

The Rise and Fall of Richard Nixon

What events influenced Richard Nixon's rise to and fall from power?

Introduction



This photograph was taken of vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon relaxing with his pet dog, Checkers, in 1952. In his famous “Checkers” speech, Nixon refuted accusations that he had misused campaign contributions. He emphasized his family’s modest means, claiming that his wife, Pat, wore not a mink coat but “a respectable Republican cloth coat.”

On September 23, 1952, California senator Richard Nixon reserved a spot on television to deliver the most important speech of his career. With this address, Nixon hoped to squash rumors that he had accepted \$18,000 in illegal political contributions to finance personal expenses. The Republicans had recently nominated Nixon to run for vice president on Dwight D. Eisenhower’s ticket. When these charges against Nixon became public, Eisenhower was noncommittal — he did not drop Nixon from the ticket, but he also did not defend him.

In his speech, Nixon said, “Not one cent of the \$18,000 or any other money of that type ever went to me for my personal use. Every penny of it was used to pay for political expenses that I did not think should be charged to the taxpayers of the

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United States.” But, he did confess to accepting one personal gift:

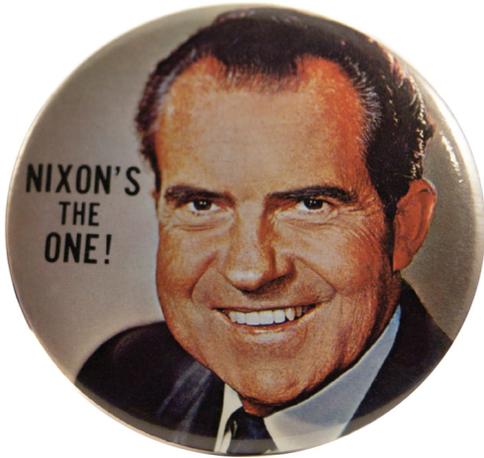
A man down in Texas heard [my wife] Pat on the radio mention the fact that our two youngsters would like to have a dog. And, believe it or not, the day before we left on this campaign trip, we got a message from Union Station in Baltimore saying they had a package for us. We went down to get it. You know what it was. It was a little cocker spaniel dog in a crate he’d sent all the way from Texas. Black and white spotted. And our little girl—Tricia, the 6-year-old—named it Checkers. And you know, the kids, like all kids, love the dog, and I just want to say this right now, that regardless of what they say about it, we’re gonna keep it.

—Senator Richard Nixon, “Checkers” speech, September 23, 1952

Nixon’s “Checkers” speech proved a high point in his tumultuous government career that culminated in his presidential election in 1968. As president, Nixon would engineer stunning successes in both domestic and foreign affairs, as well as orchestrate his own humiliating fall from power.



President Richard Nixon threw out the first pitch at this baseball game at Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium in April 1969.



In his 1968 presidential election campaign, Nixon related to moderate, middle-of-the-road voters. In a pamphlet titled “The Nixon Stand,” he outlined his position on five key issues facing the country. These critical issues were winning the peace, fighting rising crime, progressing with order, preventing runaway government, and maintaining respect for America.

1. Richard Nixon’s Rise to the Presidency

Born in California in 1913, Richard Nixon was one of five brothers. He financed both his college and law school educations. After serving in the Navy during World War II, Nixon was elected to the House of Representatives and, later, to the Senate. From 1953 to 1960, he served as vice president for Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Nixon lost to John F. Kennedy in the very close presidential election of 1960. Two years later, Nixon lost the race for governor of California and announced his

retirement from politics in his concession speech. “You won’t have Richard Nixon to kick around any more,” he told reporters. In reality, Nixon’s political career was far from over.

A Bumpy Road to the White House Nixon commenced his spectacular political comeback by winning the Republican presidential nomination in 1968. Nixon’s nomination was only one surprising occurrence in this tumultuous election year. First, President Lyndon B. Johnson unexpectedly decided not to run for reelection. Soon thereafter followed the shocking assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy.

