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Chapter 1

CROSSCURRENTS OF CRISIS IN 1970S AMERICA

Big trouble splashed into most Americans' lives in the 1970s. Few symbols embodied this as fully as the 25-foot great white shark that rose from the murky depths to devour swimmers and terrorize a Long Island beach town in the blockbuster movie, *Jaws*. The film opened on June 20, 1975, after an unprecedented television advertising campaign, and quickly became the first movie to earn over $100 million, the model for future summer blockbusters, and one of the two most popular films of the decade (along with 1977's *Star Wars*). *Jaws* spawned a series of spoofs and parodies, including a towering hit man in a subsequent James Bond film with sharpened metal teeth who was nicknamed "Jaws." But the film's extraordinary success stemmed from its ability to tap into a range of popular fears. One was the common anxiety about deep water and what might lurk below the visible surface, especially beyond the artificial clarity of chlorinated swimming pools. Another was the memory of the last great threat to cruise just beneath the waters of the nation's Atlantic coast, killing unsuspecting Americans on the surface: the German U-boats of the early months of World War II in 1942. Most obviously, the efforts of the town's leaders in the film to cover up the shark attacks in order to preserve the tourist trade evoked for Americans in 1975 pervasive concerns that authorities, for their own interests, might be keeping some hidden evil from public view. In the era of investigations of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, and CIA efforts to assassinate foreign leaders, such concerns were more realistic than paranoid.

Three years earlier, another very popular film had used different dangers of the deep to examine growing anxieties about

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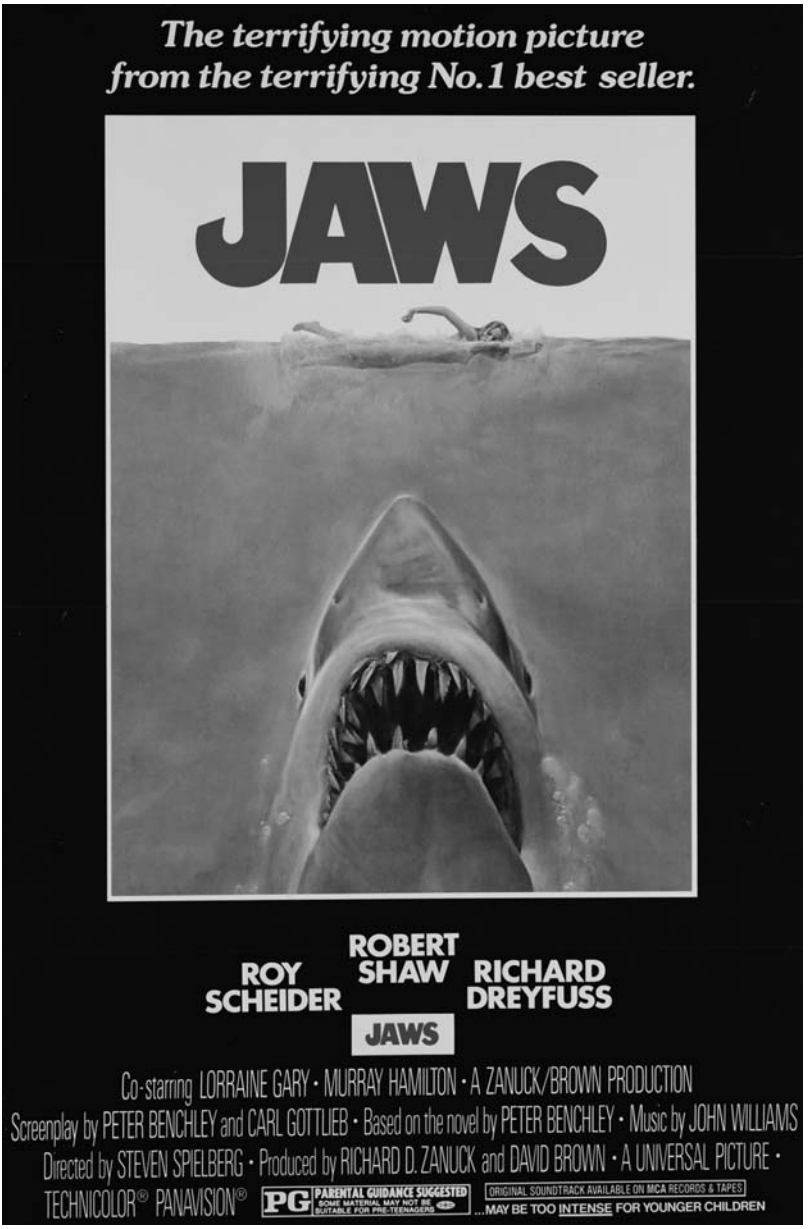

Figure 1.1.
Americans by the 1970s learned to worry about unknown dangers hidden beneath the surface. Released in 1975, *Jaws* was the first big summer blockbuster film. Courtesy Universal Studios.

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where American society and perhaps all of Western culture were headed. In *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972), a tidal wave—improbably in the Mediterranean Sea—capsized a cruise ship bound for Greece, leaving the boat upside down and requiring the passengers to escape up through the bottom or hull. At one level a simple escapist adventure tale, the film also raised larger questions. With ancient Greece, the cradle of Western civilization, lost as a compass and everything turned literally upside down—by the civil rights struggle, by antiwar protests, by the counterculture and the movement for women's liberation—how were people to survive and go forward in this new era? A charismatic Roman Catholic priest, played by Gene Hackman, provided guidance to the other passengers for an escape from disaster. He was bound for work in Africa, "the future" as he called it, a multicultural, inclusive view of the world beyond just Europe and of the United States beyond just European Americans. While *Jaws* reflected the shift in the second half of the 1970s toward sheer entertainment and profit-making, *The Poseidon Adventure* also imagined disaster but captured some of the optimism of egalitarian reform that still motivated many American citizens in the first half of the decade.[1]

Events of the previous decade of the 1960s had knocked loose certain longstanding foundations of American society and thought. Traditional hierarchies of whites over nonwhites, men over women, and adults over youth no longer seemed commonsensical or even acceptable. Popular attitudes, particularly among younger Americans, toward sexuality, dress, and language were more tolerant and less judgmental, the standards of acceptable behavior less clear. This less confident culture was then buffeted by powerful crosscurrents in the 1970s that reshaped both the nation and the world beyond it. Military, political, economic, and environmental crises unfolded rapidly on top of each other, leaving many citizens uncertain of which to address first and how to do so. In the backwash of defeat in Vietnam and humiliation from the Watergate scandal, and in the midst of inflation and an oil crisis, distrust of government pervaded American society. The loss of confidence in public author-

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ity laid the foundation for deregulation and a turn toward the free market, a path that led to growing disparities between rich and poor. At the same time, the more tolerant and individualistic mainstream American culture increasingly rejected old forms of group discrimination and inequality.[2]

Challenges to the economy affected Americans most immediately throughout the 1970s. Rising unemployment, persistent high inflation, and the loss of manufacturing jobs through deindustrialization made the future uncertain. One of the people at mid-decade who best articulated the fears and hopes of working-class and middle-class citizens came out of a humble background in the small New Jersey town of Freehold. Singer and guitarist Bruce Springsteen recorded four albums in the 1970s, vaulting to fame and the covers of both *Time* and *Newsweek* in October 1975 with his third album, *Born To Run*, as he gave eloquent voice to quiet desperation and hopes for personal transcendence, if only in the private sphere of a speeding car at night. These were smaller, narrower dreams, framed more individually, than the great public causes of the 1960s. The United States was in for a rougher ride now, and comfort would be found in small doses. Springsteen's popular vision was deeply egalitarian and inclusive—the iconic cover of *Born To Run* showed the white musician leaning fondly on his bandmate, black saxophonist Clarence Clemons—but was also imbued with a sorrowful sense of the slipping economic prospects of so many citizens. The America Springsteen evoked in the mid-1970s was both more equal and less equal than it had been.[3]

Trouble Abroad

More than 200 million people lived in the United States in the 1970s. Widely diverse in age, income, personality, ethnicity, family circumstances, life experiences, and a host of other characteristics, Americans recognized their common ground most clearly in national crises, events that visibly shaped the entire country. The foremost issue that had loomed over American life

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since 1965 was the U.S. war in Southeast Asia, and it brought little comfort. From the first combat troops wading ashore in South Vietnam that spring, the U.S. military commitment escalated steeply, reaching an apex of more than 500,000 American soldiers in the country in 1968 and 1969. Victory in the political struggle for the loyalties of the South Vietnamese remained elusive, however, even as superior firepower enabled U.S. forces to inflict enormous damage on their mostly Communist enemies and on the millions of civilians caught up in the fighting. Stalemate on the battlefield, rising American casualties, and declining support at home for the war encouraged the Nixon administration to begin bringing U.S. troops home, as did Nixon's recognition of the futility of the war and his plan to refocus U.S. foreign policy toward balancing China and the Soviet Union. The steady process of withdrawal from 1969 onward, accompanied by further buildup of South Vietnam's own military forces, led to the last U.S. combat troops leaving Vietnam in March 1973. The United States had clearly not won this war, and how and why the war had been lost remained the subject of contentious debate for decades to come.[4]

Nixon and his chief foreign policy adviser, national security adviser and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, understood that withdrawing U.S. forces from Vietnam meant an implicit admission of defeat. Ideally, the South Vietnamese government that the United States had created in 1954 and sustained ever since would survive on its own. But Nixon and Kissinger were far too clear-eyed in their view of Southeast Asia to expect that the corrupt, unpopular regime in Saigon would be any match for the coalition of disciplined North Vietnamese regular army forces and their insurgent Communist allies in the South, the National Liberation Front (disparaged by Saigon and Washington as the "Vietcong," a pejorative term meaning roughly "Vietnamese Commies"). Nixon and Kissinger instead hoped merely for what became known as a "decent interval" between the departure of the last U.S. troops and the triumphant arrival of Communist forces in Saigon. The longer that interval lasted, the less obvious might be the link between these two events, and the

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less attention that might be paid internationally to an apparent U.S. defeat. To Nixon's assertion that "South Vietnam probably is never gonna survive anyway," Kissinger agreed: "So we've got to find some formula that holds the thing together a year or two, after which—after a year, Mr. President . . . no one will give a damn." Nixon and Kissinger were keenly sensitive to the perceptions of others, both enemies and friends, and sought to extract the United States from a lost war while preserving as much of its reputation for toughness and military competence as possible.[5]

The corrosive effect of a long, slow withdrawal over four years, even if intended to bolster an ally, spread unease among Americans abroad and at home. Most dramatically, four more years of war resulted in the deaths of 21,000 more U.S. soldiers as well as over half a million Vietnamese, both combatants and civilians. Inevitably, a policy of slow, steady troop withdrawals made clear that the United States was no longer in the war to win it, and military morale plummeted. Official U.S. Army figures for these years listed nearly eight hundred fraggings—attempts by military personnel to murder a superior officer—while the real number may have been much higher. Drug use metastasized throughout the ranks, reaching well beyond just marijuana. By 1973, the Pentagon admitted that a third of all army enlisted men had tried heroin. The goal of eighteen-year-old draftees was simply "to turn 19" and get back home again. Racial tensions, desertions, disrespect for officers, and antiwar organizing among GIs proliferated, piling on top of accusations of war crimes against Vietnamese civilians, most infamously the murder of hundreds of women, children, and old men at the village of My Lai in March 1968, a story covered up by the army until late 1969. In 1971, Marine Colonel Robert Heinl wrote in the *Armed Forces Journal* that the U.S. Army remaining in Vietnam "is in a state approaching collapse" and had reached "the lowest state of military morale in the history of the country." Decorated Vietnam veteran and future U.S. senator John Kerry famously asked an April 1971 hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" Being forced to continue fighting a

