

Rise of Conservatism

Directions: The decade of the 1970s saw Americans divided. As a result, many ordinary citizens developed a deep distrust of government and liberalism. Seizing political advantage amid the trauma and division, a revived Republican Party, led by the New Right, offered the nation a fresh way forward. The election of President Ronald Regan in 1980 symbolized the ascendance of this new political formula, and the president himself helped shape the era. Use the following documents to complete the graphic organizer and answer the question that follows.

Document 1

“Franklin Roosevelt’s rapid conversion from Constitutionalism to the doctrine of unlimited government is an oft-told story. ... I am here concerned ... by the unmistakable tendency of the Republican Party to adopt the same course. The result is that today *neither* of our two parties maintains a meaningful commitment to the principle of States’ Rights. Thus, the cornerstone of the Republic, our chief bulwark against the encroachment of individual freedom by Big Government, is fast disappearing under the piling sands of absolutism. ...

The root evil is that the government is engaged in activities in which it has no legitimate business. As long as the federal government acknowledges responsibility in a given social or economic field, its spending in that field cannot be substantially reduced.”

-Barry Goldwater, a Republican senator from Arizona, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, 1960

Document 2

“We now have several decades of experience with governmental intervention. ...

Which if any of the great “reforms” of past decades has achieved its objectives? ...

A housing program intended to improve housing conditions of the poor, to reduce juvenile delinquency, and to contribute to the removal of urban slums, has worsened the housing conditions of the poor, contributed to juvenile delinquency, and spread urban blight. ...

The greater part of the new ventures undertaken by government in the past few decades have failed to achieve their objectives. The United States has continued to progress; its citizens have become better fed, better clothed, better housed, and better transported; class and social distinctions have narrowed; minority groups have become less disadvantaged. ... All this has been the product of the initiative and drive of individuals co-operating through the free market.”

-Milton Friedman, economist, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 1962

Document 3

“This letter is written to you by a law abiding citizen who feels she is discriminated against in favor of dope addicts and welfare cheats. I am a widow who lives alone, works every day, pays taxes and lives by the rules. I get very little from my taxes when I can no longer walk on the streets and when I am afraid in my own home. ... Sorry this letter is not typed. My typewriter was stolen.”

-Letter to Nelson Rockefeller, Republican governor of New York, February 6, 1971

Document 4

“We must reverse the trend America finds herself in today. Young people between the ages of twenty-five and forty have been born and reared in a different world than Americans of years past. The television set has been their primary baby-sitter. From the television set they have learned situation ethics and immorality – they have learned a loss of respect for human life. They have learned to disrespect the family as God has established it. They have been educated in a public-school system that is permeated with secular humanism. They have been taught that the Bible is just another book of literature. They have been taught that there are no absolutes in our world today. They have been introduced to the drug culture. They have been reared by the family and the public school in a society that is greatly void of discipline and character-building. These same young people have been reared under the influence of a government that has taught them socialism and welfarism. They have been taught to believe that the world owes them a living whether they work or not.”

-Jerry Falwell, television evangelist and founder of the Moral Majority, *Listen, America!*, 1980

Document 5

“I am pleased that God blessed me with the privilege of being a woman. I have never been envious of the role of men but have had respect for both sexes. There’s no doubt that there has been discrimination against women, but that is past history, just as discrimination against blacks is past history in the US. ...

Just what were we women to be liberated from? These women [feminists] were calling for liberation from things women like me love most – our husbands, our children, our homes. My cry became: “God, liberate us from the Liberators!” ...

We believe that the mothers of this and other nations must stand up for the protection of our homes and our children. In no way are we extremists, unless we be guilty of extreme devotion to our husbands, our children, and our homes. It is our sincere belief that if we do not unite against the threats to the home, if we retire to the convenience and security of our houses and do not speak out, then it will not be long until we, the ‘keeper at home’ (Titus 2.5) will not have a home to keep!”

-Teddi Hold, a homemaker, a member of Georgia Stop ERA, and the national president of Mothers On the March, 1984

Document 6

... “There can be no doubt about what is the major issue in this campaign concerning the question of peace. It is whether you believe Mr. Carter’s words and deeds have brought the United States closer to or further away from the goal of peace based on confidence in the strength of our nation. As a presidential candidate four years ago, he said: “...it is imperative that the world know that we will meet obligations and commitments to our allies and that we will keep our nation strong.” Did he keep his promise? That’s the real peace issue in 1980. And that’s an issue for you to decide. Has he kept our nation strong? Are you willing to risk four more years of what we have now? Has the registration and the possible draft of your sons and daughters contributed to your peace of mind? Is the world safer for you and your family? Whatever else history may say about my candidacy. I hope it will be recorded that I appealed to our best hopes, not our worst fears, to our confidence rather than our doubts, to the facts, and not to fantasies. And these three – hope, confidence, and facts – are at the heart of my vision of peace. We have heard the phrase “peace through strength” so often, its meaning has become blurred through overuse. The time has come for America to recall once more the basic truths

behind the familiar words. Peace is made by the fact of strength – economic, military, and strategic. Peace is lost when such strength disappears or – just as bad – is seen by an adversary as disappearing. We must build peace upon strength. There is no other way. And the cold, hard fact of the matter is that our economic, military, and strategic strength under President Carter is eroding. Only if we are strong will peace be strong.”

-Televised address by Governor Ronald Reagan, “A Strategy for Peace in the ‘80s”, October 1980

Document 7

“Overseas, our goal is ... to preserve a world at peace by keeping America strong. This philosophy once occupied a hallowed place in American diplomacy, but it was casually ... dismissed at the outset by the Carter Administration – and the results have been shattering. Never before in modern history has the United States endured as many humiliations, insults, and defeats as it has during the past four years: our ambassadors murdered, our embassies burned, our warnings ignored, our diplomacy scorned, our diplomats kidnapped. The Carter Administration has shown that it neither understands totalitarianism nor appreciates the way tyrants take advantage of weakness. The brutal invasion of Afghanistan promises to be only the forerunner of much more serious threats to the West – and to world peace – should the Carter Administration somehow cling to power.

-1980 Republican Party Platform