In another surprise, Alabama governor George Wallace mounted a strong campaign for president on the American Independent Party ticket. During his state’s civil rights struggle, Wallace had been an ardent segregationist, garnering support from white voters in the South. Wallace also appealed to “the average man on the street” by attacking the “liberals, intellectuals, and long hairs [who] have run the country for too long.”

The year’s final shock was caused by the outbreak of violence in Chicago, Illinois, during the Democratic National Convention. Anti-Vietnam War protesters clashed with police outside the convention as Vice President Hubert Humphrey secured the Democratic nomination on a prowar platform. The Democratic Party left the convention anything but united.

These troubling events augmented many Americans’ fear that the country was unstable, so Nixon prioritized addressing these concerns in his campaign. He stated, “We live in a deeply troubled and profoundly unsettled time. Drugs, crime, campus revolts, racial discord, draft resistance—on every hand we find old standards violated, old values discarded.” In his campaign, Nixon championed himself the hero of ordinary Americans: people who worked hard, paid their taxes, and loved their country. Nixon appealed to their desire for stability by promising a renewed government commitment to “law and order.”

Nixon used a “southern strategy” to win over the Democratic South. He chose a southern governor, Spiro T. Agnew of Maryland, as his running mate. Agnew was known for his tough stance against racial violence and urban crime. Nixon related to conservative southern voters by emphasizing states’ rights and limited federal government, values that southern Democrats often supported.

The election was very close, as Nixon won with only 43.4 percent of the popular vote. Wallace won a **plurality**, or more votes than any other candidate but not a

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majority, in five Southern states. Democrats retained control of Congress. Because Nixon lacked both a strong electoral mandate and a Republican majority in Congress, it was unclear whether he could effectively lead the country.



When Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he commented, “I think we just delivered the South to the Republicans for a long time to come.” His prediction began to materialize during the presidential election of 1968, when Democrat Hubert Humphrey won only one southern state. Segregationist George Wallace won five, and Republican Richard Nixon carried the remaining southern states.

Nixon’s Domestic Policies: A Conservative and Liberal Blend Because he won the presidency by a narrow margin, Nixon tried to appeal to both conservatives and liberals once in office. He appeased conservatives with a plan, called **New Federalism**, to reduce the size and power of the federal government. “After a third of a century of power flowing from the people and the states to Washington,” Nixon explained, “it is time for a New Federalism in which power, funds, and responsibility will flow from Washington to the people.”

The centerpiece of Nixon’s New Federalism was a proposal called **revenue**

sharing, in which the federal government distributed tax revenues to states and local governments to spend as they saw fit. State and local leaders approved of the increased funds and expanded spending powers mandated by revenue sharing. The practice also proved popular with conservatives.

Nixon proved less successful at shrinking the federal government. Although he did eliminate some of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society bureaucracy, including the Office of Economic Opportunity, Nixon expanded several social benefit programs. Additionally, he increased Social Security and enlarged the Food Stamp Program.

Nixon further increased the size and power of the federal government by approving new federal agencies, including the **Occupational Safety and Health Administration** (OSHA), which was charged with protecting workers on the job. He also established the **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) in order "to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment."

Nixon's most unexpected proposal was the **Family Assistance Plan**, which called for the government to support every poor American family with a minimum annual income. To be eligible to receive this support, family members capable of working would be required to seek employment. The Family Assistance Plan would have greatly expanded the number of families eligible for public assistance.

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The Nixon administration founded the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1971. This organization was created to ensure safe workplaces for Americans.

Nixon believed that this program would appeal to liberals, but he also hoped it would interest conservatives since the plan increased states' responsibility for running welfare programs. Instead, conservatives attacked the plan as a reward for laziness, while liberals denounced the proposed guaranteed income as insufficient. After much debate, Congress rejected the plan.

