

The Trend Toward Conservatism: 1972–1985

Section Overview

After the upheaval of the 1960s, Richard Nixon tried to take the nation into a new direction, but the Watergate affair led to his resignation. His successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, struggled with lingering economic troubles. In the 1980s, conservatives Ronald Reagan and George Bush came to power. After the cold war ended, the United States struggled to determine its new role in international relations.

Key Themes and Concepts

As you review this section, take special note of the following key themes and concepts:

Presidential Decisions and Actions How did President Nixon shape a new policy toward China and the Soviet Union?

Economic Systems How did economic problems of the 1970s present unique challenges to the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations?

Key People

Mao Zedong
Warren Burger
Gerald Ford

Jimmy Carter
Ronald Reagan
Mikhail Gorbachev

Key Terms

détente
Watergate affair
stagflation
Camp David Accords

supply-side economics
"Star Wars"
Iran-Contra affair

Key Supreme Court Cases

Engel v. Vitale (1962) *
Gideon v. Wainwright (1963) *
Miranda v. Arizona (1966)
Tinker v. Des Moines Community School District (1969)
New York Times v. United States (1971) *
Roe v. Wade (1973)
United States v. Nixon (1974)

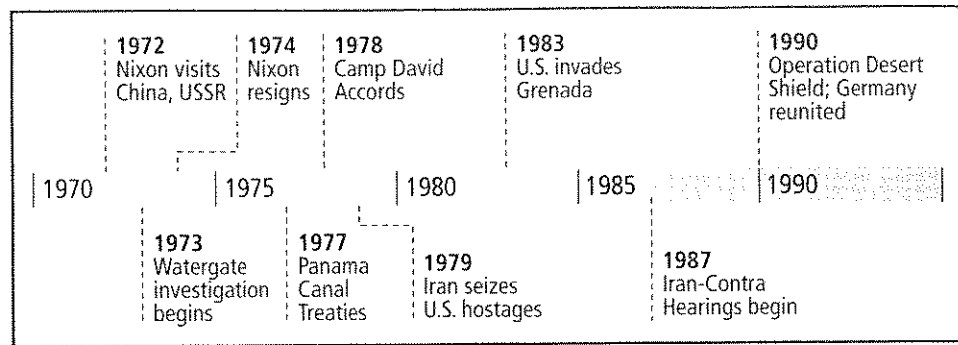
The Big Idea

Beginning in the early 1970s, conservatism replaced liberalism in American politics. During this period:

- President Nixon opened diplomatic relations with China and shaped a policy of détente toward the Soviet Union.
- President Ford pardoned President Nixon following his resignation over the Watergate affair.
- President Reagan supported a domestic program of New Federalism during the 1980s that was begun by President Nixon.

* For information on these cases, see the Landmark Supreme Court Cases chart in the Reference Section.

An Era of Conservatism, 1972–1990



From Cold War to Détente

Although President Nixon's main foreign policy objective was ending the Vietnam War, he had other foreign policy interests as well.

Nixon Doctrine

In 1969, Nixon announced what became known as the Nixon Doctrine. This doctrine stated that the United States would no longer provide direct military protection in Asia. Even though the Vietnam War was not yet concluded, the president promised Americans that there would be no more Vietnams for the United States.

A New Policy Toward China

President Nixon also adopted a new foreign policy toward China. The United States had not had diplomatic relations with the People's Republic since the 1949 Communist revolution.

Presidential Visit In 1971, Nixon stunned Americans by announcing that he had accepted an invitation to visit China. On February 21, 1972, Nixon arrived in China. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger accompanied the president on his peace mission.

Opening the Door After more than 20 years of hostility, President Nixon and Chinese leaders Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai agreed to open the door to normal diplomatic relations. Nixon's visit cleared the way for economic and cultural exchanges. American manufacturers, for example, now had a new market for their products. By following a policy toward China that was separate from the Soviet Union, Nixon underscored the splits that had occurred within communism. This visit ultimately reduced tensions between the United States and China.

A New Policy Toward the Soviet Union

Nixon balanced his openness with China by looking for ways to ease tensions with the Soviet Union, China's Communist rival.

Détente Nixon and Kissinger shaped a policy called détente. The goal of détente was to bring about a warming in the cold war. In contrast to President Truman's policy of containment, President Nixon's policy of détente was designed to prevent open conflict.

During the Nixon administration, the foreign policy of the United States was shaped by *Realpolitik*, a political philosophy favored by Kissinger. The meaning of *Realpolitik* is power politics. Therefore, in its dealings with China and the Soviet Union, the United States made its decisions based on what it needed to maintain its own strength—regardless of world opinion.

