A New Era Begins: Reading Essentials and Study Guide: Lesson 2

Reading Essentials and Study Guide
A New Era Begins

Lesson 2 Western Europe and North America

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

Reading HELPDESK
Content Vocabulary
budget deficit the state that exists when a government spends more than it collects in revenues
postmodernism an artistic movement that emerged in the 1980s; its artists do not expect rationality in the world and are comfortable with many "truths"
popular culture entertainment created for a profit and for a mass audience
cultural imperialism referring to Western nations’ control of other world cultures similar to how they had controlled colonial governments

Academic Vocabulary
currency coins, for example, that are in circulation and used as a medium of exchange
symbol something that stands for something else by way of association; a visible sign of something invisible

TAKING NOTES: Organizing
1. ACTIVITY As you read, use the flow chart below to identify events that led to the reunification of Germany.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events leading to the reunification of Germany</th>
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IT MATTERS BECAUSE
The leaders of Western European and North American countries faced many economic challenges during the last years of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century. Western culture still influences many parts of the world.

Winds of Change in Western Europe
GUIDING QUESTION What were the political, social, and cultural trends in Western Europe and North America since the end of the Cold War?

Western European economies were doing better during the 1980s, but problems remained. Unemployment was still high. The Western European states seemed able to become more prosperous.

The European Community (EC) was mainly an economic union. (It was started in 1957 under the name European Economic Community. Its goal was to set up a common market, without trade barriers, among the member nations. It changed its name to EC in 1993.) The Treaty on European Union, which went into effect on November 1, 1993, turned the EC into the European Union (EU). One of the EU’s first goals was to create a common, or shared, currency, or money. This currency was named the euro. The euro officially replaced 16 national currencies and served about 327 million people by January 2010. However, a major problem for the euro occurred in the same year. The public debts of Greece and Ireland put those countries in danger of bankruptcy. This situation caused financial problems for the euro.

The EU expanded between 2004 and 2007. It added twelve new members, which were mostly from Eastern Europe. They included nations that became independent after the Soviet Union collapsed. The end of the Soviet Union also had a major effect on Germany.

Reunification of Germany
In 1982 the Christian Democratic Union of Helmut Kohl formed a new, more conservative government in West Germany. Kohl was a smart politician, and he was helped greatly by economic growth in the mid-1980s. Then events in East Germany led to the unexpected reunification of the two Germanies in 1990.

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

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

Kohl’s government was soon forced to raise taxes. The economy in eastern Germany almost collapsed, leading to extremely high levels of unemployment and discontent. One result was a return to power for the Social Democrats. They were successful in the 1998 elections but did not solve Germany’s economic problems. Angela Merkel was leader of the Christian Democrats. In 2005
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she became the first female chancellor in German history.

The collapse of the German economy also led to more attacks on foreigners. Illegal immigrants and foreigners seeking refuge came to Germany for many years. It had very liberal immigration laws. Increased unemployment and economic problems caused tensions. Some Germans felt that immigrants were taking their jobs.

**Great Britain**
Margaret Thatcher resigned as prime minister in 1990. John Major followed her as leader of the Conservative Party. However, the party’s ideas and program did not gain enthusiasm among most Britons. The Labour Party won a huge victory in 1997, and Tony Blair became prime minister. He was a moderate who gave new life to the political scene with his youthful energy. However, he supported the U.S. war in Iraq when most Britons were against it. This made him unpopular. Gordon Brown, another member of the Labour Party, became prime minister in June 2007. New elections in May 2010 made Conservative David Cameron become prime minister.

**France**
In the elections of 1993, a group of conservative parties gained 80 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. The move to the right grew stronger when Jacques Chirac became president of France from 1995 to 2007.


**PROGRESS CHECK**
2. **Determining Cause and Effect** What happened after the Berlin Wall was dismantled?

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**The United States and Canada**
**GUIDING QUESTION** What were the political, social, and cultural trends in Western Europe and North America since the end of the Cold War?

The Cold War was ending. At this time, U.S. and Canadian politics moved between the right and left as economics became a focus.
The United States
President Reagan sent U.S. policy in new directions. This was called the Reagan Revolution. Reagan reduced welfare policies. These included cuts in spending on food stamps, school lunch programs, and job programs. Reagan also supervised the largest peacetime military buildup in U.S. history.

