 1968 in ways undreamt of in the early 1960s. This standard will measure your knowledge of the events in the most recent period in U.S. history.

### a. Describe President Richard M. Nixon's opening of China, his resignation due to the Watergate scandal, changing attitudes toward government, and the Presidency of Gerald Ford.

#### President Nixon and President Ford Administrations

Richard Nixon's presidency was one of great successes and criminal scandals. Nixon's visit to China in 1971 was one of the successes. He visited to seek scientific, cultural, and trade agreements and to take advantage of a 10-year standoff between China and the Soviet Union. Nixon hoped to win the Chinese to his side in case he had future negotiations with the Soviets. Later, Nixon was part of the Watergate scandal, which centered on his administration's attempt to cover up a burglary of the offices of the Democratic Party in the Watergate apartment and office complex in Washington, D.C. The crime was committed by Nixon's reelection campaign team, who sought political information. Nixon won reelection in 1972, but his efforts to cover up the crime soon unraveled and, facing impeachment, he resigned in 1974. The scandal left Americans dismayed by Nixon's actions and cynical about politics in general. It also led to changes in campaign financing and to laws requiring high-level government officials to disclose their finances. Because Nixon and many of the people involved in Watergate were lawyers, the reputation of the legal profession suffered too. Nixon was succeeded by his vice president, Gerald Ford, whose two-year presidency was damaged by his connection to Nixon. It was damaged again when he pardoned Nixon for any crimes he may have committed. One bright spot is that the Vietnam War ended during the Ford administration by following a path established by Nixon, but Ford's domestic policies failed to stop growing inflation and unemployment, and America experienced its worst economic recession since the Great Depression.

### b. Explain the impact of Supreme Court decisions on ideas about civil liberties and civil rights; include such decisions as *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and the *Bakke* decision on affirmative action.

#### Supreme Court Decisions

The Supreme Court ruled on many cases that would change the perception of civil liberties and civil rights in America. Two controversial cases with the greatest impact were *Roe v. Wade* and *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (also known as the Bakke decision).

- *Roe v. Wade*—1973—Addressed the right of women to choose whether to have an abortion under certain circumstances. By expanding the constitutional right of privacy to include abortion, the Court extended civil liberties protections.
- *Regents of University of California v. Bakke*—1978—Ruled race can be used when considering applicants to colleges, but racial quotas cannot be used. The Court barred the use of quota systems in college admissions but expanded Americans' civil rights by giving constitutional protection to affirmative action programs that give equal access to minorities.

### c. Explain the Carter administration's efforts in the Middle East; include the Camp David Accords, his response to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the Iranian hostage crisis.

#### Carter Administration

Jimmy Carter's presidency was strongly influenced by international issues. He tried to bring peace to the Middle East and, in the Camp David Accords, negotiated a peace agreement between the Egyptian president and the Israeli prime minister at Camp David (a presidential retreat in Maryland) in 1978. This was the first time there had been a signed peace agreement between Middle Eastern nations. Although the agreement left many differences unresolved, it did solve urgent problems facing the two nations. In 1978, the Iranian Revolution replaced a shah (king) friendly to America with a Muslim religious leader unfriendly to America. When Carter let the shah enter the United States for medical treatment, angry Iranian revolutionaries invaded the U.S. embassy in Iran and took 52 Americans captive. The Iranian Hostage Crisis lasted 444 days, until the captives were released after the election of Ronald Reagan as president, and it nurtured anti-Americanism among Muslims around the world.

**d. Describe domestic and international events of Ronald Reagan's presidency; include Reaganomics, the Iran-contra scandal, and the collapse of the Soviet Union.**

Reagan Administration

Ronald Reagan was president for much of the 1980s. During that time, many important events helped shape American politics to this day. As a conservative, Reagan wanted to decrease the size and role of the federal government.