A Mixed Record on Civil Rights Nixon's civil rights policies were as mixed as the rest of his domestic agenda. To carry out his "southern strategy," Nixon sought to appoint conservative southern judges to the Supreme Court. His first two appointees had previously supported segregation, and the Senate rejected them both. When the Voting Rights Act was submitted for renewal in 1970, Nixon introduced changes to the legislation. Congress rejected his proposals, which would have reduced federal oversight of voting officials in the South. Nonetheless, Nixon re-signed the Voting Rights Act into law.

At the same time, Nixon sought to increase economic opportunities for African

Americans by expanding affirmative action. Under the Philadelphia Plan, he required construction companies working on federally funded projects to hire a specified number of minority workers. Nixon also encouraged “black capitalism” by providing federal assistance to black-owned businesses.



In response to the 1973 oil embargo, Congress enacted the National Maximum Speed Law, which required states to impose a 55 miles per hour speed limit on all roads in order to receive federal highway funds. For a short time, the lower speed limit seemed to increase highway safety. In 1995, Congress returned control of highway speed limits to the states.

Demonstrations Increase on City Streets and College Campuses The national economy struggled throughout Nixon’s presidency. In 1970, the United States entered a recession. During a normal recession, unemployment rises,

wages drop, and consumers spend less money. To encourage people to buy goods, companies lower their prices, driving business activity and eventually ending the recession. However, in the early 1970s, the nation experienced an economic condition known as **stagflation**, or an economic condition in which prices and the rate of unemployment increase simultaneously. So, Americans faced both a stagnant economy and rapid inflation.

Nixon responded to stagflation by first addressing the issue of inflation with a three-phase program. In Phase I, he froze wages and prices for 90 days. In Phase II, he created a new federal agency to strictly limit future wage and price increases. Before implementing Phase III, Nixon turned to unemployment, increasing government spending to filter more money into the economy. After unemployment rates fell, Nixon enacted Phase III of his inflation plan, replacing the strict wage and price controls with voluntary guidelines. But after these controls were lifted, cost of living skyrocketed, rising at the fastest rate since the end of World War II.

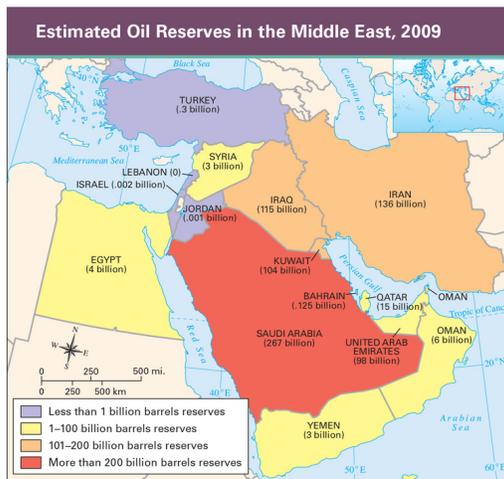
To make matters worse, oil-exporting nations in the Middle East stopped shipping oil to the United States in the fall of 1973. This oil embargo was established to protest U.S. support for Israel in conflicts between Israel and Arab nations. It resulted in a nationwide **energy crisis** in the United States. To conserve dwindling supplies, the government urged homeowners to lower their thermostats and reduced highway speed limits to 55 miles per hour. The crisis did not end until Middle Eastern nations lifted the embargo the following year.

2. President Nixon's Foreign Policy Record

Richard Nixon's early political career was characterized by his staunch opposition to communism. But as president, Nixon was determined to reshape America's containment policy. He hoped to transition the country from a period of continual conflict to one of stable coexistence between the two superpowers.

Nixon's Realistic Approach to Foreign Affairs Nixon centered his foreign policy on **realpolitik**, a German term meaning "the politics of reality," which refers to politics based on practical rather than idealistic concerns. Nixon's top foreign policy adviser, Henry Kissinger, supported the president's realistic approach.