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war that clearly had been lost was a recipe for disaster, and the American military spent the rest of the decade trying to rebuild its morale.[6]

Vietnam veteran and memoirist Tobias Wolff recalled visiting a particularly edgy and unhappy U.S. base at Dong Tam in South Vietnam, where he saw "something that wasn't allowed for in the national myth—our capacity for collective despair." He drew a biblical analogy. "A sourness had settled over the base, spoiling and coarsening the men. The resolute imperial will was all played out here at empire's fringe," Wolff concluded, "lost in rancor and mud. Here were pharaoh's chariots engulfed; his horsemen confused; and all his magnificence dismayed." Before the Vietnam War, and across the sweep of U.S. history, such comparisons with ancient Egypt or any other great empire were rare among Americans, who long imagined themselves instead as the model of anticolonial self-government. "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people, the Israel [not Egypt!] of our time; we bear the ark of liberties of the world," wrote novelist Herman Melville a century before. Even U.S. expansion seemed neither imperial nor self-interested to most of its citizens, who tended to see in American military success abroad a sign of divine approval. "We but pitch the tents of liberty farther westward, farther southward," Senator Albert Beveridge declared during the U.S. annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines in 1898. Such faith about the tents of liberty was hard to hold by the early 1970s. The publication of the Defense Department's previously classified official history of the war, known popularly as *The Pentagon Papers* (1971), and such journalistic accounts as David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest* (1972) revealed incompetence and extensive deception of the American public by its leaders, as well as something less than liberty in South Vietnam. By April 28, 1975, when helicopters began evacuating the last Americans from Saigon in a scene whose photographs became iconic symbols of U.S. defeat, most Americans wanted nothing more to do with Vietnam. Gallup polls showed public opinion running 54–36 against even granting refuge to America's allies, the anticommunist South Vietnamese, some of

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Figure 1.2.
On April 29, 1975, anticommunist South Vietnamese try to scale the wall of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, hoping to reach evacuation helicopters, as the last of the Americans depart from Vietnam. Courtesy AP Photo/Neal Ulevich.

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them literally hanging from the skids of those helicopters in desperate flight from the victorious Communists. Close the door and put Indochina behind us, was the prevailing sentiment.[7]

The discovery that the United States was perhaps not the unique, special, ever-victorious nation its citizens had tended to assume marked a watershed in modern American history, a crisis of identity. Rather than being *the* exceptional nation, the United States now appeared to be much like other great nations across time, with some of the same strengths and some of the same challenges. In particular, it was an at least temporarily defeated imperial power in economic decline, marred by political corruption all the way to the top of its government. Freed from the burden of proving their nation's unique virtue in the face of growing evidence to the contrary, many politically engaged citizens found it refreshing to take a new, more skeptical, but also more realistic view of the United States. If knowing the truth could set one free, freedom might be coming on strong. Others, however, were not so happy. Conservatives and nationalists regretted what they called the "Vietnam Syndrome," in which uncertainty and self-doubt prevented the nation from acting effectively abroad, particularly in military fashion. Neither the Ford nor Carter administration was ultimately able to overcome this perception of military and political weakness. Ford did use naval force in response to the Communist Cambodian government's brief seizure of the U.S. container ship *Mayaguez* in May 1975, slaking a little of the considerable thirst on the Right for striking back vigorously at those disrespectful of the American flag. "It shows we've still got balls in this country," declared Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ). But the rescue operation cost forty-one American lives in order to free forty hostages, who turned out to have been already released before the U.S. naval operation began. The Vietnam Syndrome continued to haunt U.S. foreign policy decision-making well beyond the 1970s.[8]

For the United States, the war in Vietnam mattered most in what it meant for the larger Cold War. U.S. policymakers feared that the perception of American weakness in Indochina would embolden Soviet and Communist aggression elsewhere, the con-

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cern behind the "decent interval" strategy for withdrawal. For the most part, leaders of the newly independent nations believed in their self-designation as the "Third World," part of neither the capitalist First World nor the Communist Second World. Sometimes consciously, they followed the same path of the American revolutionaries of 1776 who took advantage of the Great Power struggle of that era between the British and the French in order to win their independence. Third World leaders tried to stay out of the Cold War while playing each side off against the other for various benefits. With the U.S. defeat in Vietnam still fresh, with the U.S. government in confusion over the Watergate scandal, and with the American public unhappy about overseas adventures and dogged by rising economic problems at home, the Soviets bid for fresh influence abroad, particularly among new, nominally socialist governments in Africa such as Angola and Ethiopia. It turned out that the Soviet Union was actually entering a period of profound economic stagnation and political sclerosis in the Kremlin, and in just a few years would invade Afghanistan, a decision that led directly to the collapse of the USSR. But for a few years in the mid-1970s, both Soviet leaders and American conservatives believed that the opposite was happening, that the United States was losing the Cold War competition for global influence.[9]

Angola became, briefly, a flash point of conflict in the post-Vietnam struggle over the U.S. role in world affairs. The last great overseas European empire dissolved in 1975 as Angolans and Mozambicans fought their way free of Portuguese control. Having won home rule, Angolan factions now began the fight over who would rule at home. The more pro-Western National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), backed by the apartheid regime in South Africa that ruled neighboring Namibia, lost ground to the socialist Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which received some aid from the USSR but more important assistance from Cuban troops. Ford and Kissinger hoped to slow this advance by directing the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to provide large-scale support

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to the pro-Western forces, determined that the U.S. debacle in Vietnam not translate into other leftist advances around the world. Anti-imperialists in Congress hit the roof. Empowered by an infusion of liberal Democrats in the November 1974 elections in the wake of the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, reformers in Congress refused to allow the United States to slide into another potential Vietnam-style commitment by engaging in a joint intervention with South Africa. Senator Dick Clark (D-IA), chair of the African Affairs Subcommittee, visited southern Africa, spoke in support of the end of white rule there, and held hearings in Washington to raise public awareness of a part of the world few Americans paid attention to, at least not since the slave trade of the 1700s. "Where the hell is Angola?" replied one U.S. senator to an invitation to the hearings.[10]

Angola almost seemed to be located right on Capitol Hill in the late fall of 1975, where the once obscure country received unprecedented attention. Congress had been reasserting its power on foreign affairs for two years, trying to correct an imbalance advertised by Vietnam and Watergate. Congressional demands for greater respect for human rights led one European diplomat to note: "It isn't just the State Department or the President anymore. It's Congress now." With the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* investigating white supremacist South African aid to UNITA, and with the MPLA firmly in control of the capital city of Luanda and most of Angola, the House and Senate passed by a large margin Senator John Tunney's (D-CA) amendment to temporarily end U.S. aid to UNITA. The Clark Amendment then passed in January 1976 to make the Tunney Amendment permanent, and U.S. intervention in Angola halted. It was the most dramatic assertion of congressional control over the American intelligence community since the beginning of the Cold War, a watershed event in the brief anti-colonial heyday of the mid-1970s. Within a year, though, the tide began turning, conservatives gaining traction with the question, "Who lost Angola?" Tunney lost his reelection bid in November 1976, as did Clark two years later. The lines were drawn clearly between a

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U.S. stance focused more on human rights and one committed more to reasserting American influence. Following the Vietnam debacle, most Americans were unsure which way to lean.[11]

The disorienting effect of the Vietnam War on the United States in the 1970s was sharply compounded by the opening of relations with the People's Republic of China. The Carter administration's formal exchange of ambassadors with Beijing in 1979 completed a thawing of perhaps the most frigid diplomatic relationship in the world, a process begun by Nixon's dramatic visit to Beijing in February 1972. For the previous generation, "Red China," as Americans called it, embodied the sheerest anti-Americanism, surpassing even that of the Soviets. The Chinese Communists had defeated the pro-American Guomindang government in 1949, ending the Chinese civil war and eliminating what Americans thought of as their special relationship with the Chinese people (even if that relationship had involved a condescension captured in Senator Kenneth Wherry's [R-NE] pledge to "lift up Shanghai, up and up, ever up, until it is just like Kansas City"). Within a year, Chinese and American soldiers were killing each other by the tens of thousands in Korea. While Soviet-American relations occasionally went through periods of relative thaw after 1953, ties to China remained nonexistent. Indeed, Mao Zedong's government positioned itself as the most exuberant, ideological promoter of socialist wars of national liberation throughout the Third World. Mao's instigation of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966, which promoted Communist purity of thought and behavior and lasted until his death ten years later, only deepened the ideological chasm between the two countries. Into this icy non-relationship, Nixon's smiling visit to Beijing—the very symbol of evil to Americans for a quarter-century, on the first trip ever by a U.S. president to China—plunged like a torrent of warm water. Americans watched live television coverage of Nixon and Mao toasting each other and speaking warmly together, and a Chinese military band playing traditional American tunes such as "Home, Home on the Range." For many Americans and others, it was almost unbelievable, "one of the greatest

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diplomatic and political coups of the century," in the words of the Concord (NH) *Monitor*.[12]

The warming of Sino-American relations had enormous significance for world politics and confusing implications for Americans. First, the supposedly monolithic Communist bloc was no more. The Chinese and Soviet governments' wary alliance dating from 1950 had actually been deteriorating since the late 1950s, as the two neighbors' historic differences meshed with a growing competition for leadership of the anti-capitalist bloc. By 1969, Soviet and Chinese troops were engaging in firefights along their common border on the Ussuri River. It took Nixon, who built his early political career on denouncing Communism in China, to seize the opportunity to drive a deeper wedge between the two great Communist powers. The Soviets blamed Nixon for doing just that, but they also moved swiftly to warm relations with the United States rather than being left as the third wheel in the new "triangular diplomacy." Nixon and Kissinger visited Moscow three months after Beijing, and a new era of détente was born. After a generation of viewing the Soviet Union and China as a monolithic conspiracy straddling the Eurasian landmass, Americans were suddenly free to understand them instead as two complicated nations with often conflicting interests and priorities. The Cold War would never be the same.[13]

Second, the image of Nixon and Mao smiling and toasting each other, displayed around the world, instantly cast the U.S. war in Vietnam, just across China's southern border, in a different light. Americans were still fighting and dying in Vietnam in 1972, supposedly to prevent the spread of Communism and specifically the expansion of Mao's influence into Southeast Asia. After all, Nixon's predecessor in the White House, Lyndon Johnson, had pointed to "the deepening shadow of Communist China" as the real threat and the real answer to the question, "Why are we in Vietnam?" Nixon's presence in Beijing and his negotiations with Mao and Zhou Enlai made seven years of U.S. sacrifices in Vietnam suddenly seem unnecessary. Might all that death and destruction—more than 50,000 American lives and

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millions of Vietnamese lives, and all that rancor and national discord at home—simply have been avoided?[14]