- **Reaganomics** was the nickname for Reagan's economic policy. It included budget cuts, tax cuts, and increased defense spending. By cutting social welfare budgets, his policy hurt lower-income Americans and, overall, Reaganomics led to a severe recession.
- The Iran-Contra Scandal was Reagan's biggest failure in international policy. Administration officials sold weapons to Iran—an enemy of the United States—and then violated more laws by using the profits from those arms sales to fund a rebellion in Nicaragua fought by rebels called the *Contras* (a Spanish nickname for “counter-revolutionaries”). Details of this scandal are still largely unknown to the public.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union was Reagan's biggest success in international policy. The Soviet Union's last leader set up policies allowing freedom of speech and of the press and other reforms putting the U.S.S.R. on a path to democratic government, but these reforms got out of the leader's control and eventually led to the breakup of the 15 states that were the Soviet Union. Five of those states now comprise Russia, and the other ten are independent countries.

**e. Explain the relationship between Congress and President Bill Clinton; include the North American Free Trade Agreement and his impeachment and acquittal.**

Clinton Administration

Bill Clinton's presidency included ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA brought Mexico into a free-trade (tariff-free) zone already existing between the United States and Canada. Opponents believed NAFTA would send U.S. jobs to Mexico and harm the environment, while supporters believed it would open up the growing Mexican market to U.S. companies; these pros and cons are still argued today. Clinton also became the second president in U.S. history to suffer impeachment. The House of Representatives charged him with perjury and obstruction of justice. The charges were based on accusations of improper use of money from a real estate deal and allegations he had lied under oath about an improper relationship with a White House intern. Clinton denied the charges and the Senate then acquitted him, allowing Clinton to remain in office and finish his second term.

**f. Analyze the 2000 presidential election and its outcome, emphasizing the role of the electoral college.**

2000 Presidential Election

The presidential election of 2000 saw Clinton's vice president, Al Gore, facing the Republican governor of Texas, George W. Bush, as well as consumer advocate Ralph Nader, who ran as a third-party candidate. Polls showed the race would be close, and it turned out to be one of the closest elections in American history. Gore won the national popular vote by over 500,000 of the 105 million votes cast, but when American voters cast ballots for president, the national popular vote has no legal significance. Rather, Americans are voting for members of the Electoral College representing each candidate. Each state is assigned “electors” in equal number to its total amount of U.S. representatives and senators. (Georgia had thirteen electors in 2000: eleven representatives and two senators). In the 2000 election, Bush won by receiving 271 votes in the Electoral College to Gore's 266.

**g. Analyze the response of President George W. Bush to the attacks of September 11, 2001, on the United States, the war against terrorism, and the subsequent American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.**

Bush Administration

George W. Bush's presidency will always be remembered for al-Qaeda's attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11). In response, and with overwhelming support of both Congress and the American people, he signed a law the next month to allow the U.S. government to hold foreign citizens suspected of being terrorists for up to seven days without charging them with a crime. This law also increased the ability of American law-enforcement agencies to search private communications and personal records. Then he created the Department of Homeland Security and charged it with protecting the United States from terrorist attacks and responding to natural disasters. In October 2001, another of Bush's responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was his authorizing Operation Enduring Freedom, the invasion of Afghanistan by the U.S. military and allied forces. That country'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 leader Osama bin Laden escaped and the fight against the Taliban still rages on today. The invasion of Afghanistan was part of Bush's larger war on terrorism, for which he built an international

coalition to fight the al-Qaeda network and other terrorist groups. 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 the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) that Bush feared Hussein had and could supply to terrorists for use against the United States. No WMD were found before Hussein was captured. He was convicted of crimes against humanity and executed in 2006. The fight to bring democracy to Iraq still is going on today, a fight that was called un-winnable in 2005, 2006 and 2007, is now seen as an operation that is giving Iraqi's a chance for their country to succeed as a democracy. Many point to the U.S. troop surge, the Sons of Iraq program, and the brutality of Al-Qaeda turning Iraqis against them as the turning points which led to coalition success in O.I.F.