As part of their realpolitik strategy, Nixon and Kissinger concluded that the United States could no longer bear full responsibility for defending the free world. Addressing the nation in 1969, the president outlined his plan, which became known as the Nixon Doctrine. In his address, Nixon promised that the United States would continue to protect its allies from Soviet or Chinese nuclear attacks. In other cases of aggression, however, the United States would expect the nation at risk to do more to help itself. The Vietnamization of Southeast Asia was one early application of the Nixon Doctrine.



Source: Energy Information Administration, www.eia.doe.gov, 2009.

The Middle East contains more than half of the world's proven crude oil reserves. Proven reserves are known deposits of petroleum that can be pumped at a reasonable cost. In the fall of 1973, Middle Eastern countries placed an oil embargo on the United States to protest its support of Israel.

Nixon also applied the Nixon Doctrine to the Persian Gulf region of the Middle East. Persian Gulf nations had become increasingly important to the United States since these countries contained vast deposits of oil. However, the United States had no military forces stationed in the region. Rather than move troops in, Nixon sent military aid to Iran and Saudi Arabia hoping that these allies would assume responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the region. Meanwhile, the United States continued to supply its closest ally in the Middle East, Israel,

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with military and financial aid.

The Nixon Doctrine's limitations were exposed when Israel was attacked by a coalition of Arab countries, led by Egypt and Syria, during the Yom Kippur holy days in October 1973. The Yom Kippur War only lasted three weeks, but it was long enough to trigger the oil embargo against the United States. Despite U.S. aid, Saudi Arabia backed the embargo to punish the United States for its long-standing support of Israel.

In foreign relations with the Soviet Union and China, Nixon and Kissinger pursued a policy of **détente**, French for a relaxation of tension or hostility. To many conservatives, détente seemed inconsistent with Nixon's earlier anticommunism. Some believed it violated U.S. interests and ideals. In contrast, most liberals approved any policy that might prevent a nuclear holocaust.

Opening Diplomatic Relations with China The policy of détente dramatically changed U.S. interactions with China. When Nixon took office in 1969, the United States did not engage in diplomatic relations with China, nor did it officially recognize the communist government that had ruled mainland China since 1949. Nixon believed isolating China was no longer worthwhile, and told Congress in 1970 that it was in the United States' national interest to improve "practical relations with Peking [Beijing]."

The president had several motivations for establishing better relations with China. One was China's sheer size—one-fifth of the world's population lived in China. Additionally, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union had shifted from communist comrades to hostile neighbors. Nixon believed that establishing friendly diplomatic relations with China might pressure Soviet leaders, who feared Chinese power, to cooperate with the United States.

A sporting event in April 1971 facilitated détente. That year, the Chinese government invited the U.S. table tennis team to play in Beijing. These 15 team members were the first Americans to visit Beijing since communists came to power in China. Chinese leaders regarded the American athletes as ambassadors. Meeting with the U.S. team, Chinese Premier Chou En-lai stated that the athletes' arrival in China marked a new chapter in U.S.-China relations.



President Nixon's historic trip to China in 1972 marked the first visit by a U.S. president to a communist country. Nixon attempted to establish friendly relations with Chinese leaders during his visit. Here, Nixon converses with Madame Mao, a prominent figure in China's communist party, at an opera.

