**Modern Politics 12.2**

**SSUSH23 Assess the political, economic, and technological changes since 1981.**

**a. Analyze challenges faced by recent presidents including the collapse of the Soviet Union, Clinton’s impeachment, the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war against terrorism.**

**Collapse of the Soviet Union**

Soviet leader **Mikhail Gorbachev** realized that the hurting Soviet economy could not sustain an arms race with the US any longer. For this reason, he initiated **glasnost** (political openness) and **perestroika** (a restructuring of the economy to allow limited free enterprise). These changes, along with the economic collapse of Communist nations in Eastern Europe, paved the way for the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and its satellite nations. On one occasion, while speaking in West Berlin, President Reagan challenged the Soviet leader publicly when he proclaimed before a cheering crowd at the **Berlin Wall**, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Finally, on November 9, 1989, the East German government announced that people could travel freely to West Berlin. Germans flocked to the Berlin Wall and began tearing it down with sledgehammers and anything else they could find. The wall, and the "iron curtain," had come down. Except for a failed coup (attempt by certain members of the government to overthrow those in power) in the early 90s that was meant to remove Gorbachev and reverse his policies, the Cold War was essentially over. Just a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Union itself dissolved. It had survived less than eighty years. Although he was no longer in office at the time, many credited Ronald Reagan with bringing about the end of the Cold War.

**Document Analysis 1**

**"Simply put, the president's (Bill Clinton) deposition testimony regarding whether he had ever been alone with Ms. (Monica) Lewinsky was intentionally false, and his statements regarding whether he had ever engaged in sexual relations with Ms. Lewinsky likewise were intentionally false...."**

**Bill Clinton’s Impeachment**

**Bill Clinton** is acknowledged by many to have been a brilliant politician and an effective president. His legacy is forever attached, however, to a series of scandals that dogged his candidacy and his administration. As early as his first presidential campaign, Clinton's hopes of being president were nearly derailed by accusations of an extramarital affair. He also had to deal with charges that he had used questionable means to avoid the draft during Vietnam. Clinton's ability to survive these challenges and bounce back earned him the nickname the "comeback kid." During his first term, Clinton was accused of taking part in fraudulent business practices in Arkansas and using his influence as governor to cover them up. This came to be known as the **Whitewater Affair**. It also involved accusations against Mrs. Clinton and her former law firm. Although some Clinton associates were eventually convicted of crimes, the president and the first lady were never linked to any wrongdoing. The final scandal to hit the Clinton White House was by far the biggest. A young woman named **Paula Jones** accused Clinton of sexual harassment before he became president. During the investigation, Clinton was asked about the nature of his relationship with a White House intern named **Monica Lewinski**. Under oath, before a grand jury, the president denied that he had ever had any sexual relationship with the young lady. As more evidence came to light, however, it became apparent that Clinton had lied. In August 1998, Clinton went on national television and admitted having a relationship with the intern that was "inappropriate." On December 19, 1998, the House voted to **impeach** President Bill Clinton for lying to a grand jury. He is only the second president in history to be impeached; the first being Andrew Johnson. (Remember, Nixon was never impeached because he resigned before he could be.) Clinton's presidency survived after he was acquitted by the Senate, but the humiliation of the Lewinski scandal remained throughout the rest of his time in office. Despite his pitfalls, however, Clinton proved to be an effective president. He balanced the national budget and presided over a time of economic prosperity. Almost ten years after leaving office, polls showed that most US citizens still had a positive opinion of the Clinton presidency.

**Document Analysis 2**

**“On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. American have known wars but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning. Americans have known surprise attacks----but never before on thousands of civilians.**

**Americans are asking: Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al Qaeda…. its goal is remaking the world---- and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.”**

**Source: George W. Bush, Address to Congress and the**

**American people following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks,**

**September 20, 2001.**

**Terrorist Attacks of 9/11**

Life in the United States changed forever on **September 11, 2001**. That morning, people across the country watched in shock as terrorists flew hijacked commercial airliners into the **World Trade Center** in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. The attack killed thousands as the Twin Towers of the Trade Center came crashing down, and the **Pentagon** burst into flames. Meanwhile, another hijacked plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing everyone on board. It went down when the passengers revolted and prevented the airliner from reaching its intended target (believed to be either the Capitol or the White House). In one day, four planes were hijacked, the World Trade Center was destroyed, and the Pentagon had been badly damaged. Far more tragic, however, were the many lives that were lost. The 9/11 attacks brought the reality of terrorism home to the United States and shook people's sense of national security more than any event since the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

**War Against Terrorism**

President **George W. Bush** had not quite been in office eight months on September 11, 2001. People were anxious to see what kind of leader he would be and what kind of response the US would have to the terrorist attacks. Bush responded by declaring a "**war on terror**." He created a new government department for the purpose of preparing and protecting the nation against future terrorist attacks, the **Department of Homeland Security**. Among other things, it greatly increased airline security to prevent future hijackings and instituted a color-coded terrorist alert system to warn the public when there is increased reason to fear a terrorist attack. Bush also signed into law the **U.S. PATRIOT Act**. The new law increased the authority of U.S. law enforcement agencies and allowed them greater latitude in what measures they used to obtain information. Although the law came to be criticized by some as infringing too much on civil liberties, it was renewed by Congress and the president in March 2006.

