

Introduction

The United States experienced many problems as the 1968 presidential election approached. The Vietnam War had caused many American casualties, yet the American forces fighting along with the South Vietnam Army were no closer to victory than when the United States had first entered the war. At home, antiwar protesters marched in the streets and held rallies to voice their opposition. The Republican candidate for President in 1968 was *Richard M. Nixon*. Nixon promised to end the Vietnam War and to return law and order to the streets of America. He had served in Congress and as Vice President under Eisenhower. He narrowly defeated Democrat *Hubert H. Humphrey* in the election and took office in January of 1969.



President
Richard M.
Nixon

Nixon and Law and Order

In the 1968 presidential campaign, Richard M. Nixon ran on a platform that included *law and order*. Many Americans felt that crime in the 1960s had gone unchecked. Indeed, statistics showed that crime had risen. During the 1968 Democratic convention, potential voters watched on TV as protesters of the Vietnam War battled with Chicago police. This TV scene helped to uphold Nixon's argument.

Some people felt that the Supreme Court had been too lenient, or easy, on people accused of crimes. In May of 1969, President Nixon nominated *Warren Burger* as Chief Justice. Nixon said that Burger would *strictly* follow the Constitution. This was understood to mean that Burger would stand up for old American values such as belief in law and order.

During the 1960s, some Americans criticized the decisions of the Supreme Court. Some were unhappy about the Court's decisions to end segregation. Some Americans objected to the Court's decisions on separation of church and state. In 1962 the Court had decided school prayer was unconstitutional. The next year, it outlawed Bible reading in the classroom. The Court was accused of weakening religious faith in young people.

Some Americans disagreed with the Court's decisions about the laws for treating people who were accused of crimes. In *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963), the Court made states provide legal counsel for poor defendants. Under *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966), the Court ruled that police had to inform an accused person of the right to remain silent. The accused also had the right to have a lawyer present when questioned by police.

The Vietnam War Ends

During his campaign for the presidency, Nixon had also promised to end the Vietnam War. His plan was to gradually turn the fighting over to the South Vietnamese and withdraw American forces. Nixon did begin withdrawing small numbers of troops after his election. Antiwar protesters, however, wanted the United States out of Vietnam immediately.

Although Nixon had withdrawn some troops, he also expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia. He believed that North Vietnam was using Cambodia as a base for its operations. When this information became public, many antiwar protesters became violent. On May 4, 1970, four students were shot by National Guardsmen during an antiwar demonstration at Kent State University in Ohio. Congress responded to the invasion of Cambodia by trying to limit the President's power to make war. Instead, the President ordered massive bombings on North Vietnam.

Peace talks between the United States and North Vietnam already were taking place in Paris. Nixon hoped the stepped-up bombing would force



The Vietnam War ended December 30, 1972

North Vietnam to stop fighting and sign a treaty. Then, on December 30, 1972, without an explanation, Nixon halted the bombing. In January of 1973, the two sides finally signed a cease-fire. United States Secretary of State *Henry Kissinger* received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on the cease-fire and treaty.

Results of the War

The United States lost an estimated 58,000 soldiers in Vietnam. Over 1,200 were *missing in action* (MIA). As the United States withdrew, the North Vietnamese took over South Vietnam. The country was united under a Communist government. For the first time in over 10 years, the United States was no longer fighting in Vietnam. And for the first time the United States had experienced defeat in war.



Efforts at Détente

Détente (day tahnt) is a French word that means to *ease up* or *relax*. It came to mean a relaxing of the Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1971 President Nixon surprised the American people by going to China to meet with Chinese Communist leader *Mao Zedong*. The United States had never recognized the Communist government in China. Nixon's historic trip improved relations with the Chinese.

In 1972 the President made another historic trip. He went to the Soviet Union to meet with Soviet leader *Leonid Brezhnev*. They signed a treaty to work together to limit nuclear arms. The treaty was called the **Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT)**.

Both China and the Soviet Union had supported North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Nixon's official visits to these countries were efforts to create peaceful relations or a *spirit of détente*.

Americans in Space

As the United States moved into the 1970s, it made great strides in its space program. On July 20, 1969, the first men set foot on the moon. *Neil Armstrong* and *Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, Jr.*, left the ***Apollo 11*** spacecraft and landed the tiny space module, *Eagle*, on the moon. Astronaut *Michael Collins*, the pilot aboard *Apollo 11*, circled the moon while the two other astronauts conducted research on the surface. After a decade of research, John F. Kennedy’s vision had come true. The United States space program was a success. Americans experienced a great feeling of pride in their country.

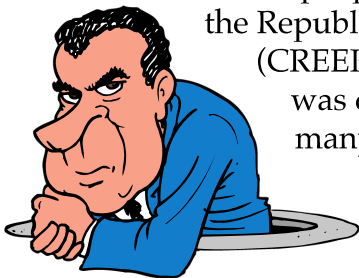


astronaut walking on the moon

Nixon Wins Reelection

President Nixon ran against the Democratic nominee Senator *George McGovern* in 1972. Nixon easily won reelection, winning the majority of votes in 49 of the 50 states. In 1971 the **26th Amendment** had lowered the voting age to 18. Of the few new voters who cast ballots, most voted for Nixon.