Turning Point

- Why is President Nixon's visit to China considered a turning point in U.S. foreign policy?

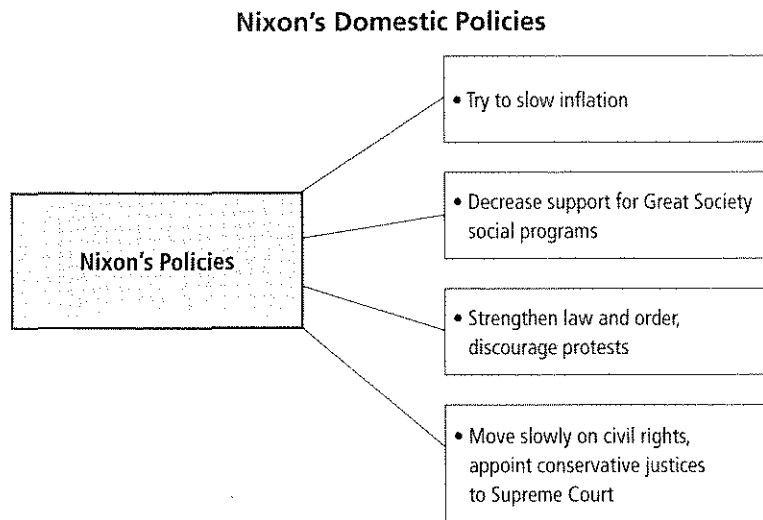
Key Themes and Concepts

Foreign Policy

- As secretary of state, Henry Kissinger favored the political philosophy of *Realpolitik*. In your own words, how would you define *Realpolitik*?

President Nixon underscored his willingness to pursue détente by visiting the Soviet Union in May 1972. He was the first president since World War II to make such a journey.

SALT While in Moscow, Nixon opened what became known as the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT). These talks led to a 1972 agreement called the SALT Agreement. The agreement set limits on the number of defensive missile sites and strategic offensive missiles each nation would keep.



Analyzing Documents

Based on the graphic organizer at left and your knowledge of social studies, would you characterize Nixon as a conservative or a liberal president? Provide two reasons to justify your answer.

- 1.
- 2.

Nixon's Domestic Policies

President Nixon was mainly interested in foreign affairs. He knew that he faced a Congress controlled by a Democratic majority. Because of the system of checks and balances, Nixon realized that it would be almost impossible to push Republican policies through Congress. Therefore, he limited his domestic policy goals.

Nixon's Domestic Initiatives

In 1970, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was created to ensure safe and healthful working conditions for all working Americans. OSHA assisted states in providing research, information, education, and training in the field of occupational safety and health.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), established in 1970, coordinated federal programs to combat pollution and protect the environment.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 was a major comprehensive federal law addressing topics related to air pollution. It was amended in 1977 to set new goals since many parts of the country did not meet the standards set by the 1970 act. It was amended again in 1990 to address problems such as acid rain, ground level ozone, stratospheric ozone depletion, and air toxins.

On July 12, 1973, President Nixon united several existing federal drug agencies into the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), which enforced federal drug laws and conducted investigations of illegal drugs overseas.

In 1974, the Energy Reorganization Act created the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to regulate the nuclear power industry and the Energy Research and Development Administration to manage the nuclear weapon, nuclear reactor, and energy development programs of the federal government. In 1977, under President Carter, the Department of Energy was established. Today, the department ensures energy security and safety.

Preparing for the Exam

- What did Nixon intend to accomplish with his policy of New Federalism?
- To what previous presidential policy was he reacting?

Key Themes and Concepts

Constitutional Principles

- Did these landmark Supreme Court cases provide more protection for individual rights or less protection?
- What effects did *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963), *Escobedo v. Illinois* (1964), and *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) have on people who were accused of a crime?

Key Themes and Concepts

Science and Technology

- Why was it significant that an American was the first person to set foot on the moon?

Key Themes and Concepts

Change

- How did passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment affect the number of voters in the United States?
- Would you say that this amendment made the United States more democratic or less democratic?

New Federalism

Like Eisenhower, Nixon wanted to reduce the role of the federal government and turn over more activities to the states. Nixon called this policy the New Federalism. He criticized Johnson's Great Society as too costly and tried to reduce involvement of the federal government in social welfare programs. To achieve this goal, Nixon instituted revenue sharing, a policy in which the federal government gave part of its income to the states to spend on social welfare as they saw fit.

