

# The Stalelated Seventies

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1968–1980

*In all my years of public life, I have never obstructed justice. People have got to know whether or not their President is a crook. Well, I'm not a crook; I earned everything I've got.*

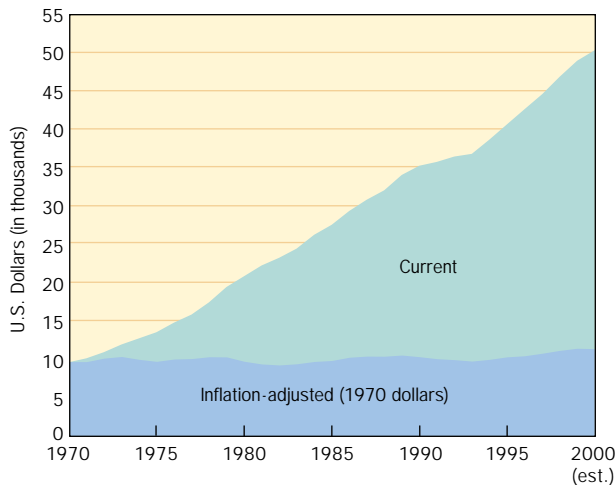
RICHARD NIXON, 1973

As the 1960s lurched to a close, the fantastic quarter-century economic boom of the post-World War II era also showed signs of petering out. By increasing their productivity, American workers had doubled their average standard of living in the twenty-five years since the end of World War II. Now, fatefully, productivity gains slowed to the vanishing point. The entire decade of the 1970s did not witness a productivity advance equivalent to even one year's progress in the preceding two decades. At the new rate, it would take five hundred more years to bring about another doubling of the average worker's standard of living. The median income of the average American family stagnated in the two decades after 1970, and failed to decline only because of the addition of working wives' wages to the family income (see the chart on p. 947). The rising baby-boom generation now faced the depressing prospect of a living standard that would be lower

than that of their parents. As the postwar wave of robust economic growth crested by the early 1970s, at home and abroad the "can do" American spirit gave way to an unaccustomed sense of limits.

## Sources of Stagnation

What caused the sudden slump in productivity? Some observers cited the increasing presence in the work force of women and teenagers, who typically had fewer skills than adult male workers and were less likely to take the full-time, long-term jobs where skills might be developed. Other commentators blamed declining investment in new machinery, the heavy costs of compliance with government-imposed safety and health regulations, and the general shift of the American economy from



### Median Family Income, 1970–2000

During the long post–World War II economic boom (from about 1950 to 1970), family incomes increased dramatically, but after 1970 “real,” or inflation-adjusted, incomes stagnated. Prosperity at the end of the twentieth century has led to recent increases. (Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics.)

manufacturing to services, where productivity gains were allegedly more difficult to achieve and measure. Yet in the last analysis, much mystery attends the productivity slowdown, and economists have wrestled inconclusively with the puzzle.

The Vietnam War also precipitated painful economic distortions. The disastrous conflict in Southeast Asia drained tax dollars from needed improvements in education, deflected scientific skill and manufacturing capacity from the civilian sector, and touched off a sickening spiral of inflation. Sharply rising oil prices in the 1970s also fed inflation, but its deepest roots lay in government policies of the 1960s—especially Lyndon Johnson’s insistence on simultaneously fighting the war in Vietnam and funding the Great Society programs at home, all without a tax increase to finance the added expenditures. Both military spending and welfare spending are inherently inflationary (in the absence of offsetting tax collections), because they put dollars in people’s hands without adding to the supply of goods that those dollars can buy.

When too many dollars chase too few goods, prices rise—as they did astonishingly in the 1970s. The cost of living more than tripled in the dozen years following Richard Nixon’s inauguration, in the longest and steepest inflationary cycle in American history.

Other weaknesses in the nation’s economy were also laid bare by the abrupt reversal of America’s financial fortunes in the 1970s. The competitive advantage of many major American businesses had

been so enormous after World War II that they had small incentive to modernize plants and seek more efficient methods of production. The defeated German and Japanese people had meanwhile clawed their way out of the ruins of war and built wholly new factories with the most up-to-date technology and management techniques. By the 1970s their efforts paid handsome rewards, as they came to dominate industries like steel, automobiles, and consumer electronics—fields in which the United States had once been unchallengeable.

The poor economic performance of the 1970s hung over the decade like a pall. It frustrated both policymakers and citizens who keenly remembered the growth and optimism of the quarter-century since World War II. The overachieving postwar generation had never met a problem it could not solve. But now a stalemated, unpopular war and a stagnant, unresponsive economy heralded the end of the self-confident postwar era. With it ended the liberal dream, vivid since New Deal days, that an affluent society could spend its way to social justice.

### **Nixon “Vietnamizes” the War**

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Inaugurated on January 20, 1969, Richard Nixon urged the American people, torn with dissension over Vietnam and race relations, to “stop shouting at one another.” Yet the new president seemed an unlikely conciliator of the clashing forces that appeared to be ripping apart American society. Solitary and suspicious by nature, Nixon could be brittle and testy in the face of opposition. He also harbored bitter resentments against the “liberal establishment” that had cast him into the political darkness for much of the preceding decade. Yet Nixon brought one hugely valuable asset with him to the White House—his broad knowledge and thoughtful expertise in foreign affairs. With calculating shrewdness he applied himself to putting America’s foreign-policy house in order.

The first burning need was to quiet the public uproar over Vietnam. President Nixon’s announced policy, called “Vietnamization,” was to withdraw the 540,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam over an extended period. The South Vietnamese—with American money, weapons, training, and advice—could then gradually take over the burden of fighting their own war.

The so-called Nixon Doctrine thus evolved. It proclaimed that the United States would honor its existing defense commitments but that in the future, Asians and others would have to fight their own wars without the support of large bodies of American ground troops.

Nixon sought not to end the war, but to win it by other means, without the further spilling of American blood. But even this much involvement was distasteful to the American “doves,” many of whom demanded a withdrawal that was prompt, complete, unconditional, and irreversible. Antiwar protesters staged a massive national Vietnam moratorium in October 1969, as nearly 100,000 people jammed the Boston Common and some 50,000 filed by the White House carrying lighted candles.

Undaunted, Nixon launched his own home-front counteroffensive. On November 3, 1969, he delivered a dramatic televised appeal to the great “silent majority,” who presumably supported the war. Though ostensibly conciliatory, Nixon’s appeal was in fact deeply divisive, as he sought to carve out a political constituency that would back his policies. His intentions soon became clear when he unleashed tough-talking Vice President Agnew to attack the “misleading” news media, as well as the “effete corps of impudent snobs” and the “nattering nabobs of negativism” who demanded quick withdrawal from Vietnam. Nixon himself in 1970

sneered at the student antiwar demonstrators as “bums.”

By January 1970 the Vietnam conflict had become the longest in American history and, with 40,000 killed and over 250,000 wounded, the third most costly foreign war in the nation's experience. It had also become grotesquely unpopular, even among troops in the field. Because draft policies largely exempted college students and men with critical civilian skills, the armed forces in Vietnam were largely composed of the least privileged young Americans. Especially in the war's early stages, African-Americans were disproportionately represented in the army and accounted for a disproportionately high share of combat fatalities. Black and white soldiers alike fought not only against the Vietnamese enemy but also against the coiled fear of floundering through booby-trapped swamps and steaming jungles, often unable to distinguish friend from foe among the Vietnamese peasants. Drug abuse, mutiny, and sabotage dulled the army's fighting edge. Morale appeared to have plummeted to rock bottom when rumors filtered out of Vietnam that soldiers were “fragging” their own officers—murdering them with fragmentation grenades.

Domestic disgust with the war was further deepened in 1970 by revelations that in 1968 American troops had massacred innocent women and children in the village of My Lai. Increasingly desperate for a quick end to the demoralizing conflict,

Nixon widened the war in 1970 by ordering an attack on Vietnam's neighbor, Cambodia.

### **Cambodianizing the Vietnam War**

For several years the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had been using Cambodia, bordering South Vietnam on the west, as a springboard for troops, weapons, and supplies. Suddenly, on April 29, 1970, without consulting Congress, Nixon ordered American forces to join with the South Vietnamese in cleaning out the enemy sanctuaries in officially neutral Cambodia.

Restless students nationwide responded to the Cambodian invasion with rock throwing, window smashing, and arson. At Kent State University in Ohio, jumpy members of the National Guard fired into a noisy crowd, killing four and wounding many more; at Jackson State College in Mississippi, the highway patrol discharged volleys at a student dormitory, killing two black students. The nation fell prey to turmoil as rioters and arsonists convulsed the land.

*A Marine Corps officer expressed the disillusion that beset many American troops in Vietnam:*

“For years we disposed of the enemy dead like so much garbage. We stuck cigarettes in the mouths of corpses, put *Playboy* magazines in their hands, cut off their ears to wear around our necks. We incinerated them with napalm, atomized them with B-52 strikes, shoved them out the doors of helicopters above the South China Sea. . . . All we did was count, count bodies. Count dead human beings. . . . That was our fundamental military strategy. Body count. And the count kept going up.”

