

# Neo-conservatism



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The Rise of Neo-Conservatism in the 1970s Neo-conservatism is an ideology which has been gaining more and more popularity in the modern United States, but where did it come from, and why? Despite its evolution in many different areas and groups, all neo-conservative factions have one particular goal in common: to reduce government funding for social programs. This paper will discuss the events of the late twentieth century to explain what type of people initiated the gradual leaning to the right of modern American politics. Although neo-conservatism did not become a full movement until later, the New Deal policies of the 1930s played their role – the people who would later become neo-conservatives generally disagreed with the New Deal funding. This new policy was also, in some ways, ineffective – as unions failed, blue-collar workers felt let down by the system and turned to neo-conservatism. The lack of contradictory political ideologies also played its part, giving dissatisfied Democrats the terrible choice of sticking with a disappointing party or turning to the right. As the century wore on, event after traumatic event shook the American culture, fatally dismantling people's faith in the current leftist governments. The Vietnamese war, the Watergate scandal, and the Iranian hostage crisis (amongst others) generated a pervasive sense of cynicism and alienation (WBA 695) which made neo-conservatism strangely more attractive. The culmination of such events combined with the inefficacy of the Democratic government to become a deathly blow to leftist politics. Many American people, particularly the working class and poor who had previously identified with the Democratic party, felt let down by a system which appeared to not care about them. This led to a massive drop in the amount of people going to the polls, meaning even before the results were in that a significant change in contemporary politics was almost

guaranteed. The 1970s neo-conservatism was also a reaction to the liberal counterculture of the 1960s. The earlier break from traditional values took many forms, but three of these were particularly galling to the neo-conservatives. In 1972 the laudable and feminist-supported Equal Rights Amendment passed (although never actually made it into the Constitution); a year later, the U. S. Supreme Courts legalized abortion in Roe vs Wade; and throughout this time period, there was increased visibility and hence a growing national consciousness of homosexual Americans (WBA 702). Sadly a swathe of the population could not handle the greater freedom for American citizens – these were mostly people who felt that their own power structures were built on inequality and would topple in the face of equality. The combination of Democratic failures, tense foreign affairs, and progressive movements within the United States was the tipping point which made personal dislikes into a movement of epic proportions, from which forty years later the nation has not yet recovered. Habit is a strong force, and the changes in many arenas of life spurred some people to turn to tradition, arguing that a return to old values would ease the revolutions around them. This is a recurring event in history, as we can see in the entrance of women into the workforce during wartime – some of whom were arrested on their way home from work for 'cross-dressing' (“ Jackie Bross vs. Chicago's Dress Code”). The enforcement of segregation and the Jim Crow laws after abolition show the same painful phenomenon. Neo-conservatism is a misleading term, because there is nothing new in the reactionary backlash against progressive change. Although it cannot be blamed solely on an innate (or, more hopefully, learned) human aversion to change, neo-conservatism lends itself to such an interpretation. Change is instant and

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necessary – as Martin Luther King Jr. said, “ Justice too long delayed is justice denied” (“ Letter from Birmingham Jail”). It can only be hoped that neo-conservatives begin to realize this both individually and as a movement.

Works Cited WBA book (customer, please fill in this information yourself.

Thank you) “ Jackie Bross vs. Chicago's Dress Code.” May 13th 2011.

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