

A New Era Begins, 1989-Present

THE STORY MATTERS...

The Berlin Wall stood as a potent symbol of the division of the world into two hostile camps during the Cold War. From 1961 to 1989, the Berlin Wall separated West and East Berlin, dividing families and limiting travel across the border. In a major Cold War speech in 1987, U.S. president Ronald Reagan stood in front of the Brandenburg Gate of the Berlin Wall as he challenged the Soviet leader: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” In 1989 the East German government finally ended the political division between West and East.

Lesson 34-2

Western Europe and North America

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

currency symbol

Content Vocabulary

budget deficit postmodernism
popular culture cultural imperialism

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What motivates political change?
- How can economic and social changes affect a country?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the leaders of Western European and North American countries faced many economic and political challenges. Western culture has continued to influence many parts of the world.

Winds of Change in Western Europe

GUIDING QUESTION *What were the political and economic trends in Western Europe since the end of the Cold War?*

In the course of the 1980s, Western European economies recovered, but problems remained. Unemployment was still high. Despite their economic woes, however, the Western European states seemed quite capable of prospering.

Especially important in that respect was the European Community (EC), which was chiefly an economic union. The Treaty on European Union, which went into effect on November 1, 1993, turned the EC into the European Union (EU). One of the EU’s first goals was to establish a common currency, the euro. A major crisis for the euro emerged in 2010, when the public debts of Greece and Ireland threatened bankruptcy for those countries and financial disaster for the euro. By 2015, the euro had officially replaced 19 national currencies and served approximately 340 million people.

Between 2004 and 2007, the EU expanded, by adding 12 new members, mostly from Eastern Europe. These

included nations that became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The end of the Soviet Union also had a major impact on the fate of Germany.

Reunification of Germany

In 1982 the Christian Democratic Union of Helmut Kohl formed a new, more conservative government in West Germany. Kohl was a smart politician who benefited greatly from an economic boom in the mid-1980s. Then events in East Germany led to the unexpected reunification of the two Germanies in 1990.

Erich Honecker, head of the Communist Party in East Germany, ruled harshly. While many East Germans fled their country, others led mass demonstrations against the regime in 1989. When the Communist government opened its entire border with the West, thousands of East Germans swarmed across the border to reunite with their families and friends. The Berlin Wall, long a symbol of the Cold War, was torn down. The reunification of Germany took place on October 3, 1990. What had seemed almost impossible became a reality – the countries of West and East Germany had formed one Germany.

With a population of 79 million people, the new Germany became the leading power in Europe. The joy over reunification soon faded as new problems arose. It became clear that the rebuilding of eastern Germany would take far more money than had been thought.

Kohl’s government was soon forced to raise taxes. In addition, the virtual collapse of the economy in eastern Germany had led to extremely high unemployment and severe discontent. One result was a return to power for the Social Democrats, who were victorious in the 1998 elections. However, the Social Democrats had little success in solving Germany’s economic woes. In 2005 Angela Merkel, leader of the Christian Democrats, became the first female chancellor in German history.

The collapse of the German economy also led to increasing attacks on foreigners. For years, illegal immigrants and foreigners seeking refuge had found haven in Germany because of its very liberal immigration laws.

Increased unemployment and economic problems caused tensions between some Germans and immigrant groups.

Great Britain

After Margaret Thatcher resigned as prime minister in 1990, the Conservative Party, now led by John Major, failed to capture the imagination of most Britons. In new elections in 1997, the Labour Party won a landslide victory. Moderate Tony Blair became prime minister. However, his ongoing support of the U.S. war in Iraq, when most Britons opposed it, caused his popularity to plummet. Another member of the Labour Party, Gordon Brown, became prime minister in June 2007.

The Conservative Party gained a majority in the 2010 British general election, and David Cameron became prime minister. In 2015 the Conservatives won even more convincingly. Despite the defeat of a Scottish independence referendum in 2014, the pro-independence Scottish National party also gained a large number of seats in 2015. In 2016 Great Britain held a national referendum, informally known as Brexit, to leave the European Union. Cameron, who opposed the referendum, resigned after the vote narrowly won. Theresa May succeeded him.

France

In the elections of 1993, a coalition of conservative parties gained 80 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. Jacques Chirac was president from 1995 to 2007.

By 1995, resentment against foreign-born residents had become a growing political reality. Especially noticeable were the growing tensions between the Muslim community and the remainder of the French population. These tensions helped elect Nicolas Sarkozy president in 2007.

France did not escape the financial woes of the euro crisis. Amid the failing economy and low approval ratings, Sarkozy lost his reelection bid in a run-off election in May 2012. He was defeated by François Hollande of France's Socialist Party.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Determining Cause and Effect What happened after the Berlin Wall was dismantled?

The United States and Canada

GUIDING QUESTION *What were the political and economic trends in North America since the end of the Cold War?*

As the Cold War was coming to a close, U.S. politics oscillated between the right and left as economic issues became a focus. Canadians were also concerned about economic problems and the status of Quebec.