Nixon withdrew the American troops from Cambodia on June 29, 1970, after only two months. But in America the Cambodian invasion deepened the bitterness between “hawks” and “doves,” as right-wing groups physically assaulted leftists. Disillusionment with “whitey’s war” increased ominously among African-Americans in the armed forces. The Senate (though not the House) overwhelmingly repealed the Gulf of Tonkin blank check that Congress had given Johnson in 1964 and sought ways to restrain Nixon. The youth of America, still aroused, were only slightly mollified when the government reduced draft calls and shortened the period of draftability, on a lottery basis, from eight years to one year. They were similarly pleased, though not pacified, when the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1971 lowered the voting age to eighteen (see the Appendix).

In the spring of 1971, mass rallies and marches once more erupted from coast to coast. New combustibles fueled the fires of antiwar discontent in June 1971, when *The New York Times* published a top-secret Pentagon study of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. These Pentagon Papers, “leaked” to the *Times* by former Pentagon official Daniel Ellsberg, laid bare the blunders and deceptions of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations,

especially the provoking of the 1964 North Vietnamese attack in the Gulf of Tonkin.

### **Nixon’s Détente with Beijing (Peking) and Moscow**

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As the antiwar firestorm flared ever higher, Nixon concluded that the road out of Vietnam ran through Beijing and Moscow. The two great communist powers, the Soviet Union and China, were clashing bitterly over their rival interpretations of Marxism. Nixon astutely perceived that the Chinese-Soviet tension afforded the United States an opportunity to play off one antagonist against the other and to enlist the aid of both in pressuring North Vietnam into peace.

Nixon’s thinking was reinforced by his national security adviser, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. Bespectacled and German-accented, Kissinger had reached America as a youth when his parents fled Hitler’s anti-Jewish persecutions. In 1969 the former Harvard professor had begun meeting secretly on Nixon’s behalf with North Vietnamese officials in Paris to negotiate an end to the war in Vietnam. He was meanwhile preparing the president’s path to Beijing and Moscow.

Nixon, heretofore an uncompromising anti-communist, announced to a startled nation in July 1971 that he had accepted an invitation to visit China the following year. He made his historic journey in February 1972. Between glass-clinking toasts and walks on the fabled Great Wall of China, he paved the way for improved relations between Washington and Beijing.

Nixon next traveled to Moscow in May 1972 to play his “China card” in a game of high-stakes diplomacy in the Kremlin. The Soviets, hungry for American foodstuffs and alarmed over the possibility of intensified rivalry with an American-backed China, were ready to deal. Nixon’s visits ushered in an era of *détente*, or relaxed tension, with the two communist powers. Détente resulted in several significant agreements. One product of eased relations was the great grain deal of 1972—a three-year arrangement by which the food-rich United States agreed to sell the Soviets at least \$750 million worth of wheat, corn, and other cereals.

Far more important were steps to stem the dangerously frantic competition in nuclear arms. The

first major achievement was an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) treaty, which limited each nation to two clusters of defensive missiles. The second significant pact was an agreement, known as SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks), to freeze the numbers of long-range nuclear missiles for five years. These accords, both ratified in 1972, constituted a long-overdue first step toward slowing the arms race. Yet even though the ABM treaty forbade elaborate defensive systems, the United States forged ahead with the development of “MIRVs” (multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles), designed to overcome any defense by “saturating” it with large numbers of warheads, several to a rocket. Predictably, the Soviets proceeded to “MIRV” their own missiles, and the arms race ratcheted up to a still more perilous plateau, with over sixteen thousand nuclear warheads deployed by both sides by the end of the 1980s.

Nixon’s *détente* diplomacy did, to some extent, deice the Cold War. Moreover, by checkmating and co-opting the two great communist powers, the president had cleverly set the stage for America’s exit from Vietnam. But the concluding act in that wrenching tragedy still remained to be played.

### **A New Team on the Supreme Bench**

Nixon had lashed out during the campaign at the “permissiveness” and “judicial activism” of the Supreme Court presided over by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Following his appointment in 1953, the jovial Warren had led the Court into a series of decisions that drastically affected sexual freedom, the rights of criminals, the practice of religion, civil rights, and the structure of political representation. The decisions of the Warren Court reflected its deep concern for the individual, no matter how lowly.

In *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965), the Court struck down a state law that prohibited the use of contraceptives, even among married couples. The Court proclaimed (critics said “invented”) a “right of privacy” that soon provided the basis for decisions protecting women’s abortion rights.

In 1963 the Court held (*Gideon v. Wainwright*) that all defendants in serious criminal cases were entitled to legal counsel, even if they were too poor to afford it. More controversial were the rulings in two cases—*Escobedo* (1964) and *Miranda* (1966)—that ensured the right of the accused to remain silent and to enjoy other protections when accused of a crime. In this way safeguards were erected against confessions extorted under the rubber hose and other torture. Critics of these decisions were loud in their condemnation of “crook coddling” and demanded that the courts handcuff criminals, not the “cops.”

Freedom of the press was also emphatically endorsed by the Warren Court in the case of *New York Times v. Sullivan* (1964). The Court ruled unanimously that public figures could sue for libel only if they could prove that “malice” had motivated their defamers. The decision opened a wide door for free-wheeling criticism of the public actions as well as the private lives of politicians and other officials.

Nor did the Court shy away from explosive religious issues. In two stunning decisions, *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp* (1963), it voted against required prayers and Bible reading in the public schools. These rulings were based on the First Amendment, which requires the separation of church and state, but to many religious believers they seemed to put the justices in the same bracket with atheistic communists. Cynics predicted that the “old goats in black coats” would soon be erasing “In God We Trust” from all coins.

Infuriating to many southerners was the determination of the Court, following the school-desegregation decision of 1954, to support black people in civil rights cases. Five southern state legislatures officially nullified the “sociological” Supreme Court decision, but they in turn were overruled by the high tribunal. In general, it held that the states could not deny to blacks the rights that were extended to whites. Conservatives maligned the Warren Court for not interpreting the Constitution but rewriting it, at the expense of states’ rights and other constitutional guarantees. It was acting, they

charged, too much like a legislature and not enough like a judicial body.

The Warren Court also struck at the overrepresentation in state legislatures of cow-pasture agricultural districts. Adopting the principle of one-man-one-vote, the Court in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) ruled that the state legislatures, both upper and lower houses, would have to be reapportioned according to the human population, irrespective of cows. States’ righters and assorted right-wingers raised anew the battle cry “Impeach Earl Warren.” But the legislatures grudgingly went ahead with reapportionment.

From 1954 on, the Court came under relentless criticism, the bitterest since New Deal days. Its foes made numerous but unsuccessful efforts to clip its wings through bills in Congress or through constitutional amendments. But for better or worse, the Court was grappling with stubborn social problems spawned by midcentury tensions, even—or especially—if duly elected legislatures failed to do so.

Fulfilling campaign promises, President Nixon undertook to change the Court’s philosophical complexion. Taking advantage of several vacancies, he sought appointees who would strictly interpret the Constitution, cease “meddling” in social and political questions, and not coddle radicals or criminals. The Senate in 1969 speedily confirmed his nomination of white-maned Warren E. Burger of Minnesota to succeed the retiring Earl Warren as chief justice. Before the end of 1971, the Court counted four conservative Nixon appointments out of nine members.

Yet Nixon was to learn the ironic lesson that many presidents have learned about their Supreme Court appointees: once seated on the high bench, the justices are fully free to think and decide according to their own beliefs, not according to the president’s expectations. The Burger Court that Nixon shaped proved reluctant to dismantle the “liberal” rulings of the Warren Court; it even produced the most controversial judicial opinion of modern times, the momentous *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, which legalized abortion (see p. 989).

### **Nixon on the Home Front**

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Surprisingly, Nixon presided over significant expansion of the welfare programs that conservative Republicans routinely denounced. He approved

increased appropriations for entitlements like Food Stamps and Medicaid, as well as for the largest federal welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which especially targeted single mothers of young children. Nixon also implemented a new federal program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which gave generous benefits to the indigent aged, blind, and disabled. He signed legislation in 1972 that raised Social Security old-age pensions and provided for automatic increases when the cost of living rose more than 3 percent in any year. Ironically, though designed to protect the elderly against the ravages of inflation, this "indexing" actually helped to fuel the inflationary fires that raged out of control later in the decade. Yet in the short run, Nixon's generous expansion of Great Society programs—along with continuing economic growth—helped reduce the nation's poverty rate to 11 percent in 1973, its lowest level in modern history.

Amid much controversy, Nixon also did the Great Society one better in his attack on racial discrimination. His so-called Philadelphia Plan of 1969 required construction-trade unions working on federal contracts in Philadelphia to establish "goals and timetables" for the hiring of black apprentices. Nixon may have been motivated in part by a desire to weaken the forces of liberalism by driving a wedge between blacks and trade unions. But whatever his reasoning, the president's new policy had far-reaching implications. Soon extended to all federal contracts, the Philadelphia Plan in effect required thousands of employers to meet hiring quotas or to establish "set-asides" for minority subcontractors.

Nixon's Philadelphia Plan drastically altered the meaning of "affirmative action." Lyndon Johnson had intended affirmative action to protect *individuals* against discrimination. Nixon now transformed and escalated affirmative action into a program that conferred privileges on certain *groups*. The Supreme Court went along with Nixon's approach. In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), the black-robed justices prohibited intelligence tests or other devices that had the effect of excluding minorities or women from certain jobs. The Court's ruling strongly suggested that the only sure protection against charges of discrimination was to hire minority workers—or admit minority students—in proportion to their presence in the population.