Curbing Inflation

The Vietnam War had helped trigger inflation, which was one of Nixon's biggest domestic problems. During the 1968 election, Nixon had promised to end inflation and balance the budget. By the time he took office, prices were rising faster than they had in 20 years. Unemployment was rising too. At the same time, the nation's gross national product (GNP) was declining. To bring the economy under control, Nixon implemented a 90-day wage-price freeze in August 1971. He was the first president to impose mandatory wage-price controls in peacetime.

Nixon and the Supreme Court

Each President hopes to influence the decisions of the Supreme Court through the appointment of justices. However, the appointees do not always rule as a President might expect. For example, President Eisenhower regretted his appointment of Earl Warren to the Supreme Court, because Warren made many liberal decisions that opposed Eisenhower's conservative political views.

Nixon Appointees In 1969, Warren retired, and Nixon appointed Warren Burger as chief justice. During his administration, Nixon also had the opportunity to appoint three other justices. Nixon's appointees were all strict constructionists, believing that Congress and the President have only those powers specifically given to them by the Constitution. The "Nixon Court," however, did not overturn many of the liberal rulings of the 1960s, as Nixon had expected.

Other Domestic Events Under Nixon

Advances in the space program, an increase in the electorate, and additional rights movements occurred in the 1970s.

The Space Program

In 1969, American astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon. The triumph of seeing Armstrong plant a United States flag on the moon's surface marked a bright spot in an otherwise troubled decade.

The Twenty-sixth Amendment

In 1971, the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified. This amendment extended the vote to people ages 18 and older. By lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, this amendment added almost 12 million new voters to the American electorate. The ratification of this amendment has been seen as a result of the participation of the United States in the Vietnam War, where thousands of Americans between the ages of 18 and 21 died.

Women's Rights Movement

In the 1970s, more and more women enrolled in schools of law, medicine, engineering, and business, fields that had been traditionally reserved for men. However, full-time working women in 1971 were paid only 59 percent as much as men. Many of them also did not hold positions equal to their talents. As you read in Section 2, the Equal Rights Amendment failed to win ratification.

Consumer Rights Movement

A strong consumer rights movement also developed in the early 1970s to address abuses by major American industries. The movement was led by Ralph Nader, a young Washington lawyer who organized a protest in the 1960s against the automotive industry. Nader attracted a number of young volunteers, known as "Nader's Raiders," to his cause. They championed environmental and consumer protection.

The Watergate Affair

In 1972, the Republicans nominated Nixon for reelection. The Democrats selected George McGovern. President Nixon claimed credit for bringing down inflation and scoring foreign policy triumphs abroad. He swept to victory, carrying the largest popular majority in United States history. Yet less than two years later, Nixon resigned from office.

- **What happened** an illegal break-in to wiretap phones in the Democratic Party headquarters with electronic surveillance equipment
- **Where** Watergate Towers, an apartment complex in Washington, D.C.
- **When** June 17, 1972
- **Who** the Committee to Reelect the President, acting with the knowledge of several high-level Nixon advisers
- **Why** to secure information to undermine the Democratic campaign against Nixon

The Cover-Up

Police captured the "burglars," who carried evidence linking them to the White House. Nixon did not know about the plan until after it happened. However, he then ordered a cover-up, which was a crime under federal law.

The Investigation Reporters from the *Washington Post* probed into the case, now known as the **Watergate affair**, but their reports did not hinder Nixon's reelection. Then in 1973, the Senate set up a committee to look into "illegal, improper, or unethical activities" in the 1972 election. For more than a year, the Senate committee came closer and closer to implicating President Nixon.

Resignation of Agnew While the Watergate hearings were under way, the Justice Department charged Vice President Spiro Agnew with income tax evasion. Agnew resigned, and Nixon appointed Gerald R. Ford, the minority leader in the House of Representatives, as Vice President.

The Tapes In mid-1973, the Senate committee learned that the White House had kept tape recordings of key conversations between Nixon and his top aides. Nixon refused to turn over the tapes. During the summer, the committee opened the hearings to television. The televised proceedings had the appeal of a soap opera as millions of Americans watched.

Nixon Resignation The situation ended when the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to surrender the tapes in its ruling in *United States v. Richard Nixon*. Based on evidence in the tapes, the House Judiciary Committee began voting on articles of impeachment against the president. To avoid impeachment, Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, becoming the first President to do so. On noon of that day, Gerald Ford took the oath of office.

Gerald Ford became the first nonelected president. To fill the office of Vice President, Ford named Nelson Rockefeller, the former governor of New York.

Key Themes and Concepts

Reform Movements

The consumer rights movement of the 1960s, led by Ralph Nader, achieved important reforms, such as improved safety features in U.S.-built automobiles.