Third, and perhaps most unsettling of all, official friendliness with China followed by détente with the USSR raised elemental questions about whether the nation's highest priority for the previous twenty-five years—opposing at great cost a monolith called "international Communism"—had been built on a myth. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. policymakers assumed that other nations' foreign policies were similar in dynamics to their internal politics, that they derived from the same political wellsprings. Democracies were therefore responsible and restrained in international affairs, by this logic, while totalitarian states—Communists now, like fascists before World War II—were aggressive and hostile toward other countries. But now it seemed that U.S. policies in Vietnam had been less than responsible and that Communists in Beijing and Moscow could be reasoned and negotiated with. Indeed, it would even be possible that, seventeen years hence, the totalitarian Soviet Union in 1989 could peacefully allow its eastern European empire to go free. Returning to the United States from Beijing in 1972, Nixon declared, "What we have done is simply opened the door—opened the door for travel, opened the door for trade." But he and Kissinger had done more than that. They had opened the door to an entire reconsideration of America's purpose in the world and its manner of dealing with other nations. America's future "in a disordered world . . . seems uncertain," *U.S. News and World Report* concluded.[15]

The disorientation about world affairs that so many Americans experienced in the 1970s not only reflected events in Vietnam, Angola, and China. There was also a broader wave of private terrorism unleashed by radical leftists and state terrorism carried out by reactionary governments. Airplane hijackings, bombings, and hostage-taking became regular events as various revolutionary and nationalist groups sought publicity for their causes. The Irish Republican Army, the Japanese Red Army Faction, the West German Baader-Meinhoff Gang, and the Italian Red Brigades all attacked high-profile targets, failing in their

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larger goals of destabilizing governments but succeeding in sowing doubts across the industrialized world about personal safety and security. Leftist political organizing in this era met its fiercest response in the Southern Cone of South America. Right-wing officers in the Chilean military, aided by the U.S. CIA, overthrew the elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973, "disappearing" thousands of political opponents and instituting a seventeen-year military dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet. British poet Alastair Reid had close ties to Chile and remembered 1973 as the "lean, mean year, breeder of obituaries." The Pinochet regime even reached on to American soil to carry out its murderous purposes; in 1976, a car bomb in Washington killed Orlando Letelier, Chile's former foreign minister under Allende and an opponent of Pinochet, as well as Letelier's American assistant. In Argentina, another military coup in 1976 led to six years of an infamous "dirty war" that killed some 10,000 leftists and other dissidents. And farther north in the hemisphere, anticommunist Cuban exiles who had previously worked for the CIA blew up a Cubana Airlines flight in October 1976, killing all seventy-three people on board.[16]

The use of political violence to spread fear was not new in the 1970s, nor was it limited to any one continent, but during this decade terrorism came to be associated above all with the Middle East and opponents of Israel. Several major events shaped this development. First, the British in 1971 withdrew the military forces that had long dominated the Persian Gulf region, continuing their retreat from empire that included granting independence to India in 1947, pulling out of Egypt after the debacle of the Suez crisis in 1956, and acceding to independence for most of their African colonies between 1957 and 1964. Into the vacuum left by the British retreat flowed not only continuing U.S.-Soviet competition for influence, but also a growing clash between the ebbing forces of Arab nationalism and socialism, on one side, which had dominated the struggle for independence from the European imperial powers and ruled ever since, and the rising force of Islamism, on the other side, which sought to create new theocratic governments that looked backward to the

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seventh century rather than forward to a Western model of secular rule. Islamists gained traction first not among the majority Sunni in the Arab nations but among the less numerous Persian Shi'a of Iran. The 1979 overthrow of the pro-American Shah Reza Pahlavi created a Shi'ite Islamist regime under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, while Sunni Islamists unsuccessfully sought a similar outcome in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. When young Iranian revolutionaries stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979 and seized fifty-two hostages whom they held for over a year, the targeting of civilians struck Americans like a body blow.[17]

They might have seen it coming. Hostilities between Israel, America's closest ally in the region, and its Arab neighbors ratcheted up throughout the decade. The key event was the Six-Day War of 1967, a stunning victory for Israel that exacerbated simmering disputes from its 1948 war of independence by bringing vast new swaths of Arab-populated territories—the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, and the Palestinian lands of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem—under Israeli control. Unwilling or unable to trade the occupied territories for secure borders, the government in Tel Aviv abetted the movement of Zionist settlers into those territories, a process condemned by most of the world and fiercely resented by the Palestinians whose lands and autonomy were at stake in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Egypt and Syria attacked in October 1973 in an effort to retake the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, nearly overrunning Israel, but the Israelis fought back and reconquered the territories with a crucial resupply of equipment from the United States. The resulting oil embargo by the Arab members of OPEC highlighted U.S. links to Israel, ties that had grown since 1967. Anti-Semitism had declined sharply in the United States after World War II; gentile Americans had come to see Israelis since 1948 as sturdy European pioneer settlers building a democracy, a similar story to early U.S. history; and the United States and Israel shared equally a large majority of the world's Jewish population. By the 1970s, the United States

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had become identified with Israel in a way it had not been during the 1940s and 1950s.[18]

Assaults on Israelis resonated on American shores, as Palestinian frustration with the outcome of the 1967 war fueled a proliferation of attacks on Israeli targets, both military and civilian, in Israel itself, in the Occupied Territories, and further afield. Palestinians hoped for international publicity for their cause, which they believed received little sympathetic attention in the United States and Western Europe, publicity that might lead to pressure on Israel to agree to withdraw from Palestinian lands. But the impact of terrorist attacks on civilians was the opposite in the United States: most Americans tended to identify more with Israelis and to see Palestinian insurgents as similar to other anti-Western insurgents throughout the Third World, such as the guerilla fighters in South Vietnam whom most Americans viewed as the enemy. Events such as the simultaneous hijacking of four New York-bound commercial jets from Europe in 1970 by Palestinians bolstered American identification with Israel.[19]

Two spectacular attacks on Israelis defined the era. One was the seizure and execution of eleven Israeli athletes and coaches by Palestinian gunmen at the 1972 Munich Olympics, where images of Jews being led bound to their slaughter again on German soil resurrected terrible memories of the Nazi Holocaust only twenty-seven years earlier. Just days earlier the American swimming superstar Mark Spitz, a Jew, had won a record seven gold medals. The second attack was the 1976 hijacking of an Air France flight by armed Palestinians and two German sympathizers, who diverted the plane to Entebbe Airport outside Kampala, Uganda. There they released the gentiles and kept 105 Israelis and Jews of other nationalities—again echoing the Holocaust—for a week, until an Israeli military force landed at Entebbe, secured the airport, and rescued the hostages, losing three hostages in the crossfire. One Israeli commando died: the raid commander, American-born Jonathan "Yoni" Netanyahu, a symbol of the closeness of American and Israeli societies, whose brother Benjamin would later become prime minister of

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Israel. The extraordinary operation unfolded on July 4, amid the U.S. Bicentennial celebrations, and Americans could not help comparing Israeli military success in Uganda with recent U.S. military failure in Vietnam. The story of the Entebbe raid was quickly made into two successful Hollywood films. Israel seemed to represent a toughness and competence against terrorists that Americans admired and wished to emulate in an era of declining American leadership in international affairs.[20]

To Americans in the 1970s, the world, in sum, appeared unstable and unpredictable. Their longstanding confidence in their nation's destiny was faltering. Withdrawal from Vietnam ended the widespread assumption that the United States was bound to win all its wars. Worse, an awful lot of Southeast Asians were happy to see the Americans leave. The United States had long been the admired, most popular destination for immigrants from Europe and around the globe, and Americans shared a powerful belief that most other peoples, in their hearts, really wanted to be like them. In Stanley Kubrick's film *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), an American colonel explains that U.S. troops are in Vietnam because "inside every gook [Asian] is an American trying to get out." Now, however, it turned out that most Vietnamese apparently were not really Americans at heart. Nor were most Cambodians, Angolans, Iranians, or, as the 1979 Sandinista revolution would show, Nicaraguans, all of whom created governments hostile to the United States during the 1970s. The political future of the United States in the world was unclear, at a time when the future of the American political system at home was also being shaken to its foundations.

Corruption at Home

The United States was born of a struggle against corruption. The revolutionary generation of 1776 became convinced that the centralized power of the British Crown threatened their individual liberties as English citizens. Historian Bernard Bailyn wrote that in this era, "most commonly the discussion of power

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centered on its essential characteristic of aggressiveness: its endlessly propulsive tendency to expand itself beyond legitimate boundaries." The Founding Fathers spoke in vivid metaphors about power as "grasping" and being "like a cancer [that] eats faster and faster every hour." With an image easily accessible to a later, shark-conscious, popular culture, they spoke of the "jaws" of power as "always opened to devour." What power sought to destroy were liberty and law. The American revolutionaries followed established eighteenth-century Whig theory in noting that power had legitimate functions such as establishing social order and good government, but that power was also inherently corrupting for people in political office. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution embodied the understanding that liberty's preservation hinged on establishing effective checks on power—the "checks and balances" Americans learn about in grade school. Unrestrained, the intoxicating temptation of power "converts a good man in private life to a tyrant in office." So citizens had to pay attention in order to defend their rights from the creeping hostility of centralized authority. In a 1765 sermon, colonial minister Andrew Eliot argued that when tyranny is abroad in the land, "submission is a crime."[21]

Precisely two centuries later, the Watergate scandal and investigation of 1972–74 reminded Americans of this heritage and of their need to resist the unjust behavior of corrupt power. References to "King Richard" abounded. Indeed, Nixon contributed as much as any one individual to the confusions of Americans in the 1970s. First, he undercut the nation's unifying ideology of anticommunism by warming relations with the Chinese and the Soviets; then his divisive actions at home eroded the national bipartisan consensus that had undergirded the Cold War for a generation. Abetted by his advisers, the president ignored legal constraints as he sought to consolidate power in the White House and assure an overwhelming reelection victory in 1972. Ironically, he need hardly have worried, given the Democratic Party's lack of cohesion and the weak campaign effort of presidential nominee, Senator George McGovern (SD). Nixon

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speechwriter Pat Buchanan effectively satirized McGovern's platform as "weakness abroad, permissiveness at home." But from Nixon's first months in office, he and Kissinger used wiretaps on their staffs and on reporters to identify the source of leaks about new U.S. bombing of neutral Cambodia, a violation of international law. They were determined to control the flow of information about the federal government and punish those on Nixon's "enemies list." The Committee to Reelect the President created a "Plumbers" unit to engage in a whole series of secretive "dirty tricks" against political opponents. Presidential assistant John Dean consulted with others in the administration about "how we can use the available federal machinery to screw our political enemies." Nixon agreed that "we have not used the Bureau [FBI] and we have not used the Justice Department but things are going to change now."[22]

On June 17, 1972, several Plumbers were arrested while trying to plant bugging equipment in the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington's Watergate office complex. "I'm not going to comment on a third-rate burglary attempt," Nixon's press secretary Ron Ziegler responded. But over the next two years, investigations by the press, the courts, and Congress slowly peeled back the layers of a full-blown cover-up of the Watergate break-in, orchestrated by the president and his closest advisers, who lied to the public by denying that they were doing precisely that. Several went to jail, including top aides Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. Tapes of White House conversations revealed Nixon, in the words of the conservative *Chicago Tribune*, as a "devious" and "profane" man who had given "a shabby, disgusting, immoral performance." Under threat of impeachment, Nixon resigned on August 8, 1974, the only U.S. president ever to do so.[23]

His successor, Gerald Ford, a decent and likable person, aimed to move the nation forward. "Our long national nightmare is over," he declared. A month later, Ford granted Nixon "a full, free, and absolute pardon" for any crimes he might have committed, only to provoke widespread outrage. Ford's popularity plummeted. A large bipartisan majority of Americans be-