Together the actions of Nixon and the Court opened broad employment and educational opportunities for minorities and women. They also

opened a Pandora's box of protest. Critics assailed the new style of affirmative action as "reverse discrimination." They objected especially that such a sweeping policy had been created by executive order and judicial decision, not by democratically elected representatives in the legislature. Yet what other remedy was there, defenders asked, to offset centuries of prejudice and opportunity denied?

Among the other major legacies of the Nixon years was the creation in 1970 of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a companion body, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA). Their births climaxed two decades of mounting concern for the environment, beginning with the establishment in Los Angeles of the Air Pollution Control Office in 1950. Author Rachel Carson gave the environmental movement a huge boost in 1962 when she published *Silent Spring*, an enormously effective piece of latter-day muckraking that exposed the poisonous effects of pesticides.



Legislatively armed by the Clean Air Act of 1970, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, and similar laws, EPA and OSHA stood on the frontline of the battle for ecological sanity. They made notable progress in the ensuing decades on reducing automobile emissions and cleaning up befouled waterways and toxic waste sites. Impressed by the new environmentalist mood, Congress refused after 1972 to pay for any more of the huge irrigation projects that had watered—and ecologically transformed—much of the arid West over the preceding half century.

Worried about creeping inflation (then running at about 5 percent), Nixon overcame his distaste for economic controls and imposed a ninety-day wage and price freeze in 1971. To stimulate the nation's sagging exports, he next stunned the world by taking the United States off the gold standard and devaluing the dollar. These moves effectively ended the "Bretton Woods" system of international currency stabilization that had functioned for more than a quarter of a century after World War II.

Elected as a minority president, with only 43 percent of the vote in 1968, Nixon devised a clever but cynical plan—called the "southern strategy"—to achieve a solid majority in 1972. His Supreme Court nominations constituted an important part of his scheme. The southern strategy emphasized an appeal to white voters by soft-pedaling civil rights and openly opposing school busing to achieve racial balance. But as fate would have it, the southern strategy became superfluous as foreign policy dominated the presidential campaign of 1972.

## **The Nixon Landslide of 1972**

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Vietnam continued to be the burning issue. Nearly four years had passed since Nixon had promised, as a presidential candidate, to end the war and "win" the peace. Yet in the spring of 1972, the fighting escalated anew to alarming levels when the North Vietnamese, heavily equipped with foreign tanks, burst through the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating the two Vietnams. Nixon reacted promptly by launching massive bombing attacks on strategic centers in North Vietnam, including Hanoi, the capital. Gambling heavily on foreign forbearance, he also ordered the dropping of contact mines to blockade the principal harbors of North Vietnam. Either Moscow or Beijing, or both, could have

responded explosively, but neither did, thanks to Nixon's shrewd diplomacy. The North Vietnamese offensive finally ground to a halt.

The continuing Vietnam conflict spurred the rise of South Dakota senator George McGovern to the 1972 Democratic nomination. McGovern's promise to pull the remaining American troops out of Vietnam in ninety days earned him the backing of the large antiwar element in the party. But his appeal to racial minorities, feminists, leftists, and youth alienated the traditional working-class backbone of his party. Moreover, the discovery shortly after the convention that McGovern's running mate, Missouri senator Thomas Eagleton, had undergone psychiatric care forced Eagleton's removal from the ticket and virtually doomed McGovern's candidacy.

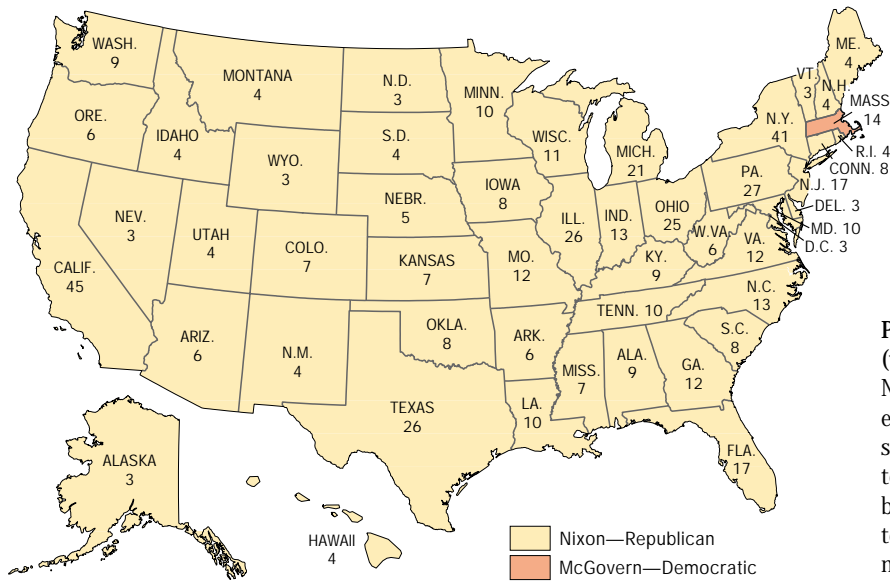
Nixon's campaign emphasized that he had wound down the "Democratic war" in Vietnam from some 540,000 troops to about 30,000. His candidacy received an added boost just twelve days before the election when the high-flying Dr. Kissinger announced that "peace is at hand" in Vietnam and that an agreement would be settled in a few days.

Nixon won the election in a landslide. His lopsided victory encompassed every state except Massachusetts and the nonstate District of Columbia. He piled up 520 electoral votes to 17 for McGovern and a popular majority of 47,169,911 to 29,170,383 votes. McGovern had counted on a large number of young people's votes, but less than half the 18–21 age group even bothered to register to vote. Nixon's claim that the election gave him an unprecedented mandate for his policies was weakened by Republican election losses in both the House and Senate.

## **Bombing North Vietnam to the Peace Table**

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The dove of peace, "at hand" in Vietnam just before the balloting, took flight after the election, when Nixon refused to be stampeded into accepting terms pocked with obvious loopholes. After the fighting on both sides had again escalated, he launched a furious two-week bombing of North Vietnam in an ironhanded effort to force the North Vietnamese back to the conference table. This attack was the heaviest of the war and resulted in substantial losses of America's big B-52 bombers. But this merciless pounding drove the North Viet-



**Presidential Election of 1972 (with electoral vote by state)**  
Nixon buried McGovern in this election, but when his administration soon thereafter began to sink in a swamp of scandals, bumper stickers appeared in Boston proclaiming, “Don’t blame me, I’m from Massachusetts.”

namese negotiators to agree to cease-fire arrangements on January 23, 1973, nearly three months after peace was prematurely proclaimed.

Nixon hailed the face-saving cease-fire agreements as “peace with honor,” but the boast rang hollow. The United States was to withdraw its remaining 27,000 or so troops and could reclaim some 560 American prisoners of war. The government of South Vietnam would be permitted to continue receiving limited U.S. support but no more U.S. fighting forces. An election was eventually to be held to determine the future of the country. The North Vietnamese were allowed to keep some 145,000 troops in South Vietnam, where they could be used to spearhead a powerful new offensive when the time seemed ripe. Ominously, the North Vietnamese still occupied about 30 percent of South Vietnam. The shaky “peace” was in reality little more than a thinly disguised American retreat.

## Watergate Woes

Nixon’s electoral triumph was soon sullied by the so-called Watergate scandals. On June 17, 1972, some two months before his renomination, a bungled burglary had occurred in the Democratic headquarters, located in the Watergate apartment-office

complex in Washington. Five men were arrested inside the building with electronic “bugging” equipment in their possession. They were working for the Republican Committee for the Re-election of the President—popularly known as CREEP—which had managed to raise tens of millions of dollars, often by secretive, unethical, or unlawful means. CREEP had also engaged in a “dirty tricks” campaign of espionage and sabotage, including faked documents, directed against Democratic candidates in the campaign of 1972.

The Watergate break-in was only the tip of an iceberg in a slimy sea of corruption that made the Grant and Harding scandals look almost respectable. Several prominently placed White House aides and advisers were forced to resign. Many were involved in the criminal obstruction of justice through tangled cover-ups or payments of hush money. By early 1974 twenty-nine people had been indicted, had pleaded guilty, or had been convicted of Watergate-related crimes.

The scandal in Washington also provoked the improper or illegal use of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency. Even the Internal Revenue Service was called upon by Nixon’s aides to audit or otherwise harass political opponents and others who had fallen into disfavor. A White House “enemies list” turned up that included innocent citizens who were to be hounded

or prosecuted in various ways. In the name of national security, Nixon's aides had authorized a burglary of the files of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, so great was the determination to destroy the man who had "leaked" the Pentagon Papers. This was the most notorious exploit of the White House "plumbers unit," created to plug up leaks of confidential information.

A select Senate committee, headed by the aging Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina, conducted a prolonged and widely televised series of hearings in 1973–1974. John Dean III, a former White House lawyer with a remarkable memory, testified glibly and at great length as to the involvement of the top echelons in the White House, including the president, in the cover-up of the Watergate break-in. Dean in effect accused Nixon of the crime of obstructing justice. But the committee then had only the unsupported word of Dean against weighty White House protestations of innocence.