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.

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.

**b. Examine economic policies of recent presidents including Reaganomics.**

**Reaganomics**

When Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, he introduced an economic plan that his critics quickly labeled "**Reaganomics**." Reagan believed that the economy would be stimulated and would recover quickest if the supply of goods increased. Therefore, he backed policies and supported corporate tax cuts designed to benefit producers (corporations, small business owners, investors, etc.). His reasoning was often referred to as the "**trickle down theory**," because it advocated that the benefits felt by business owners would eventually "trickle down" to consumers and the average working class. By cutting taxes imposed on businesses and corporations, Reagan believed that business owners and employers would spend more money to hire workers and increase production. Initially, Reagan's approach was the object of ridicule as the nation experienced a recession in the early 1980's. Eventually, however, the economy did get better during his first term. One of Reagan's most famous quotes as the economy improved was, "You know its working, because they (his critics) aren't calling it 'Reaganomics' anymore." Reagan's policies had shortcomings as well. When Ronald Reagan became president, he believed that two major things needed to happen. First, the size and role of government needed to decrease. Second, the U.S. military had to be built up and strengthened. This meant that at the same time Reagan was spending big bucks on the military, he was cutting taxes and decreasing government regulation in certain areas. The massive spending combined with less revenue from taxes contributed to a record national debt. The term "national debt" refers to the amount of money a country owes as a result of spending more than it takes in as revenue. At first, most people in the U.S. didn't care. As they saw it, Reagan had strengthened the armed forces and his tax cuts were tremendously popular. It would be his successor, **George H.W. Bush**, who would have to deal with the debt of the Reagan years.

**c. Examine the influence of technological changes on society including the personal computer, the internet, and social media.**

**Technological Changes**

As computer technology improved, a vast new world of instant, global communication arose. During the 1980s and 1990s, Internet was developed as a conglomeration of computer networks from around the world. **Personal computers** became popular as the Internet became more accessible to individuals. No longer was computer technology used solely in business and manufacturing settings. Home computers became more affordable and practical in their capability for individual use.

A new platform for communication emerged from the development of the **Internet**. The term Email is short for electronic mail. In the mid-1990s, the use of Email started to become a popular mode for sending messages instantly over the Internet. No longer did commercial companies or individuals have to wait for written documents, messages, or information to be physically transported. Instead, Email is an immediate method of information transfer. Email changed the way business communication is conducted and the way individuals often communicate. The internet also led to an increase in consumer spending. Now, people can shop at home, instead of going to the store.

**Social Media** is another recent technological phenomenon in which individuals share information in online communities. Popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Individuals create accounts and share or post messages, photos, and videos to the online community they create. The popularity of social media has dramatically increased in the first few decades of the Twenty-first Century. Social media is becoming a source for news and instant information sharing. While popular, there are growing concerns about the credibility and reliability of some information disseminated through social media. Social media is a place where biases and incorrect information can be spread.

Technological changes in the Twenty-first Century have been dramatic. Businesses and individuals rely heavily on computers, the Internet, and social media for communication and productivity. While innovation has increased global connectivity and efficiency, there have been some negative consequences that came along with the new technology. Privacy, trustworthiness of information being presented, and cyber security risks are all challenges that must be addressed as technology continues to evolve.

**d. Examine the historic nature of the presidential election of 2008.**

**Presidential Election of 2008**

Toward the end of George W. Bush's presidency the economy took a downward turn. Gas prices and unemployment rose, large companies were in danger of bankruptcy, and many lost their homes to foreclosure. Against the backdrop of the declining economy and decline in support for American involvement in foreign wars, a key theme of the election of 2008 was "change". Democratic candidate Barack Obama was elected by a wide margin in the election. This made history as Obama become the first African American to hold the office of presidency of the United States.

The Obama Administration found successes in the withdrawal of combat troops from a more-stabilized Iraq and the killing of al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. However, President Obama faced many challenges during his years as President. The economy continued to struggle with key issues being the continuation of high gas prices and unemployment. The war in Afghanistan continued to feature fierce fighting. Budget deficits continued to climb. President Obama was able to get a major overhaul of the healthcare system passed, but the program was challenged legally in the courts and unpopular with segments of the population.