**Learning Objective:**

Explain the causes and effects of continuing policy debates about the role of the federal government over time.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Debates fostered by social and political groups about the role of government in American social, political, and economic life shape government policy, institutions, political parties, and the rights of citizens.*

1. Responding to social conditions and the African American civil rights movement, a variety of movements emerged that focused on issues of identity, social justice, and the environment.
2. Despite an overall affluence in postwar America, advocates raised concerns about the prevalence and persistence of poverty as a national problem.
   1. Strikes
      1. In early 1946, the United Auto Workers and steelworkers went on strike against General Motors and U.S. Steel, respectively. President Truman suggested an 18 cent per hour wage increase and allowed the corporations to raise prices to cover the cost of the increase. This formula became the basis for settlements in other industries.
      2. After John L. Lewis’s (CIO) United Mine Workers struck in April 1946, Truman had the government take over mines and railroads and accepted the union’s demands of safety, health, and welfare benefits, but threatened to draft strikers into the military.
   2. Taft-Hartley Act
      1. The Taft-Hartley Act was passed in 1947 with the primary purpose of curbing the power of labor unions.
      2. The Taft-Hartley Act outlawed closed-shop unionism, which would require workers to join a union before being hired.
      3. Supporters of the Taft-Hartley Act believed that unions were abusing their power, widespread strikes would endanger the nation’s vital defense industries, unions had been infiltrated by communists, and employers were being coerced into hiring union workers (closed-shop unionism). By 1954, 15 states had passed “right to work” laws, which forbade the “union shop” (a non-member could not be hired to a job if a union was present).
      4. The act outlawed secondary boycotts, the practice of several unions supporting a striking union by joining a boycott of the company’s products, and gave the president the power to invoke an 80-day “cooling off period” before a strike endangering the national safety could be called.
      5. Organized labor strongly opposed the Taft-Hartley Act.
   3. Eisenhower’s Domestic Policies
      1. Eisenhower’s Modern Republicanism combined the basic features of the New Deal with a conservative economic policy, particularly controlling government spending.
      2. Eisenhower sought to balance the federal budget and lower taxes but did not attempt to curtail existing social and economic legislation.
      3. Social Security was extended in 1954 and 1956 to an additional 10 million people, including professionals, domestic and clerical workers, farm workers, and members of the armed services.
3. Liberalism influenced postwar politics and court decisions, but it came under increasing attack from the left as well as from a resurgent conservative movement.
4. Liberalism, based on anticommunism abroad and a firm belief in the efficacy of government power to achieve social goals at home, reached a high point of political influence by the mid-1960s.
   1. Election of 1960
      1. John F. Kennedy was a Roman Catholic—the first to be nominated since 1928 and first ever to become president. Kennedy’s Catholicism was a major issue until he told a group of Protestant ministers that he accepted the separation of church and state and that he would not allow Catholic leaders to tell him how to act as president.
      2. The 1960 election was the first to include televised debates. Audiences estimated at 60 million or more watched each of the four debates between Kennedy and his opponent Richard Nixon. The debates helped create a positive image for Kennedy and served as a turning point in the 1960 campaign.
      3. John Kennedy was the youngest elected president in American history.
      4. Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline, presided over a glamorous and elegant White House that was soon nicknamed Camelot after the legendary court of King Arthur.
   2. Kennedy’s “New Frontier”
      1. JFK challenged Americans to boldly enter the “New Frontier” of the 1960s.
      2. Kennedy proposed plans for federal aid to education, urban renewal, medical care for the elderly, reductions in income taxes, and the creation of a Department of Urban Affairs. None of these proposals passed.
      3. Kennedy was unable to get much of his program through Congress because of an alliance of Republicans and Southern Democrats.
5. Liberal ideas found expression in Lyndon Johnson’s ***Great Society***, which attempted to use federal legislation and programs to end racial discrimination, eliminate poverty, and address other social issues. A series of Supreme Court decisions expanded civil rights and individual liberties.
   1. Great Society reforms included Medicare (combined hospital insurance for retired people with a voluntary plan to cover physician’s bills), Medicaid (provided grants to states to help the poor below retirement gain access to medical care), Food Stamps, Head Start (prepared economically disadvantaged children for elementary school), the creation of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, and the Housing and Urban Development Act (created 240,000 housing units, $2.9 billion for urban renewal, and rent supplements for low-income families).

**Learning Objective:**

Explain the continuities and changes in immigration patterns over time.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Push and pull factors shape immigration to and migration within America, and the demographic change as a result of these moves shapes the migrants, society, and the environment.*

1. Rapid economic and social changes in American society fostered a sense of optimism in the postwar years.
2. Immigrants from around the world sought access to the political, social, and economic opportunities in the United States, especially after the passage of new immigration laws in 1965.
   1. The increasing number of undocumented immigrants from Latin American and Asian countries led to the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which penalized employers for hiring immigrants who had entered the country illegally or overstayed their visas.
   2. Many Americans concluded that the nation had lost control of its own borders.