### **The Great Tape Controversy**

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A bombshell exploded before Senator Ervin's committee in July 1973 when a former presidential aide reported the presence in the White House of "bugging" equipment, installed under the president's

authority. President Nixon's conversations, in person or on the telephone, had been recorded on tape without notifying the other parties that electronic eavesdropping was taking place.

Nixon had emphatically denied prior knowledge of the Watergate burglary or involvement in the cover-up. Now Dean's sensational testimony could be checked against the White House tapes, and the Senate committee could better determine who was telling the truth. But for months Nixon flatly refused to produce the taped evidence. He took refuge behind various principles, including separation of powers and executive privilege (confidentiality). But all of them were at least constitutionally dubious, especially when invoked to cover up crime or obstruct justice.

The anxieties of the White House deepened when Vice President Agnew was forced to resign in October 1973 for taking bribes or "kickbacks" from Maryland contractors while governor and also as vice president. President Nixon himself was now in danger of being removed by the impeachment route, so Congress invoked the Twenty-fifth Amendment (see the Appendix) to replace Agnew with a twelve-term congressman from Michigan, Gerald ("Jerry") Ford. His record in public life was politically respectable and his financial affairs proved to be above suspicion at a time when unquestioned honesty was in short supply.

Ten days after Agnew's resignation came the famous "Saturday Night Massacre" (October 20, 1973). Archibald Cox, a Harvard law professor appointed as a "special prosecutor" by Nixon in May, issued a subpoena for relevant tapes and other documents from the White House. A cornered Nixon thereupon ordered the firing of Cox and then accepted the resignations of the attorney general and the deputy attorney general because they refused to fire Cox.

### **The Secret Bombing of Cambodia and the War Powers Act**

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As if Watergate were not enough, the constitutionality of Nixon's continued aerial battering of Cambodia came under increasing fire. In July 1973 America was shocked to learn that the U.S. Air Force had already secretly conducted some thirty-five hundred bombing raids against North Vietnamese positions in Cambodia. They had begun in March 1969 and had continued for some fourteen months prior to the open American incursion in May 1970. The most disturbing feature of these sky forays was that while they were going on, American officials, including the president, were avowing that Cambodian neutrality was being respected. Countless Americans began to wonder what kind of representative government they had if the United States was fighting a war they knew nothing about.

Defiance followed secretiveness. After the Vietnam cease-fire in January 1973, Nixon openly carried on his large-scale bombing of communist forces in order to help the rightist Cambodian government. This stretching of presidential war-making powers met furious opposition from the public and from a clear majority in both houses of Congress, which repeatedly tried to stop the bombing by cutting off appropriations. But Nixon's vetoes of such legislation were always sustained by at least one-third-plus-one votes in the House. Finally, with appropriations running short, Nixon agreed to a compromise in June 1973 whereby he would end the Cambodian bombing six weeks later and seek congressional approval of any future action in that bomb-blasted country.

The years of bombing had inflicted grisly wounds on Cambodia. Incessant American air raids had blasted its people, shredded its economy, and revolutionized its politics. The long-suffering Cambodians soon groaned under the sadistic heel of Pol Pot, a murderous tyrant who dispatched as many as 2 million of his people to their graves. He was forced from power, ironically enough, only by a full-dress Vietnamese invasion in 1978, followed by a military occupation that dragged on for a decade.

Congressional opposition to the expansion of presidential war-making powers by Johnson and Nixon led to the War Powers Act in November 1973. Passed over Nixon's veto, it required the president to report to Congress within forty-eight hours after committing troops to a foreign conflict or "substantially" enlarging American combat units in a foreign

*The Washington Post (July 19, 1973) carried this news item:*

“American B-52 bombers dropped about 104,000 tons of explosives on Communist sanctuaries in neutralist Cambodia during a series of raids in 1969 and 1970. . . . The secret bombing was acknowledged by the Pentagon the Monday after a former Air Force major . . . described how he falsified reports on Cambodian air operations and destroyed records on the bombing missions actually flown.”

country. Such a limited authorization would have to end within sixty days unless Congress extended it for thirty more days.

Compelling Nixon to end the bombing of Cambodia in August 1973 was but one manifestation of what came to be called the “New Isolationism.” The draft had ended in January 1973, although it was retained on a standby basis. Future members of the armed forces were to be well-paid volunteers—a change that greatly eased tensions among youth. Insistent demands arose in Congress for reducing American armed forces abroad, especially because some 300,000 remained in Europe more than a quarter of a century after Hitler’s downfall. The argument often heard was that the Western European countries, with more population than the Soviet Union, ought by now to be willing and able to provide for their own defense against the forces of communism. But President Nixon, fearful of a weakened hand in the high-stakes game of power politics, headed off all serious attempts at troop reduction.

### **The Arab Oil Embargo and the Energy Crisis**

Adding to Nixon’s problems, the long-rumbling Middle East erupted anew in October 1973, when the rearmed Syrians and Egyptians unleashed surprise attacks on Israel in an attempt to regain the territory they had lost in the Six-Day War of 1967. With the Israelis in desperate retreat, Kissinger, who had become secretary of state in September, hastily flew to Moscow in an effort to restrain the Soviets, who were

arming the attackers. Believing that the Kremlin was poised to fly combat troops to the Suez area, Nixon placed America’s nuclear forces on alert and ordered a gigantic airlift of nearly \$2 billion in war materials to the Israelis. This assistance helped save the day, as the Israelis aggressively turned the tide and had stormed to a stone’s throw from Cairo when American diplomacy brought about an uneasy cease-fire.

America’s policy of backing Israel against its oil-rich neighbors exacted a heavy penalty. Late in October 1973, the Arab nations suddenly clamped an embargo on oil for the United States and for other countries supporting Israel. Americans had to suffer through a long, cold winter of lowered thermostats and speedometers. Lines of automobiles at service stations lengthened as tempers shortened and a business recession deepened.

The “energy crisis” suddenly energized a number of long-deferred projects. Congress approved a costly Alaska pipeline and a national speed limit of fifty-five miles per hour to conserve fuel. Agitation mounted for heavier use of coal and nuclear power, despite the environmental threat they posed.

The five months of the Arab “blackmail” embargo in 1974 clearly signaled the end of an era—the era of cheap and abundant energy. A twenty-year surplus of world oil supplies had masked the fact that since 1948 the United States had been a net importer of oil. American oil production peaked in 1970 and then began an irreversible decline. Blissfully unaware of their dependence on foreign suppliers, Americans, like revelers on a binge, had more than tripled their oil consumption since the end of World War II. The number of automobiles increased 250 percent between 1949 and 1972, and Detroit’s engineers gave nary a thought to building more fuel-efficient engines.

By 1974 America was oil addicted and extremely vulnerable to any interruption in supplies. That stark fact colored the diplomatic and economic history of the 1980s and 1990s. The Middle East loomed ever larger on the map of America’s strategic interests, until the United States in 1990 at last found itself pulled into a shooting war with Iraq to protect its oil supplies.

The Middle Eastern sheiks, flexing their economic muscles through OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), approximately quadrupled their price for crude oil after lifting the embargo in 1974. Huge new oil bills wildly disrupted the U.S. balance of international trade and added further fuel to the already raging fires of inflation.

The United States took the lead in forming the International Energy Agency in 1974 as a counterweight to OPEC, and various sectors of the economy, including Detroit's carmakers, began their slow, grudging adjustment to the rudely dawning age of energy dependency. But full reconciliation to that uncomfortable reality was a long time coming.

## **The Unmaking of a President**

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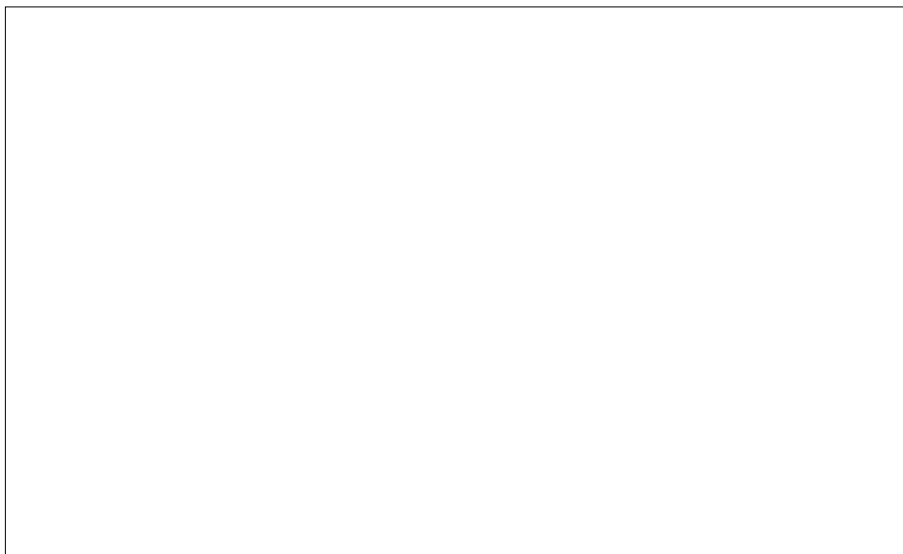
Political tribulations added to the nation's cup of woe in 1974. The continuing impeachment inquiry cast damning doubts on Nixon's integrity. Responding at last to the House Judiciary Committee's demand for the Watergate tapes, Nixon agreed in the spring of 1974 to the publication of "relevant" portions of the tapes, declaring that these would vindicate him. But substantial sections of the wanted tapes were missing, and Nixon's frequent obscenities were excised with the phrase "expletive deleted." Confronted with demands for the rest of the material, Nixon flatly refused. On July 24, 1974, the president suffered a disastrous setback when the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that "executive privilege" gave him no right to withhold from the special prosecutor portions of tapes relevant to criminal activity. Skating on thin ice over hot water, Nixon reluctantly complied.