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Figure 1.3.
Part of what comforted many Americans about President Gerald Ford was his large, likable family, gathered here at their house in Vail, Colorado, in December 1975. Courtesy Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

lieved Nixon should face justice for his actions. "There are only so many lies you can take," conservative Republican Senator Barry Goldwater declared. CBS News television anchor Walter Cronkite, a national icon of level-headedness, told friends, "I think we ought to take Lysol and scrub out the Oval Office." And corruption had spread further in the administration. The only person to enter the White House without having been elected either president or vice president, Ford had been chosen by Nixon to replace Vice President Spiro Agnew. Agnew had resigned after being found guilty of having accepted bribes while serving earlier as governor of Maryland, only the second vice president ever to leave the office voluntarily. During the Watergate cover-up, Nixon himself joked privately about Agnew's suitability for high office: "Then you think, well, Christ, this poor damn dumb President, why didn't he resign? Which might not be a bad idea, the only problem is, I mean, you get Agnew. You want Agnew?" And corruption in Washington was not re-

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stricted to the Executive branch or to the Republican Party. Powerful congressional committee chairmen embarrassed themselves and deepened public distrust of government. Two months after Nixon's resignation, police found Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-AR), chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, drunk in Washington's Tidal Basin with a buxom stripper nicknamed the "Argentine Firecracker." Rep. Wayne Hays (D-OH), chair of the Committee on House Administration, resigned after an investigation revealed in early 1976 the presence of an attractive young woman on his taxpayer-funded staff, Elizabeth Ray, whose sole duty was to serve as Hays's mistress. Ray confessed, "I can't type, I can't file, I can't even answer the phone."[24]

A major shift in American attitudes toward government and political leadership was under way. While the nation had originally emerged in the 1780s out of a struggle against centralized authority, and had fought the Civil War in the 1860s over the same issue, the United States in the twentieth century nonetheless developed an increasingly powerful federal government that most citizens came to trust and depend on. Amidst the industrialization of the final decades of the 1800s and the enormous wealth that it created, major corporations in industries such as steel and oil became so influential that Americans began to perceive them as the greatest threats to individual liberty. In the face of this danger, the only possible force to balance and restrain private economic might was the federal government. The Populists and Progressives at the turn of the century laid much of the groundwork for establishing a stronger national state. Then the crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s opened the door to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the creation of a more powerful U.S. government responsible for both managing the economy and assuring a minimal provision of material comfort—a safety net—for its citizens. The New Deal's modest welfare state set the pattern for national governance through the 1960s, primarily led by the Democratic Party and bolstered by the anxieties of the Cold War, and reached its apex in the further reforms of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, particularly regarding racial equality, health care, and education. Citizens, until Viet-

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nam and Watergate taught them otherwise, tended to assume their presidents were moral and competent men.[25]

Now, in the 1970s, public confidence in the decency and effectiveness of the federal government waned. Decency seemed to depart with Nixon. The Pulitzer Prize–winning reporters who tracked and broke most of the Watergate story, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post*, published their definitive account of those events in 1974. *All the President's Men* became a huge best seller. The popular film version of the book opened in April 1976, starring two of Hollywood's biggest names, Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman, in time to consolidate a grim visual counterpoint of corruption and misdeeds to the nation's Bicentennial celebrations. The revelation of Nixon's deceptions created a thirst for honesty that resulted in the swift reassessment of another recent president, Harry Truman (1945–53). Truman had left the Oval Office with very low public approval ratings due to the stalemated war in Korea, accusations of graft among some low-level members of his administration, and condemnations by then-influential Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI). Twenty years later, Truman's Midwestern straightforwardness contrasted starkly with Nixon's Machiavellian style of secrecy, Truman's steady hand in the early Cold War looked admirable against failed U.S. policies in Southeast Asia, and Merle Miller's 1974 book, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman*, became an immediate bestseller. "Plain speaking" seemed just what the country needed.[26]

In search of honest presidential leadership, citizens looked to Ford and then Carter, two men widely admired for their personal decency. "Lack of trust in government" and "corruption in government" together ranked second only to inflation as Americans' greatest concerns, according to polls. But the nation did not receive the kind of effective political management that it desired. Both men failed to consolidate their authority, Ford losing in his 1976 campaign to win election to the White House he had occupied only by appointment, Carter losing in his 1980 campaign for reelection. Along the way, Ford suffered from the appearance of a new, edgier generation of comedians who sub-

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jected him—and all other authority figures, including God—to unrelenting public satire. *Saturday Night Live* first aired live on national television on October 11, 1975, with Chevy Chase parodying Ford tripping and falling (as the president had done recently), a repeated routine that came to define Ford's public image, despite his status as probably the most accomplished athlete ever to serve in the Oval Office, having been the star center and linebacker on the University of Michigan football team. Then Ford raised questions about his intellectual competence as well when he declared during a debate with Carter on October 6, 1976: "There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under a Ford administration." As Carter quickly suggested, Polish Americans and others of eastern European heritage could hardly believe the president's words. (After the election, Ford self-deprecatingly joked that he might accept a teaching position at the University of Michigan in a field other than European history.)[27]

Carter's own administration over the next four years, however, became almost a byword for limited success in governance at home and critical failures abroad. While that reputation belied several significant achievements of the Carter administration—particularly the 1977 treaties turning control of the Panama Canal over to Panama, the 1979 Camp David accords creating peace between Egypt and Israel, and the 1980 Alaska Lands Act doubling the size of the national park system—the evidence of the administration's failure to work effectively with the Democratic-controlled Congress is irrefutable. Carter proved to be a better prophet than administrator. He was the first president to identify "our serious energy problem" as crucial to resolve for the nation's future well-being, and he warned Americans that "too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption" instead. "This is not a message of happiness or reassurance, but it is the truth and it is a warning."[28]

The element of paranoia evident in hit films such as *Chinatown* (1974) and *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) and other popular media of the mid-1970s reflected a growing public awareness that unethical and illegal behavior might be even more

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widespread in the government than was already known. It turned out that the people responsible for the nation's security during the ongoing crisis of the Cold War, housed in such agencies as the CIA and the FBI, had themselves been acting outside the laws and customs they were supposed to be enforcing. Revelations emerged that the FBI had for years been illegally harassing civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. *Three Days of the Condor*'s depiction of corruption within the CIA fed off the daily news. Readers of the nation's leading newspaper, the *New York Times*, woke on December 22, 1974, to this three-column headline on the first page: "Huge C.I.A. Operation Reported in U.S. Against Antiwar Forces, Other Dissidents in Nixon Years." Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter Seymour Hersh laid out in stark detail many of the misdeeds of the nation's security forces, opening a floodgate through which poured a year of further surprising revelations as other investigations followed. A Senate committee under Frank Church (D-ID) and a House committee under Otis Pike (D-NY) each spent most of 1975 on this, as did a commission under Vice President Nelson Rockefeller that Ford set up in an effort to head off less friendly congressional investigators. Disaffected former CIA agents Philip Agee and John Stockwell published revealing memoirs, *Inside The Company* (1975) and *In Search of Enemies* (1978), as other critics of American imperial behavior in the Third World weighed in. Evidence revealed deep U.S. involvement in the overthrow of foreign governments, most notably Chile in 1973, and even major CIA plots to assassinate at least five foreign heads of state. It was a sign of how new such an idea was that investigators and the public were shocked to make these discoveries, an era when the open discussions of thirty years later about the U.S. use of torture would have been unimaginable. Citizens were stunned and angry that the government acting in their name had been engaged in precisely the kind of actions abroad that the Soviets were supposed to engage in, and that were supposed to be the very reason for the United States having to stand up to the Soviets in the first place. Here was corruption indeed, a breaking of the trust of citizens in the democratic governance that they had long taken for granted.[29]

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At one level, the idea that the U.S. government might act in some of the same ways that characterized the Soviet government was not far-fetched. From a cold-eyed, pragmatic perspective, the interests of large nations in international affairs have always been calculated and self-regarding. Altruism rarely determines state behavior. The hard world of global economic, political, and military competition and the enormous stakes involved invites "realistic" rather than idealistic actions. A dog-eat-dog world required tough behavior at times; the Soviet regime, with the blood of millions on its hands, was not a kindly adversary. The U.S. Congress had long understood and gone along with this. Before the mid-1970s, neither the Senate nor the House took an active interest in their official oversight responsibilities for intelligence agencies and activities. The intelligence agencies' share of the annual federal budget was highly classified information. Sen. John Stennis (D-MS), chair of the subcommittee with oversight responsibility for the CIA, put it bluntly in 1971: "You make up your mind that you are going to have an intelligence agency and protect it as such, and shut your eyes some and take what is coming." But Americans still wanted to believe that their nation was different, somehow less self-interested and more good-willed than other great powers, ultimately a promoter of liberty and justice abroad. So the news that U.S. taxpayers were footing the bill for official attempts at murder and mayhem was jarring, even to members of Congress doing the investigating.[30]

Congress's efforts to rein in the executive branch made 1973–78 a highly unusual period in recent U.S. political history. The War Powers Act of 1973 required the president to receive congressional approval within ninety days for any new posting of American troops overseas. While the law only came into effect once, during the 1975 *Mayaguez* incident in Cambodia, because presidents otherwise simply avoided reporting such actions directly to Congress, the War Powers Act nonetheless symbolized Congress's determination to reassert the influence in foreign policy that it had lost during the Cold War heyday of what had become known as the imperial presidency. The reports of the

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Church Committee and Pike Committee about covert CIA operations caused President Ford on February 16, 1976, to issue an executive order banning U.S. government employees from involvement in political assassinations. Two years later, Congress passed the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act in an effort to prevent future widespread government monitoring of private electronic communications, in order to end abuses of wiretapping. Also enacted in 1978, the Presidential Records Act aimed to bolster the relationship between a republican government and its citizens by preserving public access to the paper trail left by a president. In response to Nixon's efforts to hide his administration's records by claiming them as his personal property, this legislation instead assigned clear ownership to the public, under the care of the National Archives, of the documentary materials generated during a presidency. The middle years of the 1970s, in sum, witnessed a brief flurry of congressional attempts to restrain the power of the Cold War presidency, a democratic strategy soon to be shunted aside during the crises of 1979–80 in Iran and Afghanistan, but an effort that showed vital American resistance to the corruptions of power.[31]

Conservatism and the Distrust of Government

Watergate was a Republican scandal. Just two years after Nixon's huge reelection victory, and three months after his resignation, the Democrats won a raft of new seats in Congress in 1974. Only 18 percent of Americans that year identified themselves as Republicans. It seemed, briefly, that the crosscurrents of American politics in this era might be shifting back to the more liberal party that had held the White House from 1961 to 1969. This was an illusion. The Democrats were divided, their old coalition fraying as much of the white working class distrusted the party's ongoing shift from economic liberalism to cultural liberalism and continued slipping into the Republican column.[32] The ultimate message embedded in Watergate and also in the deceptive Vietnam policies of the Johnson administration was simply not

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to trust government—ultimately a conservative attitude that rejected four decades of New Deal activist management from Washington. The public sector became associated with corruption, compromise, and self-dealing. Washington took on an aura of an "inside the Beltway" place, sealed off from the genuine concerns and interests of average citizens outside. "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" declared fictional TV news anchor Howard Beale in the 1976 hit film *Network*, as he urged citizens to yell the same from their windows across the nation. Carter's election that fall put the first person in the White House in more than half a century, since Woodrow Wilson, without previous experience in the federal government. Experience in Washington became a political burden rather than an asset, a remarkable measure of voter distrust in their government. Carter campaigned against Washington, touting his outsider status. Ronald Reagan, another governor, did the same in 1980. Bill Clinton in 1992 and George W. Bush in 2000 used similar strategies. Of the eight presidential elections following 1972, only one saw a non-incumbent victor—George H. W. Bush in 1988—with experience in Washington. The tide had changed in the mid-1970s.

