**Chapter 30: Conservative America in the Ascent, 1980-1991**

**[[BIG IDEA:** What factors made the rise of the New Right possible, and what ideas about freedom and citizenship did conservatives articulate in the 1980s?]]

Think back to Chapter 23. The United States was in the midst of the Great Depression. The reigning governmental and economic philosophies of the day proved unable to return the country to economic growth. Those philosophies were largely conservative, dominated by what is sometimes called *laissez faire*, symbolizing limited government. In response, American voters changed course, electing a president, Franklin Roosevelt, and a congress that fundamentally transformed American government and politics with the New Deal.

Well, 1980 shared many of these same elements. The country had not been mired in a depression, but it had experienced a decade of sluggish growth, high unemployment, and high prices. The reigning economic philosophies of the day, known as Keynesianism, an essentially liberal outlook, proved unable to restore growth. And again, voters changed course, only this time in a distinctly conservative direction. They elected Ronald Reagan president, and he brought to the White House an emphasis on lower taxes, fewer regulations of industry, and, at least in spirit, a return to a more *laissez faire* approach.

The reality was more complex, as it inevitably is. This chapter takes you into the intricacies of what became known as the Reagan Revolution. Reagan embodied a conservative turn in American politics and culture that would have significant, long-term repercussions. But liberals stood their ground, at least for a while, and the new political framework that emerged was something wholly unique in American history.

Even as American politics grew more conservative after 1980, other developments pushed the country in still new directions. The most significant of these has to be the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991, and the end of the Cold War. But there was also the beginning of the computer revolution, with the first personal computers. The collapse of the Cold War and accelerating developments in technology, alongside developments in economic regulation would lead to a new era of globalization in the coming years.

That development is still in the future, however, and in this chapter we take you inside the conservative turn in American political life.