The House Judiciary Committee pressed ahead with its articles of impeachment. The key vote came

late in July 1974, when the committee adopted the first article, which charged obstruction of "the administration of justice," including Watergate-related crimes. Two other articles were later approved by the committee accusing Nixon of having abused the powers of his office and of having shown contempt of Congress by ignoring lawful subpoenas for relevant tapes and other evidence.

Seeking to soften the impact of inevitable disclosure, Nixon voluntarily took a step, on August 5, 1974, that had a devastating effect on what remained of his credibility. He now made public three subpoenaed tapes of conversations with his chief aide on June 23, 1972. One of them had him giving orders, six days after the Watergate break-in, to use the CIA to hold back an inquiry by the FBI. Now Nixon's own tape-recorded words convicted him of having been an active party to the attempted cover-up, in itself the crime of obstructing justice. More than that, he had solemnly told the American people on television that he had known nothing of the Watergate whitewash until about nine months later.

The public backlash proved to be overwhelming. Republican leaders in Congress concluded that the guilty and unpredictable Nixon was a loose cannon on the deck of the ship of state. They frankly informed the president that his impeachment by the full House and removal by the Senate were foregone conclusions. They made it clear that he would best serve his nation, his party, and himself by resigning with honor, or a semblance of it. If convicted by the Senate, he would lose all his normal retirement



## **The First Unelected President**

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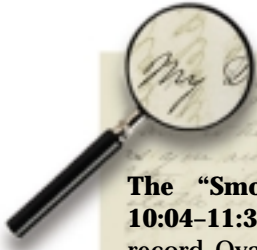
Gerald Rudolph Ford, the first man to be made president solely by a vote of Congress, entered the besmirched White House in August 1974 with serious handicaps. He was widely—and unfairly—suspected of being little more than a dim-witted former college football player. President Johnson had sneered that “Jerry” was so lacking in brainpower that he could not walk and chew gum at the same time. Worse, Ford had been selected, not elected, vice president, following Spiro Agnew’s resignation in disgrace. The sour odor of illegitimacy hung about this president without precedent.

Then, out of a clear sky, Ford granted a complete pardon to Nixon for any crimes he may have committed as president, discovered or undiscovered. Democrats were outraged. They wanted iron-toothed justice, even vengeance. They heatedly charged, without persuasive evidence, that Ford was carrying out a “buddy deal” that had been cooked up when Nixon nominated him for the vice presidency. Ford explained that he only wanted to end Nixon’s private agony, heal the festering wounds in the body

benefits; if he resigned he could retain them—more than \$150,000 a year—and retire in royal splendor.

Left with no better choice, Nixon choked back his tears and announced his resignation in a dramatic television appearance on August 8, 1974. Few presidents had flown so high, and none had sunk so low. In his Farewell Address, Nixon admitted having made some “judgments” that “were wrong” but insisted that he had always acted “in what I believed at the time to be the best interests of the nation.” Unconvinced, countless Americans would change the song “Hail to the Chief” to “Jail to the Chief.”

The nation had survived a wrenching constitutional crisis, which proved that the impeachment machinery forged by the Founding Fathers could work when public opinion overwhelmingly demanded that it be implemented. The principles that no person is above the law and that presidents must be held to strict accountability for their acts were strengthened. The United States of America, on the eve of its two-hundredth birthday as a republic, had given an impressive demonstration of self-discipline and self-government to the rest of the world.



## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

**The “Smoking Gun” Tape, June 23, 1972, 10:04–11:39 A.M.** The technological capability to record Oval Office conversations combined with Richard Nixon’s obsession with documenting his presidency to give the public—and the Senate committee investigating his role in the break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Office Tower—rare access to personal conversations between the president and his closest advisers. This tape, which undeniably exposed Nixon’s central role in constructing a “cover-up” of the Watergate break-in, was made on Nixon’s first day back in Washington after the botched burglary of June 17, 1972. In this conversation with White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, Nixon devised a plan to block a widening F.B.I. investigation by instructing the director of the C.I.A. to deflect any further F.B.I. snooping on the grounds that it would endanger sensitive C.I.A. operations. Nixon refused to turn over this and other tapes to Senate investigators until so ordered by the Supreme Court on July 24, 1974. Within four days of its release on August 5, Nixon was forced to resign. After eighteen months of protesting his innocence of the crime and his ignorance of any effort to obstruct justice, Nixon was finally undone by the evidence in this incriminating “smoking gun” tape. While tapes documented two straight years of Nixon’s Oval Office conversations, other presidents, such as Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon Baines Johnson, recorded important meetings and crisis deliberations. Since Watergate, however, it is unlikely that any president has permitted extensive tape recording, depriving historians of a unique insight into the inner-workings of the White House. Should taped White House discussions be part of the public record of a presidency, and if so, who should have access to them? What else might historians learn from a tape like this one, besides analyzing the Watergate cover-up?

Haldeman: . . . yesterday, they concluded it was not the White House, but are now convinced it is a CIA thing, so the CIA turn off would . . .

President: Well, not sure of their analysis, I’m not going to get that involved. I’m (unintelligible).

Haldeman: No, sir. We don’t want you to.

President: You call them in.

President: Good. Good deal! Play it tough. That’s the way they play it and that’s the way we are going to play it.

Haldeman: O.K. We’ll do it.

President: Yeah, when I saw that news summary item, I of course knew it was a bunch of crap, but I thought ah, well it’s good to have them off on this wild hair thing because when they start bugging us, which they have, we’ll know our little boys will not know how to handle it. I hope they will though. You never know. Maybe, you think about it. Good!

President: When you get in these people when you . . . get these people in, say: “Look, the problem is that this will open the whole, the whole Bay of Pigs thing, and the President just feels that” ah, without going into the details . . . don’t, don’t lie to them to the extent to say there is no involvement, but just say this is sort of a comedy of errors, bizarre, without getting into it, “the President believes that it is going to open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again. And, ah because these people are plugging for, for keeps and that they should call the FBI in and say that we wish for the country, don’t go any further into this case,” period!



politic, and let the country get on with its business, undistracted by a possibly sensational trial. But lingering suspicions about the circumstances of the pardon cast a dark shadow over Ford's prospects of being elected president in his own right in 1976.

Ford at first sought to enhance the so-called *détente* with the Soviet Union that Nixon had crafted. In July 1975 President Ford joined leaders from thirty-four other nations in Helsinki, Finland, to sign several sets of historic accords. One group of agreements officially wrote an end to World War II by finally legitimizing the Soviet-dictated boundaries of Poland and other Eastern European countries. In return, the Soviets signed a “third basket” of agreements, guaranteeing more liberal exchanges of people and information between East and West and protecting certain basic “human rights.” The Helsinki accords kindled small dissident movements in Eastern Europe and even in the USSR itself, but the Soviets soon poured ice water on these sputtering flames of freedom. Moscow's restrictions on Jewish emigration had already, in December 1974, prompted Congress to add punitive restrictions to a U.S.-Soviet trade bill.

Western Europeans, especially the West Germans, cheered the Helsinki conference as a milestone of *détente*. But in the United States, critics increasingly charged that *détente* was proving to be a one-way street. American grain and technology

flowed across the Atlantic to the USSR, and little of comparable importance flowed back. And Soviet ships and planes continued to haul great quantities of arms and military technicians to procommunist forces around the globe.

Despite these difficulties, Ford at first clung stubbornly to *détente*. But the American public's fury over Moscow's double-dealing so steadily mounted that by the end of his term, the president was refusing even to pronounce the word *détente* in public. The thaw in the Cold War was threatening to prove chillingly brief.

### **Defeat in Vietnam**

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Early in 1975 the North Vietnamese gave full throttle to their long-expected drive southward. President Ford urged Congress to vote still more weapons for Vietnam, but his plea was in vain, and without the crutch of massive American aid, the South Vietnamese quickly and ingloriously collapsed.

The dam burst so rapidly that the remaining Americans had to be frantically evacuated by helicopter, the last of them on April 29, 1975. Also rescued were about 140,000 South Vietnamese, most of them so dangerously identified with the Americans that they feared a bloodbath by the victorious com-

munists. Ford compassionately admitted these people to the United States, where they added further seasoning to the melting pot. Eventually some 500,000 arrived (see "Makers of America: The Vietnamese," pp. 964–965).

America's longest, most frustrating war thus ended not with a bang but a whimper. In a technical sense, the Americans had not lost the war; their client nation had. The United States had fought the North Vietnamese to a standstill and had then withdrawn its troops in 1973, leaving the South Vietnamese to fight their own war, with generous shipments of costly American aircraft, tanks, and other munitions. The estimated cost to America was \$118 billion in current outlays, together with some 56,000 dead and 300,000 wounded. The people of the United States had in fact provided just about everything, except the will to win—and that could not be injected by outsiders.