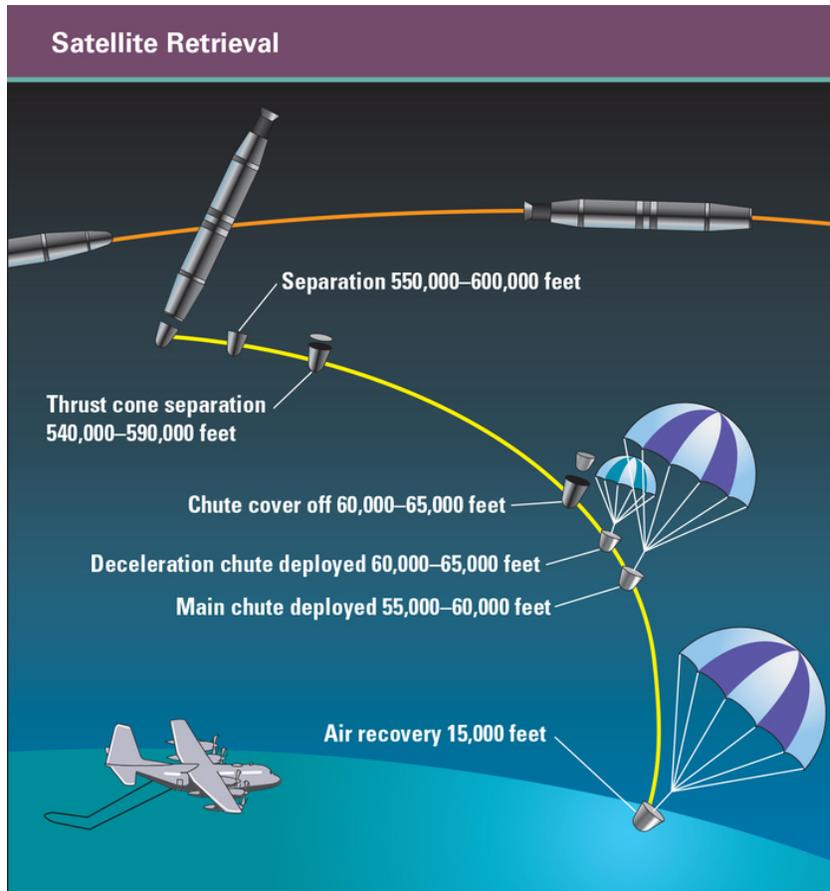
Shortly after the table tennis competition, Nixon announced proposals to initiate trade and travel between the two countries. Two months later, Kissinger secretly traveled to China, and in July 1971, Nixon announced that he would visit China the next year. The following February, Nixon and his wife, Pat, made an official state visit to China, during which Nixon pledged to establish formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. He described the trip as bridging “12,000 miles and twenty-two years of noncommunication and hostility.”

Nixon's historic visit marked a turning point in relations between the United States and the world's largest communist nation. After the trip, China's communist government, based in Beijing, assumed China's seat in the United Nations. Until this time, the Nationalist government of Taiwan had occupied China's seat. In 1973, the United States and China opened information offices in each other's capitals, and by 1979, the two countries were engaging in full diplomatic relations.

Working Toward Détente with the Soviet Union Nixon's belief that the USSR would consider détente if the United States improved relations with China proved accurate. In May 1972, just three months after visiting China, Nixon embarked on another historic journey, becoming the first American president to visit Moscow, the capital of the USSR. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev invited Nixon partly in

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response to Soviet concerns about U.S. involvement with China. Brezhnev's invitation also underscored the USSR's desire for U.S. economic and technological aid.



During the 1960s, U.S. and Soviet engineers equipped satellites with long-range cameras to build "spies in the sky." These spy satellites ejected canisters of undeveloped film back toward Earth. When a canister reached the upper atmosphere, an attached parachute opened, and a passing airplane would catch the canister in midair.

Brezhnev and Nixon were able to negotiate a trade deal that benefited both countries. The United States agreed to sell at least \$750 million worth of grain to the USSR over a three-year period. The Soviet Union was not growing enough grain to feed its population. The deal also benefited American farmers, who were happy to sell their surplus grain.