Conservatives benefited most from the fraying of public connection to elected officials. While polls revealed that the portion of Americans who believed they could "trust the federal government" dropped from 75 percent in 1965 to 25 percent by the late 1970s, a still broader shift was taking place in which citizens became more skeptical of almost all major institutions in the country, including the medical profession, unions, educational systems, traditional churches, the military, banks, television, and the press. Civic engagement declined, whether measured in time spent volunteering or number of organizations being joined. Unlike Western Europe, where voting participation remained around 80 percent, the percentage of voting-age Americans who made the effort to cast a ballot during presidential elections dropped from 61 percent in 1968 to 53 percent in 1980, and dipped to just 38 percent in the 1974 congressional elections and 46 percent in 1978. By the end of the decade, in

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other words, not much more than half of the American electorate even bothered to vote, a portent in a nation long seen as a leader of the world's democratic countries. "Don't vote—it only encourages them," a popular bumper sticker advised. But a new generation of conservative activists saw in these developments an opportunity and a calling for rejuvenating American patriotism and what they considered traditional American values. One of the most influential of these new organizers, Jesse Helms of North Carolina, who would be elected to the Senate as a Republican in 1972 for the first of five terms, spent the preceding years warning that "the law-abiding citizens of this republic" would soon "push aside all the phony political doubletalk about 'movements' and 'marches' and 'non-violence' and 'civil rights.'" "These long-hairs keep talking about a revolution," he wrote to a friend in 1970. "One of these days they may get one—but not the kind they expect." It was a prescient view of a new conservative era about to dawn.[33]

What did it mean to be conservative in the 1970s and ever since? "Conserve" comes from the Latin for "to keep intact or unchanged," and the adjectival form implies carefulness. At least since the noted English philosopher Edmund Burke opposed the French Revolution in the 1790s, conservatism had stood for defending existing institutions—political, religious, and otherwise. By the 1970s, this was no longer the case. "I am a conservative because I am for change," declared recently elected Senator Roger Jepsen (R-IA) in 1980. After forty years of political dominance by the New Deal version of the Democratic Party, preserving the existing system was the exact opposite of what these new conservatives sought. They wanted to overthrow it. They aimed to take advantage of what pollster Lou Harris found in 1975: "People are disenchanted with liberalism because they feel it involves excessive federal spending that has not solved problems confronting the country." Bolstered by the conversion of a widening stream of white Southern Democrats, conservatives worked steadily in the 1970s to wrest control of the Republican Party from the shrinking liberal forces headed by Nelson Rockefeller and the besieged moderate forces coalesced

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around President Ford. Ronald Reagan became their hero, fresh off two terms as a popular California governor (1966–74). He nearly unseated Ford for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976 and rolled into the White House in 1980.[34]

Reagan's broad popularity among Republicans stemmed partly from his sunny personality and partly from his ability to hold together the three distinctive wings of the modern conservative movement that found its home in the Republican Party. The first wing consisted of the social conservatives, primarily self-identified religious voters who focused on what they considered to be moral issues, particularly opposing abortion rights, homosexuality, and feminism and promoting school prayer. Disturbed by recent changes in attitudes about sexuality, gender, religion, and—for many—race, they hoped to roll back the liberalizing social tendencies of the 1960s. The second wing of the conservative movement was nationalist, seeking to undo the outcome of the Vietnam War by resurrecting a powerful, self-confident U.S. presence around the world. These anticommunists, many of them neoconservatives who had previously been moderate or even liberal Democrats, feared the resurgence of Soviet influence abroad and bitterly opposed détente. The third wing of the conservative movement held the free-market forces, those sympathetic to business interests and eager to shrink government influence through deregulation and privatization. This commerce-oriented and libertarian-leaning group believed the mechanism of the market made the best social and economic decisions about allocating resources and produced the greatest freedom. The three wings of the movement overlapped in important ways, particularly on emphasizing national strength abroad, but they also differed rather sharply on the role of the government, with free marketers wanting to minimize it regarding the economy and religious voters seeking to increase it regarding people's sexual behavior. Social conservatives, ultimately, saw the intact family as the foundation of a healthy society, while free-market conservatives viewed the free individual as the essential building block. Social and religious conservatives gained considerable prominence from the 1970s onward, particularly

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in the media. But in terms of measurably changing the course of governance in the United States, free-market conservatives proved to be much more influential.[35]

Racial issues meant relatively little to libertarians but helped shape the essential contours of social conservatism. With economic challenges all around them in the stagflationary 1970s, many white working-class and middle-class Americans looked for explanations and were amenable to scapegoating. Leaders such as segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace and, more subtly, the once racially moderate Nixon offered up a traditional target for venting white frustrations: African Americans. Court-ordered school busing to achieve integration, from Charlotte to Boston, stimulated a backlash from whites whose motives ranged from simple racial prejudice to a desire to preserve neighborhood schools. Urban dwellers continued to move to the suburbs, extending a decades-long pattern that looked an awful lot like resegregation. Historian Kevin Kruse demonstrated that in cities such as Atlanta since the 1950s, as public spaces became desegregated, most whites who could afford to do so headed for the suburbs. They abandoned what became an increasingly black public sphere of the city for a mostly white private sphere of the suburbs, marked by private schools and health clubs and fewer public recreational amenities such as parks, municipal golf courses, and community swimming pools. More openly segregationist whites believed that they were fighting to preserve their traditional ability to associate only with whom they wanted to, and that blacks in league with a hostile federal government were trying to deprive them of that freedom. Nor was white resistance to black advancement merely a Southern story, as Thomas Sugrue and other historians have made clear. Boston, once the cradle of the abolition of slavery, experienced the worst school desegregation violence between 1973 and 1976. The title of John Egerton's 1974 book, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*, suggested the larger process under way, of the long distinctive and impoverished states of the former Confederacy breaking out of their isolation. Instead, as jobs and people moved into the Sun

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Belt, symbols of Southern culture simultaneously spread north and west—evangelical Protestant Christianity, stock car racing, barbecue, country music, even the Confederate flag—and took hold in working-class and lower-middle-class communities across the nation.[36]

Jesse Helms emerged as the most influential new leader in the 1970s of the forces of racially tinged Southern social conservatism. Helms grew up in the small town of Monroe, North Carolina, and made his career in the state capital of Raleigh as a television news editorialist, defending segregation and opposing communism, two issues he saw as closely connected. He gained national attention first as a leader of the anti-busing campaign that followed the Supreme Court's 1971 decision in *Swann v. Mecklenburg*, which required Charlotte's public schools to be comprehensively desegregated rather than having just a token sprinkling of black students attending white schools. *Swann* forced Southern school districts to bus large numbers of black and white students, just as the Court's decision two years later in *Keyes v. Denver* (1973) did for schools outside of the South. Like most Southern segregationists in this era, Helms switched teams, leaving the now racially inclusive Democrats for Nixon's Republican Party with its coded appeals to white Southerners. Helms rode Nixon's coattails in 1972 to an unexpected victory in the Senate race over U.S. Rep. Nick Galifianakis by emphasizing his opponent's Greek ancestry as foreign, although Galifianakis was a former U.S. Marine and a lifelong resident of Durham. Helms matched his ideological fervor with a new organization called the Congressional Club, an enormously successful direct-mail fundraising effort that brought in millions of dollars from around the country for his campaigns. In 1978, he won reelection by outspending his opponent by a ratio of 32 to 1, burying him in an avalanche of negative television advertisements.[37]

Helms positioned himself as the most principled, uncompromising social conservative of the 1970s. Recognizing that explicit racism was increasingly unacceptable in an era of civil rights at home and decolonization abroad, he borrowed the

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rhetoric of anticolonialism and self-determination to defend white neighborhood schools from "cultural imperialism" and "contempt for the ordinary parent" by the federal courts. Helms was also the strongest voice in the U.S. Senate of the emerging Christian Right, whose concerns extended far beyond race. He supported the founding of the lobbying group Moral Majority in 1979 and was a featured speaker at its first major public event that spring, a 10,000-person "Decency Rally" in Washington. Particularly galling to Christian conservatives was the Internal Revenue Service's 1978 elimination of tax-exempt status for private schools that excluded students of color, primarily church-based "white-flight" academies that had sprung up in the South as an alternative to integrated public schools. President Carter's IRS refused to continue helping fund such practices with preferential tax status, but evangelicals were outraged by what they viewed instead as a "secular humanist" attack on religion. This was a key moment in energizing conservative Christians and bringing them into the political sphere that they had long avoided. Helms enthusiastically endorsed them: "We've had preachers in politics for 50 years, to my knowledge, but they've always been on the other side." Newly politicized conservative evangelicals and Roman Catholics focused on sexual and gender issues, particularly opposing the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion rights, homosexual rights, and sex education. They also disdained détente and demanded a stronger U.S. position in the world. Helms's vigorous stance in 1976 against negotiating a turnover of the Panama Canal to Panama helped push his ally Ronald Reagan to a crucial victory in the Republican presidential primary in North Carolina. Though Reagan ultimately lost the nomination that year to the incumbent Ford, the win in North Carolina stopped a downward skid in Reagan's campaign and renewed his legitimacy as a future candidate, setting him on the path to victory in 1980 and a conservative political ascendancy thereafter.[38]

For the nationalist wing of the conservative movement, particularly the neoconservatives moving into the Republican Party but also still grouped around Democratic Senator Henry Jack-

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son of Washington, the middle years of the 1970s offered a challenge and an opportunity. These activists hated the perceived loss of American power and prestige abroad resulting from the outcome of the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the congressional investigations of the CIA, and the Soviet buildup in nuclear weaponry to parity with the United States. Ford's chief of staff, Richard Cheney, feared the erosion of what he later called "the authority I think the president needs to be effective, especially in the national security area," an argument he would later make with great effect as vice president from 2001 to 2009. Helms declared that "the United States cannot afford to be a second-rate power." Militant anticommunists saw détente as the road to defeat. Reagan's 1976 primary victory in North Carolina stemmed from his labeling of Ford as weak and as allowing the Soviets to overtake the United States in military prowess. Ford told the press afterward that "we are going to forget about the use of the word détente," to the surprise of his aides and of Secretary of State Kissinger, détente's other architect along with Nixon. Liberals, who might have been expected to stand up for détente, had no interest in defending Kissinger or Nixon. Indeed, the coolheaded, realist calculations of détente tended naturally to alienate Americans on both the Right and the Left who disliked authoritarian rule, whether (for the Right) in the Communist bloc or (for the Left) among right-wing non-European dictators. Hawks inside and outside the government pressured the CIA into a reassessment by a "Team B" of intelligence analysts of what they saw as the agency's underestimation of Soviet military strength in 1975 and 1976. Détente of a sort lingered under the Carter administration as the new president initially oriented U.S. foreign policy away from concern with the USSR, but died finally when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979.[39]

Part of the neoconservative task in the mid- to late 1970s involved recasting the image of the United States. Rather than a globe-straddling imperial hegemon inflicting massive damage on small countries such as Vietnam while asserting control of the non-Communist sphere, America was to be understood instead as a spunky underdog, the determined defender of free-

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dom and individualism against the looming collectivist might of the totalitarian Soviet empire. This was roughly the script of the highest-grossing film of the decade, *Star Wars* (1977), and its sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). After the loss in Southeast Asia and disturbing revelations of American war crimes such as the My Lai massacre and CIA corruption, these films helped Americans imagine themselves once again as warriors for justice and decency and helped them imagine war once again as a noble and even glorious undertaking, a view Reagan would promote vigorously from the Oval Office throughout the following decade. This cultural shift may have deepened the public disappointment with the Carter administration in April 1980 when the "Desert One" operation to rescue American captives in Iran failed. Rather than Luke Skywalker or Han Solo flying in to put things right, actual U.S. aircraft collided with each other, killing eight servicemen and rescuing no one. American strategists had hoped for another Entebbe rescue, four years after Israelis pulled off their stunning operation to liberate captives in Uganda, but it seemed that only Israel was capable of such a feat, something noted by the neoconservatives—and many evangelicals—who valued that country as one of the most important allies of the United States.