Technicalities aside, America had lost more than a war. It had lost face in the eyes of foreigners, lost its own self-esteem, lost confidence in its military prowess, and lost much of the economic muscle that had made possible its global leadership since World War II. Americans reluctantly came to realize that their power as well as their pride had been deeply wounded in Vietnam and that recovery would be slow and painful.

## Feminist Victories and Defeats

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As the army limped home from Vietnam, there was little rejoicing on the college campuses, where demonstrators had once braved tear gas and billy clubs to denounce the war. The antiwar movement, like many of the other protest movements that convulsed the country in the 1960s, had long since splintered and stalled. One major exception to this pattern stood out: although they had their differences, American feminists showed vitality and momentum. They won legislative and judicial victories and provoked an intense rethinking of gender roles. (On the roots of this movement, see "Makers of America: The Feminists," pp. 968–969.)

Thousands of women marched in the Women's Stride for Equality on the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage in 1970. In 1972 Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments, prohibiting sex discrimination in any federally assisted educational program or activity. Perhaps this act's biggest impact was to create opportunities for girls' and women's athletics at schools and colleges, giving birth to a new "Title IX generation" that would reach maturity in the 1980s and 1990s and help professionalize women's sports as well. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution won congressional approval

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Vietnamese

At first glance the towns of Westminster and Fountain Valley, California, seem to resemble other California communities nearby. Tract homes line residential streets; shopping centers flank the busy thoroughfares. But these are no ordinary American suburbs. Instead they make up “Little Saigons,” vibrant outposts of Vietnamese culture in the contemporary United States. Shops offer exotic Asian merchandise; restaurants serve such delicacies as lemongrass chicken. These neighborhoods, living reminders of America’s anguish in Vietnam, are a rarely acknowledged consequence of that sorrowful conflict.

Before South Vietnam fell in 1975, few Vietnamese ventured across the Pacific. Only in 1966 did U.S. immigration authorities even designate “Vietnamese” as a separate category of newcomers, and most early immigrants were the wives and children of U.S. servicemen. But as the communists

closed in on Saigon, many Vietnamese, particularly those who had worked closely with American or South Vietnamese authorities, feared for their future. Gathering together as many of their extended-family members as they could assemble, thousands of Vietnamese fled for their lives. In a few hectic days in 1975, some 140,000 Vietnamese escaped before the approaching gunfire, a few dramatically clinging to the bottoms of departing helicopters. From Saigon they were conveyed to military bases in Guam and the Philippines. Another 60,000 less fortunate Vietnamese escaped at the same time over land and sea to Hong Kong and Thailand, where they waited nervously for permission to move on. To accommodate the refugees, the U.S. government set up camps across the nation. Arrivals were crowded into army barracks affording little room and less privacy. These were boot camps not for military service but for assimilation into American society. A rigorous program trained the Vietnamese in English, forbade children from speaking their native language in the classroom, and even immersed them in American slang. Many resented this attempt to mold them, to strip them of their culture.

Their discontent boiled over when authorities prepared to release the refugees from camps and board them with families around the nation. The resettlement officials had decided to find a sponsor for each Vietnamese family—an American family that would provide food, shelter, and assistance for the refugees until they could fend for themselves. But the Vietnamese people cherish their traditional extended families—grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins living communally with parents and children. Few American sponsors would accommodate a large extended family; fewer Vietnamese families would willingly separate.

The refugees were dispersed to Iowa, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Washington, and Califor-

nia. But the settlement sites, many of them tucked away in rural districts, offered scant economic opportunities. The immigrants, who had held mainly skilled or white-collar positions in Vietnam, bristled as they were herded into menial labor. As soon as they could, they relocated, hastening to established Vietnamese enclaves around San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Dallas.

Soon a second throng of Vietnamese immigrants pushed into these Little Saigons. Fleeing from the ravages of poverty and from the oppressive communist government, these stragglers had crammed themselves and their few possessions into little boats, hoping to reach Hong Kong or get picked up by ships. Eventually many of these “boat people” reached the United States. Usually less educated than the first arrivals and receiving far less resettlement aid from the U.S. government, they were, however, more willing to start at the bottom. Today these two groups total more than half a million people. Differing in experience and expectations, the Vietnamese share a new home in a strange land. Their uprooting is an immense, unreckoned consequence of America’s longest war.

nists blamed the women's movement for the rising divorce rate, which tripled between 1960 and 1976. And the Catholic Church and the religious right organized a powerful grassroots movement to oppose the legalization of abortion.

For many feminists, the most bitter defeat was the death of the ERA. With ratification by thirty-eight state legislatures, the amendment would have become part of the Constitution. Conservative spokeswoman Phyllis Schlafly led the campaign to stop the ERA. Its advocates, she charged, were just “bitter women seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems.” In 1979 Congress extended the deadline for ratification, but ERA opponents dug in their heels. The amendment died in 1982, three states short of success.

### **The Seventies in Black and White**

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Although the civil rights movement had fractured, race remained an explosive issue in the 1970s. The Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) blindsided school integrationists when it ruled that desegregation plans could not require students to move across school-district lines. The decision effectively exempted suburban districts from shouldering any part of the burden of desegregating inner-city schools, thereby reinforcing “white flight” from cities to suburbs. By the same token, the decision distilled all the problems of desegregation into the least prosperous districts, often pitting the poorest, most disadvantaged elements of the white and black communities against one another. Boston and other cities were shaken to their foundations by attempts to implement school-desegregation plans under these painful conditions.

Affirmative action programs also remained highly controversial. White workers who were denied advancement and white students who were refused college admission continued to raise the cry of “reverse discrimination.” They charged that their rights had been violated by employers and admissions officers who put more weight on racial or ethnic background than on ability or achievement.

One white Californian, Allan Bakke, made headlines in 1978 when the Supreme Court, by the narrowest of margins (five to four) upheld his claim that his application to medical school had been turned down because of an admissions program that partially favored minority applicants. In a tortured deci-

in 1972. It declared, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” Twenty-eight states quickly ratified the amendment, first proposed by suffragists in 1923. Hopes rose that the ERA might soon become the law of the land.

Even the Supreme Court seemed to be on the movement's side. In *Reed v. Reed* (1971) and *Fron-tiero v. Richardson* (1973), the Court challenged sex discrimination in legislation and employment. And in the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Court struck down laws prohibiting abortion, arguing that a woman's decision to terminate a pregnancy was protected by the constitutional right of privacy.

But the feminist movement soon faced a formidable backlash. In 1972 President Nixon vetoed a proposal to set up nationwide public day care, saying it would weaken the American family. Antifemi-

sion, reflecting the troubling moral ambiguities and insoluble political complexities of this issue, the Court ordered the University of California at Davis medical school to admit Bakke, and declared that preference in admissions could not be given to members of any group, minority or majority, on the basis of ethnic or racial identity alone. Yet at the same time, the Court said that racial factors might be taken into account in a school's overall admissions policy. Among the dissenters on the sharply divided bench was the Court's only black justice, Thurgood Marshall. He warned in an impassioned opinion that the denial of racial preferences might sweep away years of progress by the civil rights movement. But many conservatives cheered the decision as affirming the principle that justice is colorblind.

One of the most remarkable developments of the 1970s was the resurgence of Native American political power. Inspired by the civil rights movement, American Indians learned to use the courts and well-planned acts of civil disobedience to advance their aims. But while blacks had fought against segregation, Indians used the tactics of the civil rights movement to assert their status as separate semisovereign peoples. Indian activists captured the nation's attention by seizing the island of Alcatraz in 1970 and the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1972. A series of victories in the courts consolidated the decade's gains. In the case of *United States v. Wheeler* (1978), the Supreme

Court declared that Indian tribes possessed a "unique and limited" sovereignty, subject to the will of Congress but not to individual states.

### **The Bicentennial Campaign and the Carter Victory**

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America's two-hundredth birthday, in 1976, fell during a presidential election year—a fitting coincidence for a proud democracy. Gerald Ford energetically sought nomination for the presidency in his own right and won the Republican nod at the Kansas City convention.

The Democratic standard-bearer was fifty-one-year-old James Earl Carter, Jr., a dark-horse candidate who galloped out of obscurity during the long primary-election season. Carter, a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia, had served as his state's governor from 1971 to 1975. Flashing a toothy smile and insisting on humble "Jimmy" as his first name, this born-again Baptist touched many people with his down-home sincerity. He ran against the memory of Nixon and Watergate as much as he ran against Ford. His most effective campaign pitch was his promise that "I'll never lie to you." Untainted by ties with a corrupt and cynical Washington, he attracted voters as an outsider who would clean the disorderly house of "big government."

# MAKERS OF AMERICA



## The Feminists

**A** well-to-do housewife and mother of seven, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) was an unlikely revolutionary. Yet this founding mother of American feminism devoted seven decades of her life to the fight for women's rights.

Young Elizabeth Cady drew her inspiration from the fight against slavery. In 1840 she married fellow abolitionist Henry Stanton. Honeymooning in London, they attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention, where women were forced to sit in a screened-off balcony above the convention floor. This insult awakened Stanton to the cause that would occupy her life. With Lucretia Mott and other female abolitionists, Stanton went on to organize the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. There she pre-

sented her Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence and proclaiming that “all men *and women* are created equal.” She demanded for women the right to own property, to enter the professions, and, most daring of all, to vote.