The two leaders then negotiated a much more difficult agreement that limited the number of nuclear missiles in each of their country's arsenals. This agreement

was enabled by spy satellites that had been developed in the 1960s, as cameras mounted on these satellites photographed enemy missile sites, allowing the two countries to monitor one another. The **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks** (SALT), later called SALT I, was a five-year agreement that limited the USSR to 1,618 missiles and the United States to 1,054. The United States accepted the smaller quantity because its missiles were more advanced than the USSR's. SALT I applied to both ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). Nixon and Brezhnev also signed a statement of "basic principles," which called on both of the superpowers to "do their utmost to avoid military confrontations."

Nixon was pleased with this initial agreement to halt the arms race. "The historians of some future age," he predicted, "will write . . . that this was the year when America helped to lead the world up out of the lowlands of constant war, and to the high plateau of lasting peace." But the hope that détente would create an era of cooperation between the superpowers dissolved over time. The USSR continued to support military struggles in the Third World, and began supplementing its missiles with multiple warheads in order to bypass treaty limits. As a result, conservative détente critics concluded that the Soviet Union should never be trusted again.



At the height of the Watergate scandal, Nixon released recordings of White House conversations about the break-in. On one tape, 18.5 minutes of silence were recorded over a particular conversation between Nixon and an aide. This cover-up fueled Americans' distrust in their political leaders. Here, a demonstrator calls for Nixon's impeachment.

3. Watergate Ends Nixon's Career

On June 17, 1972, five men broke into the offices of the Democratic National Committee, located in the Watergate building in Washington, D.C. A security guard caught the oddly-dressed burglars, who were fitted with suits and bugging, or wiretapping, devices. An investigation concluded that they had ties to Nixon's

reelection campaign.

Early news reports of the break-in did not prevent Nixon from winning the 1972 presidential election in a landslide. But the bungled burglary and cover up attempts would eventually lead to his downfall.

Abusing Power to Limit Dissent Although the Watergate burglars' intentions were unclear at first, their actions were part of a larger pattern of abusing presidential power. Nixon often viewed critics of his policies as threats to national security. Once elected, he developed an "enemies list" that included reporters, politicians, activists, and celebrities whom he considered unfriendly to his administration. He authorized the FBI to tap the phones of news reporters whom he felt were biased against him, as well as members of his own staff whom he distrusted. Because a judge had not authorized these wiretaps, they were unconstitutional. Thus, they represented an abuse of power.

Nixon was also gravely concerned about secrecy. He established his own White House security operation to investigate leaks of damaging information to the press. This group was nicknamed "the plumbers" because their primary task was to "plug" leaks. In 1971, the plumbers broke into the office of a psychiatrist whose clients included Daniel Ellsberg, a former defense analyst. Nixon suspected Ellsberg of leaking the Pentagon Papers, a set of secret military documents on the Vietnam War, to the *New York Times*. A year later, the White House plumbers carried out the botched Watergate burglary.

The Watergate Scandal Unfolds The Watergate break-in might have been forgotten after Nixon's reelection if not for the work of two *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. With the help of an anonymous source they called Deep Throat, Woodward and Bernstein discovered that Nixon's reelection campaign had paid the plumbers to bug the Democrats' offices. More details emerged when the plumbers faced trial in 1973. During the legal proceedings, one plumber implicated the Nixon administration in a cover-up, claiming the defendants had been paid to lie in order to protect government officials.

What the White House had originally attempted to dismiss as a "third-rate burglary" had become the **Watergate scandal**. As pressure to thoroughly investigate the scandal mounted, the Justice Department appointed Archibald Cox, a respected law professor, to serve as special prosecutor. A **special prosecutor** is a non-government lawyer appointed by the attorney general or

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Congress to investigate a federal official for misconduct while in office.

After the plumbers' trial, the Senate formed a committee to investigate the Watergate affair. In televised hearings, former White House counsel John Dean testified that Nixon had participated in efforts to cover up the White House's involvement in the Watergate break-in. Another former Nixon aide revealed that President Nixon had installed a recording system in the White House Oval Office to tape his every conversation. The aide insisted that if the committee listened to the tapes, it would uncover whether the president had ordered a cover-up.