Total federal spending was $631 billion in 1981. It rose to over a trillion dollars by 1987. Reagan’s spending policies produced record government budget deficits. The total deficit was $420 billion in the 1970s. Budget deficits were three times that amount between 1981 and 1987.

George Bush, Reagan’s vice president, became the next president. Bush was unable to deal with the federal deficit and an economic downturn. This allowed Democrat Bill Clinton to be elected president in 1992. Clinton claimed to be a new kind of Democrat. He supported several of the Republican policies of the 1980s. A long economic recovery won Clinton popular support, but he was charged with presidential misconduct during his second term. Republican George W. Bush was the son of the first President Bush. Clinton’s problems helped Bush win the presidency in 2000.

The Bush administration was mostly concerned with the war on terrorism and the U.S.-led war on Iraq. Bush and Congress passed tax cuts to help the economy but that led to record budget deficits. Bush’s popularity fell from 2004 to 2008. People were unhappy about the Iraq War. There was also a big economic downturn, which was caused in part by problems in the home mortgage industry. These key issues led to a change in American politics. Barack Obama was elected president in 2008. He was the first African American president. In 2009 Obama moved to deal with the worst economic recession, or economic slowdown, since the Great Depression. He also led passage of a national healthcare law and dealt with the continuing war in Afghanistan.

Canada
In 1993 Canada approved the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Mexico. Its purpose was to make trade easier and more profitable. However, many Canadians thought the agreement mainly helped the United States. Brian Mulroney was the prime minister who had helped negotiate the treaty. As a result, he lost popularity. Jean Chrétien became prime minister. He served as prime minister from 1993 to 2003. However, there was a Conservative victory in 2006, when Stephen Harper became the new prime minister.

The French-speaking Quebec province has been an issue for many years. In 1995 Quebec voters only narrowly rejected secession, or separating from Canada. The debate still divides Canadians.

PROGRESS CHECK
3. Describing What role did the economy play in U.S. presidential administrations in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s?

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Society and Culture in the West

GUIDING QUESTION What were the political, social, and cultural trends in Western Europe and North America since the end of the Cold War?

Places around the world are becoming more alike or more connected. This process is called globalization. One effect of globalization is the spread of culture, and Western culture has influenced most parts of the world.

The Women’s Movement
Some criticized, or complained about, the women’s movement in the 1990s. Some women wanted a return to traditional gender (male and female) roles. Other women rejected these ideas and continued to find ways to balance career and family. There have been gains in the women’s movement in the 2000s. However, women continue to do most of the child care and domestic work in most homes.

Art and Popular Culture
The United States dominated the art world after World War II. Abstractionism was popular after 1945, especially a style called abstract expressionism. Abstract artists focused on showing emotion and feeling instead of making realistic pictures of things and people. Postmodernism emerged by the 1980s. Postmodern artists often create works that include parts of film, performance, popular culture, and sculpture. Today’s artists use digital cameras and computer programs to create interactive art forms.

Music, movies, television, and sports are part of our popular culture. American performers and filmmakers are known throughout the world. They help spread American popular culture. The world participates in America’s musical pop culture, from early rock ‘n’ roll to current multimillion dollar musical acts. Films also play a big role in spreading Western culture.

Television and sports make it seem like Americans and Europeans share a culture. Europeans watch American shows and become familiar with American brand names. They also learn American attitudes about family, work, and money. Sports are another cultural export, and they have become big business. People in some nations worry that American entertainment weakens their own language and culture. Critics call this cultural imperialism. Western music and movies may still dominate, but trends in the opposite direction are developing. One trend is that non-Western
music has large Western audiences. For example, the reggae music of Jamaica has an enormous following. Latin pop has become popular, and there have been Latin Grammy awards since 1999.

**PROGRESS CHECK**

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

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**Answer Key**

1. Honecker rules harshly; mass demonstrations in East Germany; border opened; East Germans swarm across the border.

2. Germany was an economic power in the EC, but the rebuilding of the East German economy was expensive and difficult.

3. Economic problems during the early 1990s helped elect Bill Clinton. A downturn in the economy helped elect Barack Obama.

4. Some people are concerned that it may weaken their own language, culture, and values.