As visionaries of a radically different future for women, early feminists encountered a mountain of hostility and tasted bitter disappointment. Stanton failed in her struggle to have women included in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted African-Americans equal citizenship. She died before seeing her dream of woman suffrage realized in the Nineteenth Amendment (1920). Yet by imagining women's emancipation as an expansion of America's founding principles of citizenship, Stanton

charted a path that other feminists would follow a century later.

Historians use the terms “first wave” and “second wave” to distinguish the women’s movement of the nineteenth century from that of the late twentieth century. The woman most often credited with launching the “second wave” is Betty Friedan (b. 1921). Growing up in Peoria, Illinois, Friedan had seen her mother grow bitter over sacrificing a journalism career to raise her family. Friedan, a suburban housewife, went on to write the 1963 best-seller *The Feminine Mystique*, exposing the quiet desperation of millions of housewives trapped in the “comfortable concentration camp” of the suburban home. The book struck a resonant chord and catapulted its author onto the national stage. In 1966 Friedan cofounded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the chief political arm of second-wave feminism.

Just as first-wave feminism grew out of abolitionism, the second wave drew ideas, leaders, and tactics from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Civil rights workers and feminists alike focused on equal rights. NOW campaigned vigorously for an Equal Rights Amendment that in 1982 fell just three states short of ratification.

Second-wave feminism also had an avowedly radical wing, supported by younger women who were eager to challenge almost every traditional male and female gender role and to take the feminist cause to

the streets. Among these women was Robin Morgan (b. 1941). As a college student in the 1960s, Morgan was active in civil rights organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Civil rights activism provided Morgan with a model for crusading against social injustice. It also exposed her to the same sexism that plagued society at large. Women in the movement who protested against gender discrimination met ridicule, as in SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael’s famous retort, “The only position for women in SNCC is prone.” Morgan went on to found WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist

Conspiracy from Hell), made famous by its protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. There demonstrators crowned a sheep Miss America and threw symbols of women’s oppression—bras, girdles, dishcloths—into trash cans. (Contrary to news stories, they did not burn the bras.)

As the contrast between WITCH and NOW suggests, second-wave feminism was a remarkably diverse movement. Feminists in the late twentieth century disagreed over many issues—from pornography and marriage to how much to expect from government, capitalism, and men. Some feminists placed a priority on gender equality, for example, full female service in the military. Others defended a feminism of gender difference—such as maternity leaves and other special protections for women in the workplace.

Still, beyond these differences feminists had much in common. Most advocated a woman’s right to choose in the battle over abortion rights. Most regarded the law as the key weapon against gender discrimination. By century’s end radical and moderate feminists alike could take pride in a host of achievements that had changed the landscape of gender relations beyond what most people could have imagined at midcentury. Yet, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, second-wave feminists also shared the burden of understanding that the goals of genuine equality would take more than a lifetime to achieve.



Carter squeezed out a narrow victory on election day, with 51 percent of the popular vote. The electoral count stood at 297 to 240. The winner swept every state except Virginia in his native South. Especially important were the votes of African-Americans, 97 percent of whom cast their ballots for Carter.

Carter enjoyed hefty Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. Hopes ran high that the stalemate of the Nixon-Ford years between a Republican White House and a Democratic Capitol Hill would now be ended. At first Carter enjoyed notable political success. Congress granted his request to create a new cabinet-level Department of Energy. Calling the American tax system “a disgrace to the human race,” Carter also proposed tax reform and reduction. Congress eventually obliged him, in part, with an \$18 billion tax cut in 1978. The new president’s popularity remained exceptionally high during his first few months in office, even when he courted public disfavor by courageously keeping his campaign promise to pardon some ten thousand draft evaders of the Vietnam War era.

But Carter’s honeymoon did not last long. An inexperienced outsider, he had campaigned against the Washington “establishment” and never quite made the transition to being an insider himself. He

repeatedly rubbed congressional fur the wrong way, especially by failing to consult adequately with the leaders. Critics charged that he isolated himself in a shallow pool of fellow Georgians, whose ignorance of the ways of Washington compounded the problems of their greenhorn chief.

### **Carter’s Humanitarian Diplomacy**

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As a committed Christian, President Carter displayed from the outset an overriding concern for “human rights” as the guiding principle of his foreign policy. In the African nations of Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe) and South Africa, Carter and his eloquent U.N. ambassador, Andrew Young, championed the oppressed black majority.

The president’s most spectacular foreign-policy achievement came in September 1978 at Camp David, the woodsy presidential retreat in the Maryland highlands. Relations between Egypt and Israel had deteriorated so far that another blowup in the misery-drenched Middle East seemed imminent. So grave was the danger that Carter courageously risked humiliating failure by inviting President

of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Détente fell into disrepute as thousands of Cuban troops, assisted by Soviet advisers, appeared in Angola, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in Africa to support revolutionary factions. Arms control negotiations with Moscow stalled in the face of this Soviet military meddling.

## **Economic and Energy Woes**

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Adding to Carter's mushrooming troubles was the failing health of the economy. Prices had been rising feverishly, increasing at a rate of more than 10 percent a year by 1974 ("double-digit" inflation). Crippling oil-price hikes from OPEC in that same year dealt the reeling economy another body blow. A stinging recession during Gerald Ford's presidency brought the inflation rate down temporarily, but virtually from the moment of Carter's inauguration, prices resumed their dizzying ascent, driving the inflation rate well above 13 percent by 1979. The soaring bill for imported oil plunged America's balance of payments deeply into the red (an unprecedented \$40 billion in 1978), as Americans paid more for foreign products than they were able to earn from selling their own goods overseas.

The "oil shocks" of the 1970s taught Americans a painful but necessary lesson: that they could never again seriously consider a policy of economic isolation, as they had tried to do in the decades between the two world wars. For most of its history, America's foreign trade had accounted for no more than 10 percent of gross national product (GNP). But huge foreign-oil bills drove that figure steadily upward in the 1970s and thereafter. By the century's end, some 27 percent of GNP depended on foreign trade. The nation's new economic interdependence meant that the United States could not dominate international trade and finance as easily as it had in the post-World War II decades. Americans, once happily insulated behind their ocean moats, would have to master foreign languages and study foreign cultures if they wanted to prosper in the rapidly globalizing economy.

Yawning deficits in the federal budget, reaching nearly \$60 billion in 1980, further aggravated the U.S. economy's inflationary ailments. Americans living on fixed incomes—mostly elderly people or workers without a strong union to go to bat for

Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel to a summit conference at Camp David.

Skillfully serving as go-between, Carter after thirteen days persuaded the two visitors to sign an accord (September 17, 1978) that held considerable promise of peace. Israel agreed in principle to withdraw from territory conquered in the 1967 war, and Egypt in return promised to respect Israel's borders. Both parties pledged themselves to sign a formal peace treaty within three months. The president crowned this diplomatic success by resuming full diplomatic relations with China in early 1979 after a nearly thirty-year interruption. Carter also successfully proposed two treaties turning over complete ownership and control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians by the year 2000.

Despite these dramatic accomplishments, trouble stalked Carter's foreign policy. Overshadowing all international issues was the ominous reheating

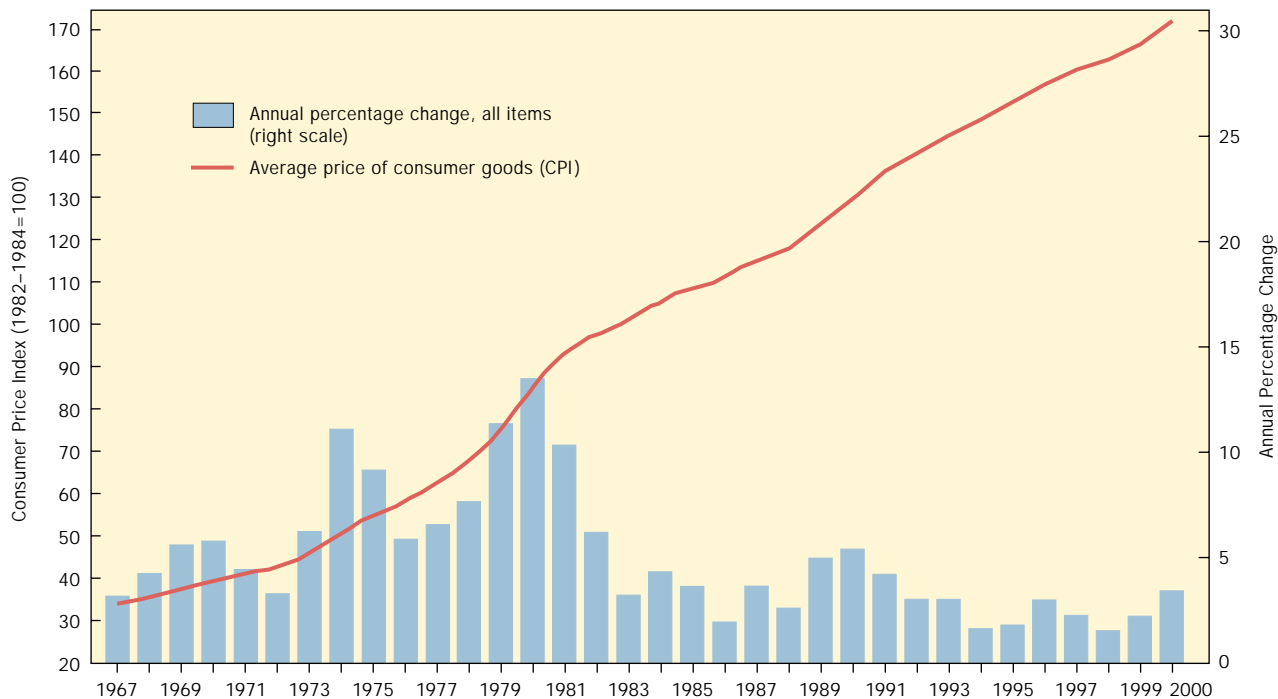
them—suffered from the shrinking dollar. People with money to lend pushed interest rates ever higher, hoping to protect themselves from being repaid in badly depreciated dollars. The “prime rate” (the rate of interest that banks charge their very best customers) vaulted to an unheard-of 20 percent in early 1980. The high cost of borrowing money shoved small businesses to the wall and strangled the construction industry, heavily dependent on loans to finance new housing and other projects.