Economic Insecurity

The performance of the U.S. economy in the 1970s dismayed most Americans. Inflation, unemployment, and declining real wages pulled the prospects of American workers downward, and the gap between rich and poor began to grow quickly. But the economy of this decade only makes sense in the context of the extraordinary quarter-century that preceded it. The "long boom" of 1947–73 marked the most sustained period of rapid economic growth in world history. The combined gross domestic product (GDP) of all nations almost tripled in this period; world manufacturing output quadrupled; the world economy grew at an average annual rate of nearly 6 percent. The real median income of

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American households shot up by nearly 50 percent just since 1960. The United States led the boom, but much of the rest of the world also benefited. Western Europeans experienced a "veritable golden age of economic growth," in the words of economic historian Barry Eichengreen, and largely caught up to American standards of income and lifestyle. Inexpensive oil underlay the boom. Petroleum remained at an average cost of just $2 per barrel during the post–World War II generation. The 1955 prediction by Admiral Lewis Strauss, chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, that electricity would become so cheap by the 1970s that it would no longer need to be metered did not come to pass, but when adjusted for inflation, the real cost of energy in the United States actually did decline by an annual average of 5 percent from 1950 to 1973. Throughout these years, organized labor and U.S. corporations worked closely together to promote free trade and thus more exports. The steady expansion of comfortable and even affluent suburbs revealed a growing middle class. The vast majority of Americans arrived at the end of the 1960s wealthier than twenty years earlier and with considerable confidence about their economic futures. One of the most distinguished historians of the modern world, Eric Hobsbawm, called these "the golden years."[40]

It did not last. A slowing U.S. economy reached stagnation in 1973, dropping into recession for the next year and a half. The stock market lost nearly half its value. American productivity—the amount of value produced per worker—crossed a divide into a new watershed, plunging from 3 percent annual increases during 1947–73 to just 1 percent increases during 1973–80. The reputation of American goods for quality and innovation slid, inviting a flood of imported products. For the first time since the nineteenth century, the United States in 1971 became a net importer of goods from abroad. Pressed by international investors trading in dollars for gold, Nixon in 1971 detached the dollar from its guaranteed postwar price of $35 per ounce (part of the "Bretton Woods" system established in 1944), instead letting the dollar's value "float" against the value of other currencies. This introduced a new level of instability in the international

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economy—and a plummeting dollar, as gold quickly shot up to $800 per ounce by 1980. The early 1970s witnessed the end of thirty years of unparalleled prosperity in the United States and the end of the rapid growth of the American middle class. "We are aware, as never before, of distinct limits on our material resources," wrote historian Laurence Veysey in 1979. "'Abundance' no longer seems to be our special defining characteristic" as a nation.[41]

Abundance had underpinned the redistributive social policies of the 1960s Great Society. Money in people's pockets and confidence about their futures made enough voters sufficiently generous to support Lyndon Johnson's programs for poverty and education. When prices went up and jobs started to grow scarce, Democratic Party liberalism became defensive. The longer the 1970s experience of stagflation went on, the more it undercut the central theme of Keynesian economics at the heart of the New Deal order: that federal government management of the economy was effective. Economists and average citizens alike lost confidence in the political economy they had known and began to shift their allegiance to conservative doctrines they had found unconvincing since the end of the 1920s and the onset of the Great Depression. The established belief in a regulated American economy now lost ground to a growing sense that the market alone, with the least government input, could best allocate resources and stimulate growth. A similar if slower process unfolded in Western Europe, where declining economic growth, rising unemployment, and sharply higher energy costs began to weaken nations' abilities to provide the generous social benefits—unemployment, health care, pensions—available since the 1940s. Fiscal conservatism and cutbacks in social spending gained ground by the end of the decade in what historian Bruce Schulman called "a worldwide crisis of the welfare state."[42]

The oil embargo of 1973–74 by the Arab OPEC states pushed a slowing U.S. economy into its deepest recession since the 1930s. Even after the embargo ended, prices remained sky high. The price of oil soared from $3 per barrel in 1970 to $31 per barrel in 1980. Other oil-consuming nations suffered as well,

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including Japan and the countries of Western Europe, whose citizens were even more dependent than Americans on imported petroleum. In the previous twenty years, for example, the share of Europe's energy produced from oil had grown from 8.5 percent in 1950 (the rest being mostly from coal) to 60 percent in 1970. Africa's economic difficulties of the late twentieth century dated more from the 1973 spike in oil prices than they did from independence from Europe in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which had at first been followed by real economic growth. The impact on the Soviet bloc varied: most of Eastern Europe, which did not produce oil, suffered a declining standard of living, while the Soviet Union itself tapped dozens of new oil fields in Siberia to increase production and delay a little longer the country's gathering economic decline. But the United States used vastly more oil than any other nation, thanks to a fourfold increase since 1945 in the number of cars and trucks on the country's extensive highway network.[43]

The oil crisis caught most Americans by surprise. After all, the United States had dominated world oil production for the first half of the twentieth century, accounting for more than 50 percent of all oil pumped as late as 1950. But that figure dropped to 25 percent in 1965 and 20 percent in 1972 as the nation's postwar boom economy drained its proven oil reserves, which fell from nearly half of the world's reserves on the eve of World War II to just 6 percent in 1972. Domestic petroleum production peaked in 1970 and dropped off steadily thereafter, while U.S. consumption continued to climb. Here was the source of growing dependence. By contrast, oil production was shifting rapidly to the Persian Gulf region and North Africa, where the Libyan government led a concerted and successful movement in the 1970s to gain control of the process of production by nationalizing the international oil companies' holdings in OPEC nations. The United States imported five times as much oil in 1979 as it had in 1970, and imports doubled as a percentage of the nation's consumption to 43 percent.[44]

Americans faced a dawning realization that long lines and high prices at gas stations heralded a new era of energy depen-

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dence on other countries. On June 13, 1979, in the midst of the Iranian revolution that caused the decade's second spike in oil prices, more than half of American gas stations had their pumps turned off. Just a few years after the United States had put men on the moon, the nation was literally running out of gas. It seemed a lifetime since *Time* magazine had encouraged drivers in 1960 to drive four extra minutes each day to reduce the U.S. burden of glutted gasoline supplies. "The Saudis," President Ford admitted privately to a reporter with unusual bluntness, "have us by the balls." Popular anger throughout the decade targeted Arabs and Iranians, though Ford and others suggested a glance in the mirror would be appropriate. "We, the United States, are not blameless," the president announced in his 1975 state of the union address. "Our growing dependence upon foreign sources has been adding to our vulnerability for years and years, and we did nothing to prepare ourselves for such an event as the embargo of 1973." For two generations, Americans had considered easy access to inexpensive gasoline as almost a birthright, a defining feature of what it meant to be American. In the 1920s, advertising executive and best-selling author Bruce Barton called gasoline "the juice of the fountain of youth," a symbol of American freedom. Now in the 1970s the fountain was drying up, leaving the nation thirsty and vulnerable. Analogies to the decline of other great empires of the past seemed apt. A Gulf Oil executive recalled, "I could feel it everywhere; it was the ebbing of American power—the Romans retreating from Hadrian's Wall."[45]

How did the United States respond to the dramatic surge in energy prices? Innovative energy analysts Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins called for a shift from the existing "hard energy path" of reliance on fossil fuels and nuclear power to a "soft energy path" of conservation and efficiency, including the development of renewable and nonpolluting sources such as solar energy. For about a decade, there was some movement in this direction. Petroleum imports dropped markedly through the early 1980s. Congress passed a national 55-mile per hour speed limit in 1974, a national "right-on-red" law that saved up

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to 12,000 barrels of oil per day, and the first set of fuel-efficiency standards for new vehicles in 1975. President Carter established a new Department of Energy in 1977. Between 1974 and 1989, the average miles per gallon of cars in the United States nearly doubled from 13.8 to 27.5. In the same period, the incentive of higher costs led to U.S. factories improving their energy efficiency by 30 percent and new homes and appliances being designed to be much less wasteful.[46]

Such advances stalled by the mid-1980s, however, as world oil prices declined once again, making waste less expensive. Americans increasingly bought larger, heavier, more powerful vehicles, particularly SUVs and vans, and by 2004 the size of the average new house had increased more than 50 percent from 1970, even as average family size shrank. Unlike Japan, which made permanent its own 1970s shift to greater energy efficiency, the United States retreated from its newly won green territory. The resistance Carter encountered to his efforts to make energy independence a permanent national priority caused him to note in his diary: "It was like pulling teeth to convince the people of America that we had a serious problem." One EPA automotive expert was blunter: "In this country, we don't sacrifice for anything."[47]

The most controversial alternative to fossil fuels was nuclear energy. Here the problem lay not just in the potentially real association with nuclear weapons, but also in the poisonous character of the radioactive waste left behind by the process of creating nuclear energy. Enthusiasts emphasized how nuclear power did not contribute directly to air pollution or global warming, while critics pointed to the half-life of tens of thousands of years, during which radioactive materials would remain potentially deadly for humans, and to the absence of any safe, permanent storage system. Commercial nuclear power reactors that had been under construction since the 1960s continued to come online. In 1976, fifty-five reactors produced 9 percent of total U.S. electricity. By 1998, 104 reactors were producing 23 percent.[48]

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Despite federal subsidies, expense issues and safety concerns intervened to halt further new orders for such plants after 1973. Particularly critical for the turn away from this energy path was the partial meltdown of the nuclear core at the Three Mile Island reactor near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on March 28, 1979. The release of a plume of radioactivity caused an evacuation of the surrounding area, and sensitized the public to just how dangerous such a malfunction could be. An eerily similar version of a nuclear reactor accident had actually appeared, by chance, just ten days earlier with the opening of the Hollywood film, *The China Syndrome*, which provided publicity that fed anxieties when the near-disaster at Three Mile Island unfolded. Seven years later, an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor near Kiev in the Soviet Union caused the worst ever nuclear accident, killing at least dozens of people, poisoning the surrounding landscape, causing a permanent evacuation of more than 300,000 people within an 18-mile radius, and raising further questions about this form of alternative energy.[49]

Beyond raising prices and lowering standards of living, one of the greatest impacts of the 1970s energy crisis was the powerful stimulus it provided for new oil exploration and development, from the Gulf of Mexico to western Siberia and from Angola to the North Sea. Denver, the epicenter of Colorado's energy boom, leaped past Kansas City in this decade as the largest city between Chicago and San Francisco. Alaska was the biggest story of all for Americans. In 1968, the Atlantic Richfield Corporation announced the discovery of the largest oil field in North America in Prudhoe Bay on the remote northern slope of Alaska, which had only been a U.S. state for nine years. The frozen waters of the Beaufort Sea prevented tanker access for most of the year, so a pipeline four feet in diameter and 789 miles in length had to be built to carry the crude oil south to the ice-free port of Valdez on Prince William Sound, east of Anchorage. Concerns about the pipeline's impact on wildlife and about oil leakage and spills, along with memories of the 1964 earthquake that devastated Valdez, slowed the approval process until