- What earlier movement in American history championed the cause of improving products available to the American people?

Reading Strategy

Reinforcing Main Ideas

The Watergate affair was a serious scandal that brought down a president.

- What was the reason behind the Watergate break-in?
- What was Nixon's role?
- How did Nixon's involvement in the Watergate affair lead to his resignation?
- How did the Watergate affair prove that the system of checks and balances works?

Turning Point

- Why is the Watergate affair considered a turning point in U.S. history?

Key Themes and Concepts

Presidential Decisions and Actions

Following a Senate investigation into the Watergate affair, President Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974. Vice President Gerald Ford became the first non-elected president in U.S. history. Although President Nixon was never charged with any crime, President Ford issued a pardon to him.

- Why do you think President Ford pardoned President Nixon?

Analyzing Documents

Based on the chart and your knowledge of social studies, answer the following questions.

- What happened to fuel prices in 1973 and 1974?
- What caused the change in fuel prices in those years?
- How might the change in fuel prices and in all consumer item prices be related?

From 1974 until 1977, the United States had both a President and Vice President who had not been elected to their offices but had been appointed. Such a situation had not occurred before and has not occurred since.

Significance of Watergate

Although Nixon was never charged with any specific crimes, President Ford pardoned him. Ford hoped to end what he called "our long national nightmare." Many of Nixon's advisers, however, were found guilty of crimes and sentenced to prison. The incident showed, as Ford put it, that "the Constitution works." The system of checks and balances had stopped Nixon from placing the presidency above the law. However, one impact of the Watergate Scandal was a decline in the public's trust in government.

The Ford Administration

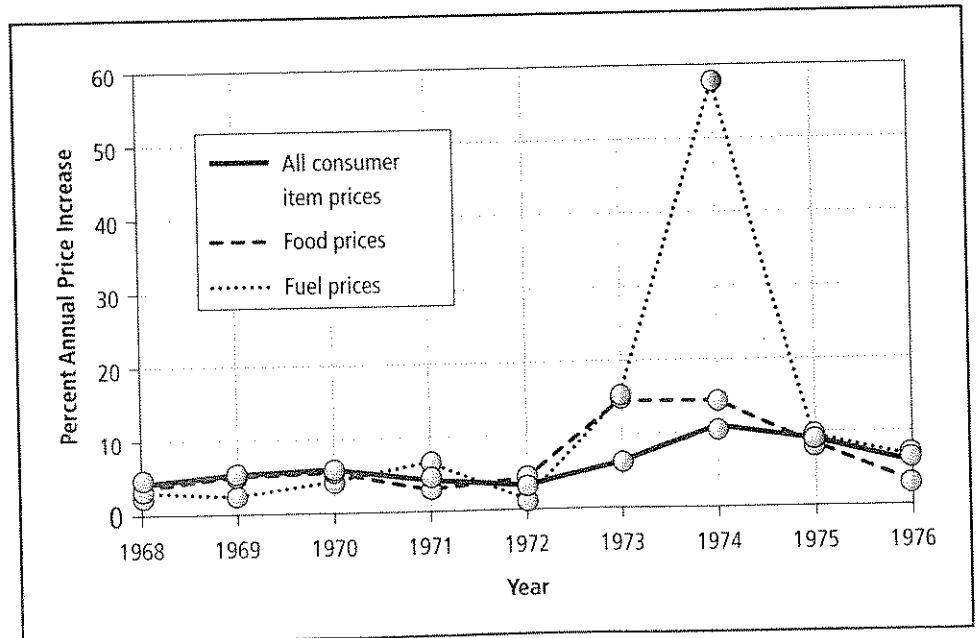
Many people called Nixon's administration the "Imperial Presidency" because of his disregard of the Constitution. Ford tried to rebuild the image of the President. However, the Watergate affair had disillusioned many Americans.

Ford's Domestic Policies

From the start, President Ford faced a number of domestic problems.

- **Nixon's Pardon** Many Americans questioned Ford's decision to pardon Nixon when so many of his advisers stood trial and were convicted and jailed.
- **Amnesty Plan** Ford stirred bitter debate when he offered amnesty to thousands of young men who avoided military service in Vietnam by violating draft laws, fleeing the country, or deserting the military.
- **Inflation** In 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) placed an oil embargo on the United States for its support of Israel. The price of oil and gasoline more than doubled, setting off a new round of inflation. Temporary rationing of gasoline and federal incentives to research energy alternatives helped ease shortages. Even so, Americans remained highly dependent on foreign oil. Inflation topped 10 percent, and the nation entered into its worst recession since World War II.

Rate of Inflation, 1968–1976



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States