

Year 3:

Unit 7

Facing a New Millennium - The Contemporary United States (2000 - 2008): Introduction

Unit Purpose: Why This Unit?

When Bill Clinton left office, his vice president, Al Gore, faced off against George W. Bush, the son of the former president, in one of the closest and most controversial elections in American history, with Bush emerging the victor after a decisive, controversial Supreme Court ruling in his favor. As president, Bush oversaw some of the largest crises in American history: 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and the financial crisis of 2008.

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, shook the country to its core and led the United States to shift its foreign policy from one against communism to one against terrorism. The focus on rooting out terrorists abroad in the name of preventing another terrorist attack on U.S. soil also affected Americans at home, as domestic policy also shifted. Along with more restrictive immigration policies, the Department of Homeland Security was created and aviation policies changed dramatically, continuing long-lasting debates about Americans' right to privacy and the government's right to infringe on that privacy in the name of protection from harm. In 2005, another disaster struck, this one of the natural variety. Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and surrounding areas, and the slow response of the U.S. government led to even more tragic consequences for many American citizens living in the area. This natural disaster led to many questions and debates about how race and poverty influenced the government's response. Then in 2008, near the end of Bush's second term as president, an economic crisis and recession impacted the nation and brought back similar feelings of malaise and lack of confidence in the government as in the 1970s.

Following the financial crisis of 2008, the United States was ready for a new start. The economic recession and failures of the government in both foreign and domestic policy during the 2000s made the nation ripe for the black rookie senator Barack Obama to be elected president, with a campaign focused

on hope and change. Once again, the political pendulum shifted in response to crises, this time in favor of the Democrats and a rise of liberalism.

Unit 7 Learning Goals

Essential Question

If you are successful in this unit, your scholars will be able to answer the Unit 7 Essential Question: *How do events in the contemporary United States represent change and continuity over time?*

Big Ideas

The Big Ideas, outlined below, help answer the Unit 7 Essential Question and reflect the key ideas that scholars must master by the end of this unit. As you teach Unit 7, connect every lesson back to the Big Idea(s) that the lesson helps illustrate. The Unit 7 Big Ideas were adapted from the UCLA National History Standards United States History Era 10 and the New York State Common Core Social Studies 9–12 Framework.

- **Big Idea 1: Foreign policy in the 2000s shifted its focus from combating communism to combating terrorism following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which in turn influenced domestic policies as the U.S. government sought to protect American citizens from terrorism within the country as well.**
 - After the fall of the Soviet Union, U.S. foreign policy focused on exerting American power and influence, especially in the Middle East. This effort led to disastrous effects, as terrorists from the Middle East attacked the United States on September 11, 2001.
 - As a result of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. foreign policy shifted to focus solely on rooting out those responsible for the attacks, as well as preventing future terrorist attacks, leading to long-lasting wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan.
 - The 9/11 attacks also affected domestic policies, as the U.S. government created agencies solely to root out terrorists living within the country. These agencies created policies that led to long-lasting debates about freedom: whether or not Americans' right to privacy is more important than the government's job to protect Americans from harm.
- **Big Idea 2: The push for the end of big government in the 1980s and 1990s led to economic and racial disparities in the United States.**
 - The slow government response to Hurricane Katrina led to more death and destruction, leading to questions about how increasing income inequality that resulted from policies enacted during the 1980s and 1990s influenced this response.
 - Barack Obama appealed to poor and minority voters with a message of hope in the 2008 election, ultimately leading to his victory.

- **Big Idea 3: Contemporary American history cannot be fully understood without analyzing the past and examining the extent to which the past continues to have an impact on U.S. society.**
 - U.S. foreign policy decisions throughout history have affected relationships between the United States and other countries.
 - Concerns about national security have threatened civil liberties in the United States throughout history.
 - Through American history, the economy has supported consistent innovations and broadened opportunities for Americans while also contributing to social stratification and the widening gap between rich and poor in the United States/
 - Patterns in U.S. politics repeat throughout history, shifting from liberal to conservative and back in response to the social climate in the United States.

Key Terms

The following people, places, and events are foundational to understanding the Big Ideas of this unit. As these words are introduced in each lesson, add them to your word wall and hold scholars accountable for using them in discussion and writing throughout the unit.

- George W. Bush
- Al Gore
- Hanging Chad
- 9/11
- War on Terror
- Al Qaeda
- Aviation and Transportation Security Act
- Homeland Security Act
- Patriot Act
- Hurricane Katrina
- Financial crisis of 2008
- Barack Obama
- Election of 2008

Unit 7 Overview

In Unit 7, your scholars will conduct research and write an argumentative paper as a capstone project to conclude their three-year history program.

In the first week of Unit 7, you will introduce scholars to five contemporary topics in U.S. history: the 2000 presidential election, the September 11 attacks, the Patriot Act, the Hurricane Katrina disaster, and President Barack Obama's election in 2008. Each of these lessons will follow a similar structure to lessons in previous History units.