In July 1973, the Senate Watergate Committee issued a **subpoena**, or court order, compelling Nixon to turn over several tapes. Nixon refused, invoking the right to withhold information known as **executive privilege**, a concept based in the constitutional separation of powers. Since the time of George Washington, presidents have argued that separation of powers grants the executive branch the right to operate without disclosing the details of every conversation and working document to the other government branches.

Over the next few months, Nixon battled both Special Prosecutor Cox and the Senate Committee over the release of the White House tapes. On October 20, 1973, in what became known as the "Saturday Night Massacre," Nixon fired Cox. The president's own attorney general resigned in protest.

For reasons unrelated to Watergate, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigned that same month. He left office to avoid facing trial on charges of accepting bribes and evading taxes while governing Maryland. Nixon appointed Gerald Ford, Republican minority leader of the House of Representatives, to be Agnew's successor.

In the July 1974 case *United States v. Nixon*, the Supreme Court ruled that the president must release his tapes to the Senate. Once Nixon complied, the recordings proved beyond a doubt that he had ordered a Watergate cover-up.



Rather than face impeachment, Richard Nixon resigned in August 1974. Most Americans felt that his downfall demonstrated the Constitution's effectiveness in regards to the separation of powers clause. The legislative branch spearheaded the investigation into Nixon's role in the Watergate cover-up, while the judicial branch forced Nixon to release his Oval Office tapes.

Nixon Resigns in Disgrace Late in July, the House Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment against Nixon, accusing him of obstruction of justice, abuse of power, and contempt of Congress. Rather than face trial and almost certain conviction in the Senate, Nixon announced his resignation on August 8, 1974. The next day, Vice President Gerald Ford was sworn in as president. "Our Constitution works," Ford said, "Our long national nightmare is over."

To unify the country and put the Watergate mess to rest, Ford issued Nixon a presidential pardon in September. Rather than settle controversy, the pardon ignited it. Some Americans wanted Nixon tried for his alleged crimes, while others preferred to move on from Watergate. Despite Ford's efforts to close this volatile chapter of presidential history, Americans remained deeply disillusioned with the nation's political leadership.

Summary

Richard Nixon won the presidency in 1968. While in office, he made strides toward easing the tensions of the Cold War. He also saw many of his domestic policies enacted. However, scandal forced him to resign in disgrace in 1974.

New Federalism When he assumed office, President Nixon was determined to devolve federalist power. He intended to reduce the size and power of the federal government in order to return power to the states. Key to his plan was revenue sharing, which allowed state and local governments to spend tax revenues as they saw fit.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration Despite his promise to shrink the federal government, Nixon developed social programs like OSHA, which works to improve health and safety in the workplace.

Environmental Protection Agency Another agency founded by the Nixon administration, the EPA, was created to protect Americans' health and the natural environment.

Energy crisis Nixon attempted to revive the stagnant economy by increasing spending while fighting inflation with wage and price controls. However, a nationwide energy crisis exacerbated economic difficulties.

Détente Nixon encouraged détente, a policy of relaxing Cold War tensions. In 1972, he visited both communist China and the Soviet Union.

Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty In 1972, Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signed SALT I, the first superpower treaty designed to limit the arms race.

Watergate scandal In 1972, burglars broke into Democratic headquarters in the Watergate building. The scandal over the ensuing cover-up led to Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974.

Differing Viewpoints: What Was Watergate's Most Important Legacy?



This newspaper from August 9, 1974, reports that Nixon resigned after the Watergate scandal. Vice President Gerald Ford took Nixon's place in office.

Decades after the Watergate break-in and Richard Nixon's resignation, Americans still debate the long-term effects of the scandal. Following are three different perspectives on the significance of the Watergate scandal.