Republican “Dirty Tricks”



President Nixon was portrayed in cartoons as being “Tricky”

A lot of people were unhappy because of some “dirty tricks” the Republican Committee to Reelect President Nixon (CREEP) had played on Democrats. After the election, it was discovered that the Republicans had committed many secret, illegal acts against Democrats. One group broke into the Democratic National Committee offices located in the Watergate Apartment complex in Washington, D. C., to steal information on how the Democrats planned to run their campaign. The burglars were caught and a national scandal began.

The Watergate Investigation

The burglary of Democratic headquarters was exposed by two *Washington Post* newspaper reporters: *Robert Woodward* and *Carl Bernstein*. The break-in and subsequent events were known as the **Watergate Affair**.

President Nixon denied the crime had occurred and helped cover it up. He ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) not to help investigate the crime. Nixon even arranged to pay bribes to the burglars so they would not admit the truth. Meanwhile, the United States Senate set up the **Ervin Committee** to look into the crime.

The *Ervin Committee* learned that President Nixon had a tape recording system in his office. The tapes showed that the President had worked to prevent an investigation of the *Watergate Affair*. At the same time, the Committee learned that the President had helped cover up other crimes his colleagues had committed.

The Vice President Resigns

In 1973 while the Watergate investigation was going on, Vice President *Spiro T. Agnew* was accused of crimes. He had accepted *kickbacks* —illegal payoffs—when he was governor of Maryland. As Vice President, he was still receiving kickbacks. The Vice President made a deal with the prosecutors. Agnew resigned, and the court did not press charges. Agnew added to Nixon’s problems.

Nixon Faces Impeachment

To **impeach** means to charge a high public official with a crime. A special committee of the House of Representatives accused President Nixon of three crimes: (1) obstructing, or preventing, justice in the Watergate crime; (2) abusing presidential powers; and (3) failing to answer questions for the House of Representatives.

Impeachment of a President

- The Constitution gives Congress the power to try a President of the United States who is accused of treason, bribery, or other high crimes.
- The House of Representatives may accuse or impeach the President.
- The Senate holds the trial.
- The Senate must vote two-thirds against the President in order to convict.
- The President would be removed from office if two-thirds of the Senate voted to convict and would never be able to hold a federal office again.

The only Presidents to be impeached were Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton, but the Senate did not convict and both remained in office until their term ended.

President Nixon Resigns

The President's colleagues advised him to resign before he was *impeached*. On August 9, 1974, President Nixon submitted his resignation. He was the first President ever forced to leave office.

Gerald Ford Becomes President

When Vice President Agnew resigned in 1973, Representative *Gerald R. Ford, Jr.* was appointed to take his place. Gerald Ford then became President when Nixon resigned. Ford appointed—and Congress approved—*Nelson A. Rockefeller* as Vice President. For the first time, the country had a President and a Vice President who had not been elected to their respective offices by the people.

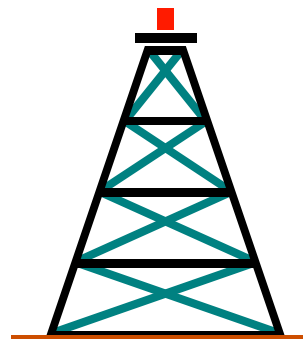
President Ford served the remaining two years of the presidential term. His first major act was to pardon, or to forgive, President Nixon for any crimes he may have committed. This cost Ford much public support in the next election.

Foreign Problems

President Ford kept Henry Kissinger as secretary of state. The two men worked to improve relations with the Soviet Union. They also tried to ease tensions between Egypt and Israel in the Middle East. However, the countries of Indochina—Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—continued to fight. President Ford helped many refugees from Indochina come to the United States to escape the war.

The Oil Crisis

In 1973 foreign oil-producing countries formed an organization called the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**. They agreed to reduce oil production and raise the price of oil. This caused oil shortages in the United States. As oil prices suddenly soared, inflation also rose.



Election of 1976

In 1976 the United States was 200 years old. The Republican candidates for President were Gerald Ford and *Ronald Reagan*. Ford narrowly defeated Reagan for the Republican nomination. The Democrats nominated *James Earl "Jimmy" Carter, Jr.* from Georgia. Carter won the election by a small margin. Many cast their vote for Carter because he was not considered a Washington, D.C. *insider* who may have been involved in scandal. He took office in January of 1977.



President Jimmy Carter

Summary

While President Richard Nixon held office, the first men traveled to the moon, and the Vietnam War ended. Nixon met with the leaders of China and the Soviet Union in efforts to ease the Cold War. Nixon's Vice President Spiro Agnew was forced to resign when it was discovered he had received bribes. Then Nixon resigned rather than face impeachment over the Watergate Affair. Gerald Ford became President, and Nelson Rockefeller became Vice President. Their administration was the first in American history which had not been elected to their respective offices by the American people.