From the outset Carter diagnosed America’s economic disease as stemming primarily from the nation’s costly dependence on foreign oil. Accordingly, one of the first acts of his presidency was a dramatic appeal to embark on an energy crusade that he called “the moral equivalent of war.” The president called for legislation to improve energy conservation, especially by curtailing the manufacture of large, gas-guzzling automobiles. But these proposals, in April 1977, ignited a blaze of indifference among the American people, who had already forgotten the long gasoline lines of 1973. Public apathy and congress-

sional hostility smothered President Carter’s hopes of quickly initiating an energetic energy program.

Events in Iran jolted Americans out of their complacency about energy supplies in 1979. The imperious Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, installed as shah of Iran with help from America’s CIA in 1953, had long ruled his oil-rich land with a will of steel. His repressive regime was finally overthrown in January 1979. Violent revolution was spearheaded in Iran by Muslim fundamentalists who fiercely resented the shah’s campaign to westernize and secularize his country. Denouncing the United States as the “Great Satan” that had abetted the shah’s efforts, these extremists engulfed Iran in chaos in the wake of his departure. The crippling upheavals soon spread to Iran’s oil fields. As Iranian oil stopped flowing into the stream of world commerce, shortages appeared, and OPEC again seized the opportunity to hike petroleum prices. Americans once more found themselves waiting impatiently in long lines at gas stations or buying gasoline only on specified days.

**The History of the Consumer Price Index, 1967–2000** This graph shows both the annual percentage of inflation and the cumulative shrinkage in the dollar’s value since 1967. (By 2000, it took more than five dollars to buy what one dollar purchased in 1967.) (Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics and *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, relevant years.)



miad.” He chided his fellow citizens for falling into a “moral and spiritual crisis” and for being too concerned with “material goods.”

While Carter’s address stunned and even perplexed the nation, he let drop another shoe a few days later. In a bureaucratic massacre of almost unprecedented proportions, he fired four cabinet secretaries. At the same time, he circled the wagons of his Georgian advisers more tightly about the White House by reorganizing and expanding the power of his personal staff. Critics began to wonder aloud whether Carter, the professed man of the people, was losing touch with the popular mood of the country.

### **Foreign Affairs and the Iranian Imbrolio**

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Hopes for a less dangerous world rose slightly in June 1979, when President Carter met with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in Vienna to sign the long-stalled SALT II agreements, limiting the levels of

As the oil crisis deepened, President Carter sensed the rising temperature of popular discontent. In July 1979 he retreated to the presidential mountain hideaway at Camp David, where he remained largely out of public view for ten days. Like a royal potentate of old, summoning the wise men of the realm for their counsel in a time of crisis, Carter called in over a hundred leaders from all walks of life to give him their views. Meanwhile, the nation waited anxiously for the results of these extraordinary deliberations.

Carter came down from the mountaintop on July 15, 1979. He revealed his thoughts to the American people in a remarkable television address, which amounted to a kind of old-fashioned “jere-

*President Jimmy Carter (b. 1924) delivered what became known as his “malaise” speech (although he never used the word) on television in 1979. In time cultural conservatives would take up his theme to support their call for a return to “traditional values”:*

“In a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning. We’ve learned that piling up material goods cannot fill the emptiness of lives which have no confidence or purpose. . . . The symptoms of this crisis of the American spirit are all around us.”

lethal strategic weapons in the Soviet and American arsenals. But conservative critics of the president's defense policies, still deeply suspicious of the Soviet Union, which they regarded as the Wicked Witch of the East, unsheathed their long knives to carve up the SALT II treaty when it came to the Senate for debate in the summer of 1979. Their hand was strengthened when news reports broke that a Soviet "combat brigade" was stationed in Castro's Cuba.

Political earthquakes in the petroleum-rich Persian Gulf region finally buried all hopes of ratifying the SALT II treaty. On November 4, 1979, a howling mob of rabidly anti-American Muslim militants stormed the United States embassy in Teheran, Iran, and took all of its occupants hostage. The captors then demanded that the American authorities ship back to Iran the exiled shah, who had arrived in the United States two weeks earlier for medical treatment. The shaky Iranian government, barely visible through the smoke of revolution and religious upheaval then rocking the country, refused to intervene against the militants. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the white-bearded Muslim holy man who inspired the revolutionaries, even accused the United States of masterminding an attack on the sacred Muslim city of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia.

World opinion hotly condemned the diplomatic felony in Iran, while Americans agonized over both the fate of the hostages and the stability of the entire Persian Gulf region, so dangerously close to the Soviet Union. The Soviet army then aroused the West's worst fears on December 27, 1979, when it blitzed into the mountainous nation of Afghanistan, next door to Iran, and appeared to be poised for a thrust at the oil-jugular of the gulf.

President Carter reacted vigorously to these alarming events. He slapped an embargo on the export of grain and high-technology machinery to the USSR and called for a boycott of the upcoming Olympic Games in Moscow. He proposed the creation of a "Rapid Deployment Force" to respond to suddenly developing crises in faraway places and requested that young people (including women) be made to register for a possible military draft. The president proclaimed that the United States would "use any means necessary, including force," to protect the Persian Gulf against Soviet incursions. He grimly conceded that he had misjudged the Soviets,

and the SALT II treaty became a dead letter in the Senate. Meanwhile, the Soviet army met unexpectedly stiff resistance in Afghanistan and bogged down in a nasty, decade-long guerrilla war that came to be called “Russia’s Vietnam.” But though the Soviets were stalled in Afghanistan, the crisis in Iran ground on.

The Iranian hostage episode was Carter’s—and America’s—bed of nails. The captured Americans languished in cruel captivity, while the nightly television news broadcasts in the United States showed humiliating scenes of Iranian mobs burning the American flag and spitting on effigies of Uncle Sam.

Carter at first tried to apply economic sanctions and the pressure of world public opinion against the Iranians, while waiting for the emergence of a stable government with which to negotiate. But the political turmoil in Iran rumbled on endlessly, and the

president’s frustration grew. Carter at last ordered a daring rescue mission. A highly trained commando team penetrated deep into Iran’s sandy interior. Their plan required ticktock-perfect timing to succeed, and when equipment failures prevented some members of the team from reaching their destination, the mission had to be scrapped. As the commandos withdrew in the dark desert night, two of their aircraft collided, killing eight of the would-be rescuers.

This disastrous failure of the rescue raid proved anguishing for Americans. The episode seemed to underscore the nation’s helplessness and even incompetence in the face of a mortifying insult to the national honor. The stalemate with Iran dragged on throughout the rest of Carter’s term, providing an embarrassing backdrop to the embattled president’s struggle for reelection.

## Chronology

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| <p><b>1970</b> Nixon orders invasion of Cambodia<br/>Kent State and Jackson State incidents<br/>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created<br/>Clean Air Act</p>  | <p><b>1973-</b><br/><b>1974</b> Watergate hearings and investigations</p>  |
| <p><b>1971</b> Pentagon Papers published<br/>Twenty-sixth Amendment (lowering voting age to eighteen) passed</p>   | <p><b>1974</b> Nixon resigns; Ford assumes presidency<br/>First OPEC oil-price increase<br/>International Energy Agency formed<br/><i>Milliken v. Bradley</i></p>  |
| <p><b>1972</b> Nixon visits China and the Soviet Union<br/>ABM and SALT I treaties ratified<br/>Nixon defeats McGovern for presidency<br/>Equal Rights Amendment passes Congress<br/>Title IX of Education Amendments passed</p>                             | <p><b>1975</b> Helsinki accords<br/>South Vietnam falls to communists</p>  |
| <p><b>1973</b> Vietnam cease-fire and U.S. withdrawal<br/>Agnew resigns; Ford appointed vice president<br/>War Powers Act<br/>Arab-Israeli war and Arab oil embargo<br/>Endangered Species Act<br/><i>Frontiero v. Richardson</i><br/><i>Roe v. Wade</i></p> | <p><b>1976</b> Carter defeats Ford for presidency</p> <p><b>1978</b> Egyptian-Israeli Camp David agreement<br/><i>United States v. Wheeler</i></p> <p><b>1979</b> Iranian revolution and oil crisis<br/>SALT II agreements signed (never ratified by Senate)<br/>Soviet Union invades Afghanistan</p> <p><b>1979-</b><br/><b>1981</b> Iranian hostage crisis</p> |

For further reading, see page A27 of the Appendix. For web resources, go to <http://college.hmco.com>.