

Name

Instructor

Course

Date

Transformation in America in the 1970's

### **Introduction**

Bruce J. Schulman is the author of the book, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and politics*. Schulman shows his stand concerning the argument that the 1970s were a dead decade with no significant notable shift in America. The stand of Schulman as he expresses in the book is that the decade had significance to America in a political, societal and cultural shift. Schulman dates the decade in question as from 1969 to 1984. He specifically defines these two years from a political perspective as the time when Richard Nixon entered the white house in 1969 and the great reelection of Ronald Reagan in 1984.

### **Book Summary**

The book narrates about the changes which occurred in the political, social, cultural and economic fields to show the stand of the author, Schulman on a significant shift. The book narrates that the decade saw a significant shift in political strength of America from Midwest to Southwest, a business-friendly area with more dollars. The significant change occurred as a result of the doubt on government from the disaster of Vietnam and Watergate. Schulman explains that the incidences made Americans to shift focus from group thoughts to individualism to solve economic and social problems. The idea of individualism brought the significant gain of the decade. However, the author states that all people did not appreciate the developments.

People like Phyllis Schlafly, an anti-feminist, rallied against the development of equal rights towards the end of 1970 leading to some divisions in America.

### **Major Reforms**

**Education Reforms;** The decade saw a significant improvement in education as compared to the years back. Before 1970, most people were concerned more to change the social orientation of America. Most people did not pay attention to education since they believed that it was a tool to propagate inequality between people. Many young people were not willing to go beyond college level to save time for reforming the social setup. In the 1970s, Americans reflected on the loss they had undergone as a result of social fights. They had exhausted all they had including money trying to fight for oneness in society. They shifted to personal interest and gain to recover from the loss. It is from this shift that saw many young people go back to school as education was the only tool they could have used to make money. The acronym, "yuppie" which meant young urban professional, came up due to the shift in education (Schulman 244). Medicine and law schools among others became full which brought massive change on education as compared in the 1960s.

**Political Gain;** The decade saw a significant shift in political field from democratic administrations which had oppressed majority of Americans to Republican administration which gave people hope. The 1970 decade started with President Richard Nixon a Republican who had succeeded a liberal Democrat from 60s. It was in his second term that Nixon resigned by force due to the Watergate case. The case involved Nixon's government involvement in the break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters where Nixon's government had attempted to cover the action. However, Nixon was credited for a political shift from North to the southeast which saw the prosperity of many Americans (Schulman 221). Gerald Ford who was Nixon's

vice president took over only to be defeated in the following election by a Jimmy Carter who was a Democrat. Americans elected a democrat due to the earlier frustrations of the Watergate case by the Republicans. However, Carter failed to make the economy better a move which saw his loss to a Republican Ronald Regan (Schulman 142). Regan was the president who marked great gain in political field during his eight-year term. The end of the 70s decade was referred to as Regan years due to his long service as well as the developments he had made. During this period, Americans gained hope again from the lowered taxes and managed inflation.

***Economic Gain;*** The development from Regan's government gave people a chance and motivation to make money as they had wished from the 1960s loss. The lowered taxes meant that people could gain more from their businesses and jobs. With reduced taxes, Americans were able to save more and invest in leading to economic growth. Also, the controlled inflation enabled Americans to get value for their money. Most people were encouraged to work even harder where they made more money bringing about economic prosperity. President Regan took action to reduce government expenses. Social programs were cut, and policies were introduced to minimize regulations which were considered to affect the businesses, work environment, and the consumer. The idiom "the 'me' generation" and others were coined by people to describe different groups of people who seemed to be so much concerned with making money. The songs, films and TV programs at the early 1980s also showed how much wealth America had become. In one of the movie, Wall Street, a young man was described to be robust and wealthy as he traded stock exchange.

***Social and Cultural Gain;*** Freedom was also gained during the decade. It was during Regan's term that the fear of nuclear war reduced bringing peace among Americans. Future security became a guarantee for many Americans. Americans were free to wear what they

wanted without restrictions, talk about anything and do whatever they wanted. Television shows were dominated by different topics ranging from politics to sex issues which could not have been discussed openly before. The decade was marked as a decade of styles where men and women had different styles. Though there were some negative impacts about the freedom, at least most people felt free from the many oppressed years. Richard Nixon saw a significant shift in culture during his presidential term which proceeded even after his exit. Nixon had taken the initiative of pleading with hippies to change their culture of long hair and use of drugs among others. Though this was a strategy to be elected, it had seen a great shift to American culture. In one instance, Schulman records that Nixon admired the words "do not smoke marijuana" from a singer Merle Haggard whom he invited to perform in the state house (Schulman 39). The statehouse song performance was to communicate the message of changing drug abuse culture.

### **Conclusion**

The proposition of Schulman is evident when the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s decades are compared. Schulman analyzes step by step the major transitions and how significant they were with evidence. In 1960 there was so much strangles in the American society in political, social and economic fields. The government had oppressed people with threats on war, inflation, high taxes and reduced freedom of expression. In the late 70s, people realized they had lost so much that they decided to focus on rebuilding themselves. It is at this time that they were able to make good choices on the presidency. Regan was elected, and transformation occurred in all spheres of Americans life. A favorable environment for work and investment was created, and Americans gave freedom and future hope.

Work Cited

Schulman, Bruce J. The seventies: The great shift in American culture, society, and politics.

Simon and Schuster, 2001.