Following these five lessons, scholars will pick one of these topics to research and write about in their own paper about how this topic develops the corresponding theme over time. Their papers will draw on the ideas introduced in class to respond to Unit 7's Essential Question: *How do events in the*

contemporary United States represent change and continuity over time? For scholars to sufficiently answer this question, they will research and organize their essays to make an argument about how the topic represents change and continuity for the corresponding theme in American history over time.

Unit 7 Research Paper Topics

Change and Continuity Theme

• 2000 presidential election	Partisan political conflicts and compromises
• September 11 attacks	Foreign policy and American responses to foreign threats
• Passage of the Patriot Act	The federal government's role in security versus protecting civil liberties
• Hurricane Katrina disaster and response	The federal government's response to domestic crises
• President Barack Obama's 2008 election	Electoral coalitions and presidential campaign messages

Scholars will use the final three weeks of Unit 7 to research, draft, revise, and finalize their research papers. The research, drafting, and revision lessons in Unit 7 are organized around weekly, rather than daily, instructional goals:

Unit 7 Research Paper Goals

- **Week 1:** Independent Research
- **Week 2:** Drafting
- **Week 3:** Peer Review, Revising, and Finalizing

The research paper lessons in this unit provide one teacher model lesson to introduce each week's goal in class, followed by a lesson structure to use during class time for the remainder of the week. Before teaching this unit, you must first go through the process of writing a research paper so that you can use it in class as your model.

Intellectual Preparation

Class Materials Once you have internalized the Big Ideas of the unit, to be successful you must study all scholar documents and materials before you teach the first lesson:

- All documents in the [Unit 7 Sourcebook](#)
- All scholar and teacher materials in the [Unit 7 Workbook](#)

Additional Resources The resources below provide additional historical background for the content covered in Unit 7:

- Read the essay “Facing the New Millennium” on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* website.
- Browse the “Overview of the 1970–2000 Era” on the University of Houston’s Digital History website.
- Watch the videos “Crash Course History: Terrorism, War, and Bush 43” and “Crash Course: Obamanation.”
- Browse the Purdue Owl: Online Writing Lab website to prepare to teach scholars how to write a research paper.

*To access these readings and more free American History content and resources, create an account on the Gilder Lehrman Institute website.

Unit 7 Lesson Sequence

Essential Question: How do events in the contemporary United States represent change and continuity over time?

Unit 7 Week 1: Topics in Contemporary U.S. History

The first three lessons introduce scholars to how foreign and domestic policy shifted to focusing on terrorism in the 2000s after the election of George W. Bush. In the first lesson, scholars will debate who should have won the election of 2000, as they learn about how the Supreme Court ultimately decided the victor: George W. Bush. The second lesson introduces scholars to the events of 9/11 and how these terrorist attacks shaped U.S. defense policy toward combating terrorism for the rest of the decade. In Lesson 3, scholars will explore the effects of the terrorist attacks on domestic policy through a debate over whether Congress should have passed the Patriot Act. By the end of these three lessons, scholars will understand the first Big Idea: U.S. policy changed after 9/11 from focusing on containing communism to focusing on eliminating terrorism.

Lesson 1: Election of 2000 (Debate)

- **Central Question:** Who should have won the election of 2000: George W. Bush or Al Gore?

Lesson 2: The Aftermath of 9/11 (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** How did U.S. defense policy change as a result of 9/11?

Lesson 3: The Patriot Act (Debate)

- **Central Question:** Should Congress have passed the Patriot Act?

Lessons 4 and 5 introduce scholars to the effects of the widening income gap that began with policies implemented in the 1980s and 1990s. In Lesson 4, scholars will learn about Hurricane Katrina and the devastating impact it had on New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Scholars will understand that the government’s slow response in the poorest districts of New Orleans elevated the devastation and death toll, and led to a continuing debate about the role that the

federal government has in addressing natural disasters. In Lesson 5, scholars will learn about Barack Obama's campaign of hope and optimism and understand how dissatisfaction with the government's response to disasters, coupled with economic distress due to the financial crisis of 2008, ultimately led to his election. By the end of these two lessons, scholars will understand how the political pendulum shifted again in response to Americans' dissatisfaction, this time in favor of liberalism.

Lesson 4: Hurricane Katrina (Video Analysis)

- **Central Question:** To what extent was Hurricane Katrina a natural disaster?

Lesson 5: The Election of Barack Obama (Source Analysis)

- **Central Question:** Why was Barack Obama's campaign of hope successful in the 2008 election?

Unit 7 Weeks 2–4: Research Paper

Central Question: How do events in the contemporary United States represent change and continuity over time?

- **Research Week 1:** Independent Research
 - **Lesson 1:** Independent Research Introduction Lesson
 - **Lesson 2:** Independent Research Daily Lesson Structure
- **Research Week 2:** Drafting
 - **Lesson 1:** Drafting Introduction Lesson
 - **Lesson 2:** Drafting Daily Lesson Structure
- **Research Week 3:** Revision
 - **Lesson 1:** Revision Introduction Lesson
 - **Lesson 2:** Revision Daily Lesson Structure