

DBQ: The 1970's, a Decade of Change

From 'Malaise' to 'Morning in America'

The election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency in 1980 would appear to be a moment of transition in the modern history of liberalism. Building upon the libertarian critiques of Goldwater and Wallace, the electoral success of Nixon, and rising anxiety over America's standing in the world, Reagan popularized a 'radically conservative' reaction to liberal assumptions that had governed American politics from 1945-1980.

The following primary source documents all come from the years 1979-1981. Evaluate them and describe what they show about the 1970s, the 1980s, and the transition from one decade to the other. How would you use the documents to address the proposition above? How do anxieties over social change contribute to a repudiation of liberalism?

TASK: Write THREE questions for each text document, TWO questions for each image document and FIVE summary questions comparing/contrasting aspects of multiple documents. Include the answers to your questions.

Document A

Chart Showing Demographic Changes in Family life, 1970-1980

Source: U.S. Dept. of Commerce

**In One Decade—
10 Ways Families Have Changed**

	1970	Latest	Percent Change
Marriages performed	2,159,000	2,317,000	Up 7.3%
Divorces granted	708,000	1,170,000	Up 65.3%
Married couples	44,728,000	47,662,000	Up 6.6%
Unmarried couples	523,000	1,346,000	Up 157.4%
Persons living alone	10,851,000	17,202,000	Up 58.5%
Married couples with children	25,541,000	24,625,000	Down 3.6%
Children living with two parents	58,926,000	48,295,000	Down 18.0%
Children living with one parent	8,230,000	11,528,000	Up 40.1%
Average size of household	3.3	2.8	Down 15.2%
Families with both husband and wife working	20,327,000	24,253,000	Up 19.3%

USNHW7 table—Basic data: U.S. Dept. of Commerce

Document B

Volkswagen advertisement

Source: *Time Magazine*, 1979

This ad appeared amid the second of two energy shortages in the 1970s that led to gas lines that stretched around for blocks and a new emphasis on smaller, fuel-efficient cars. The manufacturers of many of these cars, like Honda and Toyota, were made foreign, further aggravating the nation's economic problems — and pride.



Document C

Jimmy Carter, "Crisis of Confidence Speech" (a.k.a. "The Malaise Speech"), July 15, 1979

This speech on energy policy was originally scheduled for delivery in early July, 1979 when it was abruptly cancelled by President Carter, who spent the next ten days talking with experts as well as ordinary Americans about the state of the nation. The speech he ultimately gave was widely remembered for its candor. The initial impact was positive, but when it was followed two days later by the resignation of his cabinet as part of a reorganization of his administration, many observers concluded Carter's lacked the necessary confidence and decisiveness necessary in a president.

.... It is clear that the true problems of our Nation are much deeper — deeper than gasoline lines or energy shortages, deeper even than inflation or recession. And I realize more than ever that as President I need your help....

All the legislation in the world can't fix what is wrong with America. So I want to speak to you first tonight about a subject even more serious than energy or inflation. I want to talk to you right now about a fundamental threat to American democracy....

The threat is nearly invisible in ordinary ways. It is a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our Nation.

The erosion of our confidence in the future is threatening to destroy the social and the political fabric of America....

Confidence has defined our course and has served as a link between generations. We have always believed in something called progress. We have always had a faith that the days of our children would be better than our own.

Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself, but in their ability as citizens to serve as ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy....

In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does but by what one owns. But we've discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We have learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose.

The symptoms of this crisis in the American spirit are all around us. For the first time in the history of our country the majority of our people believe that the next five years will be worse than the past five years. Two-thirds of our people do not even vote. The productivity of American workers is actually dropping and the willingness of Americans to save for the future has fallen below that of all other people in the Western world.

We were sure that ours was a nation of the ballot, not the bullet, until the murders of John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. We were taught that our armies were always

invincible and our causes were always just only to suffer the agony of Vietnam. We respected the presidency as a place of honor until the shock of Watergate. We remember when the phrase "sound as a dollar" was an expression of absolute dependability until ten years of inflation began to shrink our dollar and our savings. We believed that our nation's resources were limitless until 1973, when we had to face a growing dependence on foreign oil.

These wounds are still very deep. They have never been healed.

