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Bendroth
History 313
May 5, 2000

Carter and Reagan

Both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan had to deal with the legacy of the 1960s during their presidency.

For Carter, the primary problem of the 60s was that it had caused the American people to lose their faith in the government. Carter mentioned the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Carter claimed that, "These wounds are very deep. They have never been healed" (439).

Although Carter did not make direct reference to it, it was apparent that the 1960s have left their legacy in another way too. Americans were used to affluence in the 1960s, a period of previously unparalleled growth in the nation's history. It was hard for them to accept living with out the same growth. Americans were troubled by inflation, by the hold OPEC had on the United States, and by the idea of having to live with less. This was evident in the section where Carter talked about what other people had told him.

Reagan dealt with the legacy of the 1960s in a different way. As a fiscal conservative, Reagan was upset at what he considered high taxes. Although Reagan never mentioned the Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty directly in his speech, it is certainty in the back of his mind. When Reagan talked about cutting taxes, he also meant cutting Welfare benefits that came about during the 1960s.

Reagan also mentioned Abortion quite bluntly in his speech, in a way that most modern politicians would be afraid to do. "Abortion is either the taking of human life, or it isn't; and if it is – and medical technology is increasingly showing it is – it must be stopped" (445). Reagan was not only dealing with the results of the 1973 Roe versus Wade decision, but also with the feminist movement which produced that decision. Since second wave feminism was a direct result of the 1960s, Reagan's pro-choice adversaries owed their prominence to the 60s.

Reagan also sought to gain public support for increasing the size of the military in this speech. Here the 60s were again in the shadowy background, because Reagan knew the memory of Vietnam still made many Americans fearful of the military. Reagan claimed that, "We only have a military industrial complex until a time of danger. Then it becomes the arsenal of democracy" (444). By attacking the phrase "military industrial complex" Reagan is making an attack on the anti-war movement from the 60s, which often used phrases like that. If Reagan wanted to achieve his goal of increasing the military, he first had to help Americans past their memories of Vietnam.

The civil rights movement was in Reagan's speech as well. Reagan acknowledged that the goals of the civil rights movement were not yet met. However Reagan attacked many of the government policies implemented in the 60s as "not progressive, [but] they are reactionary" 443. By deciding to focus on economic equality through laissez-faire economics, Reagan is offering a new solution to a problem that has plagued America since the 60s.

Finally, when Reagan talks about religious freedom in schools, he is reacting to

the Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960s outlawing prayer in public schools. This is an issue from the 1960s that has plagued American conservatives ever since.

Both Reagan and Carter reacted to the legacy of the 1960s in different ways, and saw different problems that arouse from the 1960s.