

# Sound Bite Society

## Government Fatigue, Rise of Conservatism and the Corporation State

### **I. Overall Trends**

#### **A. Backlash against Government**

1. Led to emergence of media as watchdog
2. Advantage of being a political outsider
3. Dismantling of New Deal social programs: helped rich, hurt poor
4. Liberalism discredited: abandoned vision of noble government as "positive good"

#### **B. Government Vacuum**

1. Shift away from government led to increasing influences of:
  - a. Fundamentalism and a resurgence of evangelicalism
    - i. Moral Majority, Televangelism, Politicization of Religion
  - b. Corporations Unchecked
    - i. Increased stock market participation, speculation, "Greed is Good" weakened unions, anti-trust laws, loosened oversight, Conflicts over environmentalism and corporate development
  - c. Media culture
    - i. Sound bites and talk radio displacing discourse and rhetoric
    - ii. Entertainment industry dominant as cultural export

#### **B. Military Distrusted, Then Rebuilt, Then Mobilized**

1. Initial shock from Vietnam leads Ford and Carter to be gun-shy about use of force
2. Reagan increases military spending, uses it against weak enemies: Grenada, Libya
3. Bush and Clinton continue trend: Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo

#### **C. Geopolitical Power Surge, Power Vacuum**

1. Break-Up of Soviet Union leaves one superpower
2. Evolving role of multinational organizations: NATO, UN, EU
2. Rise of extremist states or non-state challengers

### **II. Politics**

#### **A. The Curse of Washington**

1. Ford
  - a. Congressman from Michigan
  - b. Hurt by pardon of Nixon
  - c. Weak economy with high unemployment and inflation: "stagflation"
2. Carter
  - a. Georgia governor as outsider
  - b. The politics of character
  - c. Moderate stymied by economy and Iran hostage crisis
3. Reagan
  - a. California governor as outsider
  - b. "The Great Communicator" "The Teflon President"
  - c. Staunch conservative: distrusted big gov't, favored deregulated big business
  - d. Sought to undo New Deal programs and increase military spending
4. Bush 41
  - a. Reagan's Vice President
  - b. More moderate than Reagan, but seen as Washington insider

## 5. Clinton

- a. Arkansas governor as outsider
- b. "New Democrat" pro-business moderate but labeled liberal
- c. Signed 1993 tax increase, cut military spending
- d. Domestic agenda undermined by Whitewater and Lewinsky scandals

## **III. Economics**

### **A. Stagflation**

#### **1. Ford and Carter**

- a. Hoped to cut taxes and promote conservation
- b. But inflation led to higher tax brackets and
- c. Congress continued deficit spending, driving up interest rates

### **B. Reaganomics**

1. Cut social welfare spending and tax cuts (shifted tax burden from income to Social Security, helping rich and hurting poor)
2. Supply Side Economics and the trickle down theory
3. Increased military spending
4. Massive increase in debt

### **C. Bush 41**

1. Increasing debt, downturn in economy, rising interest rates
2. "Read my lips, no new taxes"--in the end, forced to raise taxes

### **D. Clinton**

1. Raised taxes, cut waste in government, stopped increasing military budget
2. Economic boom, falling interest rates, deficit cut in half by 2000

## **IV. Foreign Policy**

### **A. Soviet Union**

#### **1. Ford and Carter**

- a. Detente and arms limitation

#### **2. Reagan and Bush**

- a. Arms race against the "Evil Empire" contributed to Soviet collapse
- b. Pushed for development of Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars)
- c. Later agreements on eliminating intermediate nuclear weapons

#### **3. Clinton**

- a. Partnership with newly democratic Russia

### **B. Middle East**

#### **1. Nixon and Ford**

- a. OPEC oil embargo contributes to inflation, economic strain

#### **2. Carter**

- a. Camp David Accords: peace between Israel and Egypt
- b. Revolution in Iran leads to hostage crisis, growing hostilities in Middle East

#### **3. Reagan and Bush**

- a. U.S. troops to Lebanon as peacekeepers, withdrawn after terrorist attack
- b. Secret sale of weapons to Iranians in exchange for freeing some hostages
- c. Diversion of funds to aid Nicaraguan rebels in violation of Congress
- d. Iran-Contra Affair sullied rep of Reagan, but all involved pardoned by Bush

#### **4. Clinton**

- a. Oslo Peace Accords
- b. Tensions over weapons inspectors in Iraq and international terrorism