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the embargo by the Arab OPEC states helped push it through Congress in November 1973. Skyrocketing oil prices created serious incentives for fast work. More than 21,000 workers operated out of thirty-one construction camps along the pipeline's route, and the first oil reached Valdez in the summer of 1977. Environmental questions took a back seat for twelve years, until the tanker *Exxon Valdez* hit a reef in Prince William Sound at midnight on March 24, 1989, just days before the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Valdez earthquake. Eleven million gallons of crude oil flooded the sound. By the next year, North Slope oil production peaked and began a steady decline.[50]

The economic problem of the 1970s that hit the largest number of average Americans the hardest was rising inflation. Inflation is often considered the "cruelest tax" because it hits the poor harder than anyone else, since they have the fewest alternative resources. After averaging 2.5 percent annual increases during the 1960s, prices soared 6.6 percent annually from 1973 to 1980. In Western Europe, inflation was even higher, including a 15.6 percent rate in the United Kingdom. In 1974, with U.S. prices running 11 percent higher for the year, Federal Reserve chairman Arthur Burns declared that "inflation at anything like the present rate would threaten the very foundations of our society." Inflation in the United States peaked at 13.5 percent in 1980. Besides the 1930s, the 1970s was the only other decade of the twentieth century that saw Americans poorer, on average, at the end than the beginning. The sense that inflation had become permanent undercut assumptions about the traditional virtue of saving money. If dollars lost value each year, it made more sense to spend them now than to save them up. Only a severe contraction of the money supply by new Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker beginning in 1979 was able to bring inflation back under 4 percent, but it took until 1983 to do so and led to a painful recession and sharp increase in unemployment along the way.[51]

The early 1970s marked a critical turning point in the real wages of the vast majority of American workers. The steady

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growth of real wages since World War II, the defining feature of the American economic landscape, came to a halt. Prices now rose faster than paychecks, and people's buying power began to decline. Average real wages drifted downward throughout the 1970s and 1980s and have never since returned to their 1973 peak. Of course, even lower real wages were better than no wages at all. As the national and world economies slowed in the early 1970s and slipped into recession in 1974, millions of workers lost their jobs. Unemployment nearly doubled from 1973 to 1975, reaching 8.3 percent, and it remained high through the 1970s, peaking again at 9.5 percent in 1982. The "Misery Index" told the tale: a combination of the rates of unemployment and inflation, the index passed 17 percent in 1975 and topped out at 21 percent in 1980. The decline in real wages was partially masked by the increase in total hours worked by all family members. Between 1979 and 2000, middle-income families worked an average of 12.5 more full-time weeks per year. Having all adults working for wages outside the home became the new family norm in the 1970s, as it has been ever since.[52]

Not surprisingly, the number of poor Americans spiked. Previously, the boom times of the 1950s and 1960s had brought prosperity that was widespread. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations of the 1960s, federal programs for job training, education, child care, and welfare further reduced the number of indigent citizens. The percentage of Americans living below the official poverty rate dropped from 22.4 percent in 1959 to 11.1 percent in 1973, its lowest point ever. Then inflation, unemployment, and a reduction in government programs reversed this trend. By 1982, 15 percent were living in poverty, an increase of nearly one-third and a rate that would remain fairly steady for the rest of the century. Once again, 1973 proved to be a watershed year between a quarter-century of economic growth under an activist federal government, and the new era of economic retrenchment and disillusionment with the public sector.[53]

Structural shifts in the U.S. and world economies contributed

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to the decline of American manufacturing jobs and the shrinking of the ranks of organized labor. A service economy was gradually replacing an industrial economy in the United States, and the 1970s served as a critical transition period. Increasingly efficient flows of information and goods around the world encouraged "globalization," a new term for an accelerating version of an old reality. Trade increased. Tariffs plunged from the 1970s onward. Beginning in 1971, for the first time in the twentieth century, U.S. imports exceeded exports, beginning a trend that soon led to a huge U.S. trade deficit. By 1979, Japanese cars had captured 23 percent of the U.S. market, and former President Ford's daughter, Susan, could be seen dispensing this advice on a television ad: "Take it from a Ford. Drive Subaru." One consequence of twenty-five years of increasing wages was the incentive for U.S. factories to shift production to the American South and then abroad, wherever labor costs were lower. More than 30 million jobs disappeared from the United States in the 1970s, most of them in manufacturing. By 1981, Ford was producing more cars abroad than at home. Jobs evaporated disproportionately from the Rust Belt of the Great Lakes states and the Northeast, employment that had been heavily unionized and relatively high-paying. The percentage of civilian workers who were union members dropped from 25 percent at the start of the decade to 16 percent in 1981, and the percentage working in the service sector rose from 60 percent to 70 percent. Old notions of "workers" as the unionized white men of Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania on assembly lines faded away. Indeed, references to "workers" as a class of people at all largely disappeared from mainstream discourse by the early 1980s, replaced by references to "Reagan Democrats" or victims of plant closings. In 1981, President Reagan put an exclamation point on this new reality by firing 11,000 striking air-traffic controllers, whose union had actually supported his election.[54]

Out of the inflation, stagnation, and structural economic changes emerged a new era of widening socioeconomic differences among Americans. By 1979, after four decades of relatively steady distribution of wealth and income in the United States, the

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wealthy began to pull away from the rest. "Fewer have more": Yale classicist Ramsey MacMullen's summation of five hundred years of social evolution in the Roman Empire fit the new American era. Workers' overall economic security deteriorated, not just because of shrinking real wages, but also because of declining availability of critical benefits such as employer-sponsored health insurance and defined-benefit pension plans. Consumer debt repayment began to fall. Technological innovations, particularly involving the increasing use of computers, raised the "college premium" for workers with post-secondary educations, whose wages rose while those of less educated workers stagnated. The biggest changes dating from 1979 came at the very top of the income pyramid. The top 1 percent of Americans hauled in 80 percent of the total gains in taxable income over the next three decades. But even within that tiny slice of the population, the distribution of gain was radically unequal; for the entire top 1 percent, average income doubled, but for the top 0.01 percent, income increased fivefold. In 1968, the CEO of the largest U.S. corporation, General Motors, took home in pay and benefits sixty-six times the amount of a typical worker in the company; in 2005, the comparable CEO of Wal-Mart earned nine hundred times what his average employee did. From the 1970s forward, as any chart of family income trends makes vividly clear with rising lines and falling lines, the United States became an even greater country in which to be rich, and a less secure one in which to be poor or working-class. Government policies since the late 1970s contributed crucially to this trend, disproportionately cutting taxes on the wealthiest citizens while reducing social spending on the poorest, a story to be examined more fully in chapter 6.[55]

Turning Inward

The most visible response to the cultural, political, and economic turmoil of the 1970s was for citizens to withdraw from the frustrations of the public realm and focus instead on im-

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proving their private lives. The recent rise of the "hippie" counterculture, the women's liberation movement, and the sexual revolution encouraged citizens of an already deeply individualistic culture to be even more expressive of their feelings and needs. In the 1960s, the *New York Times* best-seller list rarely had more than one self-help book on it; by May 1978, there were seven. Eliminating feelings of inferiority and promoting self-esteem became big business. Thomas A. Harris's *I'm OK, You're OK*, originally published a few years earlier, soared in popularity in the mid-1970s. Standards of civility shifted, with previously obscene language now increasingly common in public discourse, films, and novels. The new frankness about sexuality troubled many but seemed liberating to others. A hugely popular how-to book by British physician Alex Comfort, *The Joy of Sex* (1972), framed intimacy in familiar terms by echoing the most popular cookbook of the era, *The Joy of Cooking*, and trying to help readers overcome anxiety and shame about their sexual lives. Embarrassment and shame lost some of their power to restrain individual behavior, including public disclosures of one's own and one's own family's most intimate behaviors. Ten million viewers watched a twelve-part PBS documentary in 1973 on the lives of the upper-middle-class Loud family of Santa Barbara, revealing beneath a veneer of material comfort a cauldron of dysfunction that culminated in divorce. Divorce rates in the United States doubled in the 1970s, part of a broader pattern in industrialized societies that also saw divorce legalized in conservative Roman Catholic nations of southern Europe, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Rising divorce rates were closely connected to women's empowerment through entering the paid workforce and through easier access to birth control and declining fertility rates. Divorce brought liberation from familial restraints and limitations; among its other effects, divorce freed individuals to "do their own thing." The title of Robert J. Ringer's *Looking Out For #1*, a 1977 best seller, captured a growing trend in American culture.[56]

One of the most striking aspects of the 1970s was the effort of millions of Americans to change their personal lifestyles in

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healthier directions, particularly in matters of diet and exercise. From eating organic and local foods to jogging, bicycling, and other forms of outdoor recreation, citizens tried to improve themselves. Such change was not easy, particularly during a decade when the percentage of calories being consumed from restaurant food—higher in fat and salt—was increasing measurably, due in large part to the prevalence of all adults in a household working outside the home and the time crunch this created for food preparation. Beginning in the 1970s, Americans over the next three decades increased their average salt intake by 50 percent, primarily from increased consumption of convenient prepared foods. By 2006, Americans were getting 33 percent of their calories from restaurant food, compared to 18 percent in the 1970s. The consumption of less expensive fast food accelerated, along with a dramatic jump in the percentage of calories Americans imbibed from sugary soft drinks. What would emerge by the end of the century as an epidemic of obesity had its origins in these years. By 2006, Americans ate 11 percent more food than in 1970, including 59 percent more fats. From 1960 to 2002, Americans gained one inch in average height but twenty-four pounds in average weight, and average body mass indices rose from 25 to 28. Concern about such emerging trends led to the coinage of the joking but pejorative term "couch potato" in 1976.[57]

Many Americans, however, resisted these developing trends and moved instead in the opposite direction. One healthier option was to use the same skills of the food science industry to develop new products with less negative impact on consumers, particularly sugars and fats. Sugar consumption by English speakers in North America, after all, had grown from just 4 pounds per year three hundred years earlier to 140 pounds in 2005 (50 percent more than in Germany or France). This was a sweet-loving culture. But in 1975, a young Indian scientist working in a London laboratory accidentally created sucralose, available ever since in small yellow packets under the name Splenda, the best-selling artificial sweetener in the United States. Six years later, the NutraSweet Corporation introduced Aspartame, which became

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the primary sweetener in the burgeoning diet soda industry. Like removing sugar from soda, reducing carbohydrates in beer held great promise. A biochemist doing postdoctoral work at Rheingold Breweries in Brooklyn developed a process to remove starch during the brewing process. Gablinger's Diet Beer was the result, first bottled in 1967. It flopped as a commercial product and Rheingold went out of business, but the diet formula passed on to Meister Brau Brewery in Chicago, which created Meister Brau Lite beer. When the giant Miller Brewing Company bought up Meister Brau in the early 1970s, a new marketing strategy boosted sales sharply by using professional football players and other rugged-looking men, arguing about the relative importance that "Lite Beer from Miller" "tastes great" or is "less filling." Competitor Anheuser-Busch responded with Bud Lite in 1982, and a vast new market for low-calorie beer opened up.[58]