The United States

The Reagan Revolution, as it has been called, sent U.S. policy in new directions. Reagan reduced welfare policies by cutting spending on food stamps, school lunch programs, and job programs. At the same time, Reagan oversaw the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history.

Total federal spending rose from \$631 billion in 1981

to over a trillion dollars by 1987. The spending policies of the Reagan administration produced record government budget deficits. A budget deficit exists when the government spends more than it collects in revenues. In the 1970s, the total deficit was \$420 billion. Between 1981 and 1987, budget deficits were three times that amount.

George Bush, Reagan's vice president, succeeded him as president. Bush's inability to deal with the federal deficit and an economic downturn, however, allowed Democrat Bill Clinton to be elected president in 1992. Clinton claimed to be a new kind of Democrat, one who favored several Republican policies of the 1980s. A lengthy economic revival won Clinton popular support, but his second term was overshadowed by charges of presidential misconduct. Clinton's problems helped Republican George W. Bush, son of the first President Bush, to win the presidency in 2000.

The Bush administration was largely occupied with the war on terrorism and the U.S.-led war on Iraq. Bush and Congress passed tax cuts to boost the economy but the cuts also helped produce record deficits. From 2004 to 2008, Bush's popularity fell due to growing discontent over the Iraq War and a significant downturn in the economy caused in part by problems in the home mortgage industry. These key issues in the 2008 presidential race led to a change in American politics with the election of Barack Obama, the first African American president.

In 2009 the Obama administration moved to deal with the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, the passage of national healthcare legislation, and the war in Afghanistan. He was reelected in 2012. In his second term, Obama oversaw the continued roll-out of the Affordable Care Act. In foreign policy, a nuclear deal was signed with Iran, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal was signed with 12 countries in the Pacific Rim.

Canada

In 1993 Canada approved the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), along with the United States and Mexico, to make trade easier and more profitable. Because many Canadians thought the agreement was too favorable to the United States, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney lost popularity. Jean Chretien of the Liberal Party served as prime minister from 1993 to 2003. Most recently, in the 2015 elections, the Conservatives lost, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper stepped down. Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party became prime minister.

The status of the French-speaking Quebec province has been an issue for decades. In 1995 Quebec voters only narrowly rejected secession. The debate still divides Canadians and was an issue in the 2015 elections.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Describing What role did the economy play in U.S. presidential administrations in the 1990s and 2000s?

Society and Culture in the West

GUIDING QUESTION *What were the cultural trends in*

Western Europe and North America in the 1990s and 2000s?

Among the effects of globalization is the spread of culture, and Western culture has expanded to and influenced most parts of the world.

The Women's Movement

In the 1990s, there was a backlash against the women's movement. Some women urged a return to traditional gender roles. Other women rejected these ideas and continued to find ways to balance career and family. While there have been gains in the women's movement in the 2000s, women continue to do most of the child rearing and domestic work in most homes.

Art and Popular Culture

The United States dominated the art world after World War II. Abstraction-ism, especially abstract expressionism, dominated modern art after 1945. Abstract artists focused on conveying emotion and feeling. By the 1980s, postmodernism emerged. Postmodern artists often create works that include elements of film, performance, popular culture, and sculpture. Today's artists use digital cameras and computer programs to produce interactive art forms.

Music, movies, television, sports—all are part of our popular culture. Known throughout the world, American

performers and filmmakers help spread American popular culture. From early rock 'n' roll to multimillion-dollar musical acts, the world participates in America's musical pop culture. Films also play a big role in spreading Western culture.

Television and sports have created a sense that Americans and Europeans share a culture. Europeans watch American shows and become familiar with American brand names—and American attitudes about family, work, and money. As a cultural export, sports have become big business. Some nations worry that American entertainment weakens their own language and culture. Critics refer to this as cultural imperialism. Although Western music and movies may still dominate, trends in the opposite direction are developing. One trend is that non-Western music has large Western audiences. For example, the reggae music native to Jamaica has an enormous following, and Latin pop has become so popular that there have been Latin Grammy awards since 1999.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Conclusions Why has the spread of American popular culture led some critics to be concerned about U.S. cultural imperialism?

LESSON 34-2 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Identifying** What happened to budget deficits in the United States from the 1970s to the 1980s?
2. **Making Connections** How is American popular culture related to the idea of cultural imperialism?

Using Your Notes

3. **Sequencing** Use your notes to list the events that led to the reunification of Germany.

Answering the Guiding Questions

4. **Making Generalizations** What were the political and economic trends in Western Europe since the end of the Cold War?
5. **Making Generalizations** What were the political and economic trends in North America since the end of the Cold War?
6. **Identifying** What were the cultural trends in Western Europe and North America in the 1990s and 2000s?

Writing Activity

7. **Narrative** Write an essay describing how popular culture has affected your life. Be sure to include examples of music, film, television, and art and how it impacted you.