Detroit Free Press: Watergate Showed That No One Is Above the Law

Even while the Watergate scandal was still unfolding, some argued that the response of Congress and the courts proved that no one, not even a president, is above the law. The following editorial appeared in October 1973, after an appeals court ordered Richard Nixon to turn over White House tapes to the special prosecutor:

In ringing terms, the court reiterated the fundamental principle that no man, not even the President, is above the law . . . If there is a single buttress [source of support] that has been strengthening the country as it has faced the Agnew and Watergate scandals, it has been the renewed demonstration that the laws do indeed apply to those in high places.

Sometimes the processes seem to work with painful slowness . . . Slowly, though, the nation's institutions—the courts, the federal prosecutors, the Justice Department—are calling the executive branch to account. The President is subject to the law . . .

The rule of law is being restored, and the public official who tries to

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ignore its claim does so at his own peril. This includes especially the President of the United States.

—*Detroit Free Press*, October 16, 1973

Lawrence Meyer: Watergate Damaged Confidence in the Presidency

On the tenth anniversary of the Watergate break-in, *Washington Post* writer Lawrence Meyer reflected on its impact. “Lives were disrupted, careers derailed, reputations shattered,” he reminded readers, continuing on to say,

Some have seen the stuff of tragedy in all of this—great men brought low. But the greater impact of Watergate was on us, on the loss of innocence for all but the most jaded and cynical among us.

The American people revere and respect no one so much as their president, believing that even men of humble gifts rise to the challenge and grow in stature when they enter the White House. Richard Nixon showed that the office does not always transform the man, that the man can also lower esteem for the office . . .

Watergate also fostered an air of cynicism about presidents and the presidency. . . .

. . . In 1973, 29 percent of Americans said they had a “great deal” of confidence in the executive branch and 18 percent had “very little.” By 1975, the percentages were reversed, and by 1980 only 12 percent had “a great deal” and 30 percent had “hardly any” confidence.

—*Washington Post*, June 17, 1982

Washington Post: Scandals Have Lost Their Power to Shock Us

Since Watergate, other scandals have erupted in Washington. The press now labels each one with a “-gate,” as in “Iran-Contra-gate” or “Travelgate.” In 1996, the *Washington Post* reported on the impact of these endless scandal charges on political campaigns and on the public:

Recent American history has plenty of ethical lows . . .

[But] Watergate remains the granddaddy of them all, the scandal by which all others leading to the Oval Office are judged.

“On a one-to-10 scale, Watergate was a 10 and everything else is a four,” said J. Brad Coker who runs the . . . Mason-Dixon Political Media Research polling firm. “Since Watergate, this country has had wannabe scandals that never amounted to much. Everything has a ‘-gate’ behind it to the point where everybody’s getting numb” . . .

Suzanne Garment, a political scientist and author of Scandal: The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics, said today’s scandals often reflect the standards of the electorate.

“In the olden days, there was more genuine shock at things, and genuine shock is hard to produce now. We’re not scandalized because the coin of scandal has been debased.”

—R. H. Melton and Bill MacAllister, “From Watergate to Whitewater, Ethics an Issue,” *Washington Post*, October 21, 1996

“Watergate” questions

1. **Why was Spiro Agnes forced to resign as Vice-President?**

2. **What investigation was conducted at the Watergate apartment complex?**

3. **What did that investigation reveal?**

4. **Did Nixon claim to have knowledge of the Watergate break-in?**

5. **What evidence did Nixon possess that he refused to turn over to the Senate investigators?**

6. **What right did Nixon claim in not turning over the evidence?**

7. **What does “executive privilege” mean?**

8. **What court case settled the argument over the tapes?**

9. **What was the Court’s decision?**

10. **What did the tapes reveal?**

11. **What did the House Judiciary Committee recommend?**

12. **What did Nixon do in August, 1974 – a major result of the Watergate controversy?**

13. **Who became President, and what did he grant Nixon?**

14. **What were some of the charges Nixon was facing from his role in the Watergate scandal?**