The move to healthier lifestyles generally took a more natural and local bent in matters of food. The natural foods movement had older roots but became a national phenomenon in the 1970s, as food co-ops and health food restaurants proliferated. Moosewood, Inc., a collectively owned business in Ithaca, New York, opened a flagship institution, the Moosewood Restaurant, in 1973 and four years later published the *Moosewood Cookbook*, the most widely used alternative cookbook of the era. Whole Foods opened in 1978 as a single small vegetarian grocery in Austin, soon to grow into a vast international health food supermarket chain. Quaker Oats, the giant mainstream cereal company, began selling its own line of granola in 1972. Alice Waters represented the haute cuisine of this trend with the opening of her Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley in 1971. Waters married French cooking style with local, seasonal produce to create an extraordinarily successful high-end restaurant, one that embodied a vibrant "new American cuisine" that reveled in blending culinary traditions from around the world.[59]

The new American cuisine received a major boost in its wine sector in 1976 when French experts in a prominent blind tasting in Paris, for the first time ever, rated several Californian wines more highly than the top French wines. The emphasis on fresh,

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local American products also reshaped the contours of the beer industry. After decades of U.S. market domination by the homogenous giants Anheuser-Busch, Miller, and Coors, a revival of distinctive local craft brewing in the late 1970s initiated the growth of micro-breweries that spread throughout the country in subsequent decades. The new emphasis on quality and freshness swept into the coffee sector of the food industry as well. Starbucks opened its first small store in downtown Seattle in 1971, taking the first step toward the 15,000 stores it would operate around the world within a generation and stimulating the growth of a slew of successful independent coffee houses. Tom's of Maine created a successful new empire of all-natural personal care products, beginning with its first toothpaste and deodorant in 1975 and 1976.[60]

Smoking began to decline in the United States in the 1970s, both as a personal habit and as a culturally acceptable practice. Cigarette smoking reached its peak in the early 1960s, just before the first official warning by the Surgeon General in 1964 about its potential hazards to human health. After a small decline, smoking reached another, slightly lower peak in the early 1970s and then dropped steadily over the next three decades. In 1955, 59 percent of men and 31 percent of women smoked; in 1997, these numbers were 28 percent and 22 percent. A crucial step came with the 1972 Surgeon General's report about possible harm from simply being in the presence of other people smoking, "second-hand smoke." In 1978, the Roper polling organization did a survey for the Tobacco Institute and warned that for public opinion, "What the smoker does to himself may be his business, but what the smoker does to the non-smoker is quite a different matter." Pressed by flight attendants, United Airlines in 1971 became the first commercial airline to segregate smokers and nonsmokers, a practice soon followed by all airlines. But separate seating sections had limited impact in such a tightly enclosed space. One critic suggested that "a smoking section on an airplane . . . is like having a peeing section in a swimming pool." Smoking was soon banned on all U.S. flights. In 1973, Arizona became the first state to enact a law restricting

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smoking in public places, and within eight years, thirty-five other states had followed suit. The 1970s, in other words, saw American society reorient from a primarily smoking culture to a primarily nonsmoking culture. Audiences that had once watched film and television stars regularly light up now saw during the 2004 Super Bowl an anti-smoking advertisement satirizing sales pitches by offering "Shards o' Glass Freeze Pops" with the slogan, "Yes, it's gravely harmful, but you'll love it!" U.S. tobacco companies responded to a declining domestic market in 1974 by initiating huge advertising campaigns overseas. Cigarette sales may have dropped by more than 20 percent in the United States from 1975 to 1994, but U.S. cigarette exports more than tripled in the same years.[61]

Americans in large numbers began going outdoors for recreational exercise in the 1970s. In the 1960s, running was done on school track teams; by the 1980s, jogging and running had become normal parts of middle-class life for both men and women. Frank Shorter's gold medal in the 1972 Olympic marathon helped ignite the popularity of running in the United States. The first New York City Marathon counted 126 entrants in 1970. By 1978, it had 10,000. The Nike Corporation was created in Portland in 1972 to make running shoes, and cofounder Bill Bowerman, the University of Oregon track coach, developed the first waffle sole by pouring urethane rubber over a waffle iron. Lighter and giving better traction, waffle soles propelled Nike past German-based Adidas as the dominant manufacturer of running shoes. Seven years later another innovation—a bubble of air sealed in the polyurethane sole to cushion the foot—allowed Nike with its Air system to do the same with the basketball shoe market. In 1977, Jim Fixx published *The Complete Book of Running* and sold more than a million copies. By 1978, his second year in the White House, President Carter was running an average of 40 miles per week. Jogging and running pervaded the nation.[62]

Americans also found their way outdoors for other forms of human-powered recreation. As oil prices soared, the bicycle

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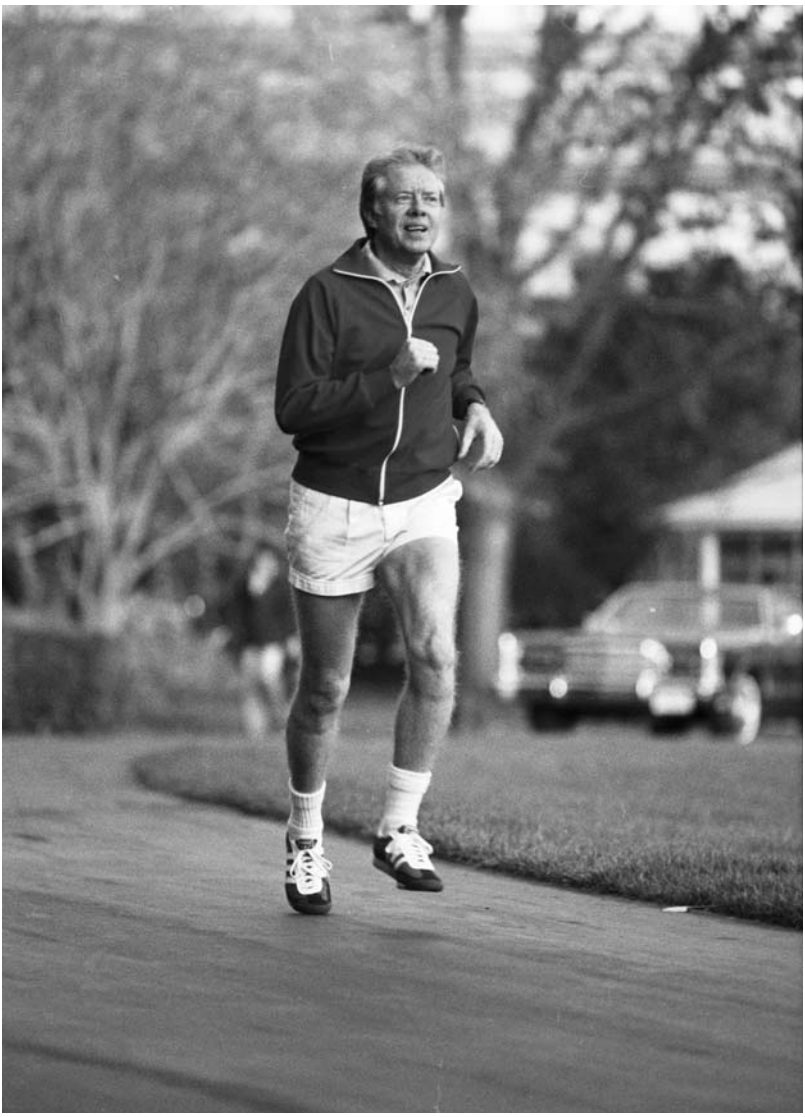

Figure 1.4.
President Jimmy Carter embodied many of the central themes of 1970s American culture. He takes a run around the White House grounds in November 1978. Courtesy Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

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market boomed. Traditional European manufacturers such as Motobecane and Peugeot from France and Raleigh from the United Kingdom found new competition from the homegrown Trek company, founded in a barn in Waterloo, Wisconsin, in 1976. Trek handcrafted 805 bikes that year; in 2007, they manufactured 1.5 million. The first Ironman Triathlon debuted in 1978, combining three popular Hawaii races—a 2.4-mile ocean swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride, and a 26.2-mile marathon run—and spawning a new sporting culture of triathletes. Whitewater slalom kayaking became an Olympic sport in 1972, the same year that the Nantahala Outdoor Center opened as a small rafting company on the banks of the beautiful Nantahala River in western North Carolina, soon to become a mecca for whitewater canoeists and kayakers. Cross-country skiing took off in popularity in the same years, promoted in part by American Bill Koch's silver medal at the 1976 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria. Outdoor education expanded dramatically, led by the five Outward Bound Schools that had opened in the previous decade but whose enrollments more than doubled during the 1970s. *Outside* magazine first appeared in 1978 to further promote outdoor recreation as a lifestyle. Renowned rock climber and mountaineer Yvon Chouinard created Patagonia in 1973 as a comprehensive outdoor clothing maker and retailer to complement his earlier line of Chouinard climbing equipment. Patagonia developed innovative layering fabrics such as synthetic polyester pile jackets (1976) and polypropylene underwear (1980) for keeping warm and dry while exercising in severe weather. Hiking, backpacking, rock climbing, and mountaineering all grew sharply in popularity. Environmental consciousness spread as millions of American adults went out to play.[63]

In 1975, the United States launched two unmanned *Viking* spaceship probes that landed on the planet Mars. Two years later, *Voyager* was launched to get closer to the outer planets of the solar system. These extraordinary voyages brought back photographs of distant realms, but they found no signs of life elsewhere in the

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universe. The Earth, it turned out, appeared to be utterly unique and alone. Whatever humans would do with their planet, they would do it on their own. For Americans in this decade, the recognition of cosmic isolation—of no larger story beyond the Earth—seemed to fit with their experience of national and personal limitations, of a society hemmed in by international frustrations, political failure, and economic trauma. The blows just seemed to pile up: a lost war, a president removed, the nation's intelligence agencies humiliated, an economy in the worst condition in a generation, and an uncertain energy future.

Faced with so much damage in their country's public sphere, Americans turned increasingly to their personal lives to seek comfort and meaning. Distrusting government and less hopeful about the common ground of the public realm, they pursued different versions of self-fulfillment in the private realm. Some sought healthier diets and lifestyles, in closer touch with nature and the outdoors. Others engaged in what looked more like self-indulgence: the consumption of drugs, casual sex, frayed family relationships, and inattentive parenting. Singer Jimmy Buffett's Florida-based, party-oriented music embodied this spirit with a Sun Belt flavor, from his ironical "Why Don't We Get Drunk and Screw" (1973) to his mega-hit "(Wasting Away Again in) Margaritaville" (1978). While many Americans sought meaning in renewed spirituality, particularly in a new wave of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, others inclined to a profound skepticism about all authorities and traditions. Irony and parody blossomed in popular culture, from *Saturday Night Live* to Hollywood films.[64] A group of ballet enthusiasts even banded together in 1974 to create Les Ballets Trockaderos De Monte Carlo, a vehicle for presenting a playful, amusing spoof of classical ballet that included men dancing en pointe to imitate female ballerinas. In the hugely popular film *Life of Brian* (1979), the British comedy troupe Monty Python parodied the Christian gospels' account of the life of Jesus, featuring a child born on the same night in a stable next door who spends his life being mistaken for a messiah. "He's not the Messiah, he's a very naughty

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boy!" declares his annoyed mother. Little was sacred in the 1970s, as traditional hierarchies weakened and the United States seemed to many of its citizens a nation adrift. Economic inequality increased, yet in other ways American society grew more inclusive and egalitarian, thanks to a more tolerant and inclusive culture and a new wave of reform, to which we now turn.

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