Looking for a way out of this crisis, our people have turned to the Federal Government and found it isolated from the mainstream of our nation's life. Washington, D.C. has become an island. The gap between our citizens and our government has never been so wide. The people are looking for honest answers, clear leadership, not false claims and... politics as usual. What you see too often in Washington and elsewhere around the country is a system of government that seem incapable of action....

What can we do? First of all, we must face the truth and then we can change our course. We simply must have faith in each other. Faith in our ability to govern ourselves and faith in the future of this nation. Restoring that faith and that confidence to America is now the most important task we face....

We are at a turning point in our history. There are two paths to choose. One is the path I've warned about tonight — the path that leads to fragmentation and self-interest. Down that road lies a mistaken idea of freedom.

All the traditions of our past, all the lessons of our heritage, all the promises of our future point to another path: the path of common purpose and the restoration of American values. That path leads to true freedom for our nation and ourselves.

Document D

Ronald Reagan, Speech Before the International Business Council (September 9, 1980)

Former California governor Ronald Reagan had long been interested in the presidency before he finally won the Republican nomination in 1980, but even then many observers in his own party considered him too conservative — and, given his tendency for verbal gaffes — too unsophisticated to actually win the confidence of the American people. In this, his first major policy speech, he lays out the vision he would take to Washington upon his election to the presidency two months later.

Never before in our history have Americans been called upon to face three grave threats to our very existence, any one of which could destroy us. We face a disintegrating economy, a weakened defense and an energy policy based on the sharing of scarcity...

We must first recognize that the problem with the U.S. economy is swollen, inefficient government, needless regulation, too much taxation, too much printing-press money. We don't need any more doses of Carter's eight or ten point programs to "fix" or fine-tune the economy. For three and one-

half years these ill-thought-out initiatives have constantly sapped the healthy vitality of the most productive economic system the world has ever known....

We must move boldly, decisively and quickly to control the runaway growth of Federal spending, to remove the tax disincentives that are throttling the economy, and to reform the regulatory web that is smothering it....

We must reduce personal income tax rates and accelerate and simplify depreciation schedules in an orderly, systematic way to remove disincentives to work, savings, investment and productivity.

We must review regulations that affect the economy and change them to encourage economic growth.

We must establish a stable, sound and predictable monetary policy....

The time has come for the American people to reclaim their dream. Things don't have to be this way. We can change them. We must change them. Mr. Carter's American tragedy must and can be transcended by the spirit of the American people, working together.

Let's get America working again. The time is now.

Document E

"Religious Right Goes for Bigger Game"

Source: U.S. News & World Report, November 17, 1980

This excerpt from a magazine story in the immediate aftermath of Ronald Reagan's election describes the evangelical agenda for the 1980s.

Liberals and conservatives alike are pointing to the 1980 election as evidence of what can happen when religion is mixed with politics — but they disagree sharply on what lies ahead.

According to conservative religious groups, Republican triumphs in the White House, Congress, and the statehouses represent long overdue victory for family life and moral values. The GOP sweep, the groups say, marks only the beginning of a drive for a thorough overhaul of American laws on such issues as abortion, pornography, and prayer in schools.

A far different view comes from Democratic lawmakers who lost their seats after being targeted for removal by religious groups. "These people have been getting away with dirty tactics in American politics for too long a time," Senator George McGovern (D-SD) said on ABC-TV's *Nightline* program. "I regard them as a menace to the American political process."

Document F
Reliance Group advertisement
Source: Time magazine, July 20, 1981

This ad was paid for by a financial conglomerate to dramatize what it regarded as a major problem in contemporary American life at the time.



**IS THE AMERICAN
ENTREPRENEUR
AN ENDANGERED SPECIES?**

One of our national assets is in danger of extinction:
The entrepreneurial spirit of America itself.
Too many people believe business is best when business is shackled. And the very people who should defend free enterprise too often remain silent.
America today needs more people to stand up and speak out—whenever and

wherever free enterprise is threatened.
After all, free enterprise, like freedom itself, never comes free.
Reliance Group, Incorporated, 919 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. Free enterprise companies in insurance, real estate, and management services with assets of \$2.7 billion.

**Reliance
Group**

