

US History/Nixon and Indochina

Violence and the Election of 1968

There were 3 major assassinations in the 60ties, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. All were suspected of "governmental" influence. Strong conspiracy theories still exist, which had a profound effect on how some Americans viewed their government. Some were very distrustful and some were very status quo. So it divided America in a way we hadn't seen since the Civil War. After the assassination of Dr. King in Memphis, riots broke out in over 100 cities. Troops were called in to control the mobs of people. Stunned and saddened by Dr. King's death, the nation worried about renewed homeland violence.

Robert Kennedy is Assassinated

In the race for the Democratic nomination, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, and Robert Francis Kennedy (brother of John F.) were competing in a close match. In most primaries, Kennedy edged out McCarthy, and meanwhile, Humphrey garnered the support of Democratic party leaders, who chose the delegates to the national convention. In June 1968, Kennedy won the primary in California, the state with the most delegates to the convention. Bobby Kennedy was trying to become president and follow in his brother's foot steps. At a celebration rally on the night of the victory, Kennedy was shot and killed by Sirhan B. Sirhan, who claimed that he did not remember shooting Bobby Kennedy. Sirhan shot Kennedy with .22 pistol. Kennedy was hit multiple times and five others were wounded. The nation was sent reeling into another shock from the new violence. Kennedy's body lay in repose at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York for two days before a funeral mass was held on June 8. His body was interred near his brother John at Arlington National Cemetery. His death prompted the protection of presidential candidates by the United States Secret Service. Hubert Humphrey went on to win the Democratic nomination for the presidency, but ultimately narrowly lost the election to Richard Nixon.

The Democratic Convention

Because of his support among leaders and delegates from the Democratic Party, it appeared that Humphrey had enough votes to win the nomination at the convention in Chicago. Humphrey, however, was a supporter of Johnson's policy in Vietnam, so he was perceived as a war supporter.

Anti-war Democrats, most of whom had supported Kennedy, felt left out of the convention. Angry, they flocked to Chicago to protest Humphrey's nomination. On the first and second nights of the convention, the protesters were generally subdued and the Chicago police made few arrests. On the third night, however, protesters planned to march to the convention site to protest.

Fearing another outbreak of violence, the mayor of Chicago made the police block the protesters at the hall. When they tried a different route, protesters were blocked again. Outraged, protesters started throwing objects at the police. The police threw tear gas into the crowd and charged the protesters, beating some and taking others into custody.

Humphrey won the nomination, but the violence hurt his campaign. The nation saw all the anger and outrage on television. It seemed that Democrats could not control their own party.

The Election

Nixon, the former Vice President, had quietly been nominated by the Republicans as their candidate. Nixon claimed to represent the "silent majority" in America; that is, those that had begun to take on a more conservative approach to politics and disliked the "hippie" and civil rights movements. Nixon also promised to end the war in Vietnam, although he never said he would win it.

Because of his promises about Vietnam, Nixon was able to gain support from antiwar Democrats and Republicans alike. In a huge political comeback (Nixon was defeated in the election of 1960 and lost the race for the governor of California in 1962), Nixon barely won the popular vote, gaining only 500,000 more votes than Humphrey. He won by a larger margin in the electoral college, gaining 301 votes, while Humphrey only had 191.

Also note that Nixon made the statement on November 3rd 1969, almost a year after his election. He cribbed it from a speech his vice president, Spiro Agnew, had made on May 9th of that year. Agnew's writers may have been taking it from President Kennedy's 1956 book *Profiles in Courage*. The original phrase goes back to Edward Young's 1721 poem "The Revenge":

"Life is the desert, life the solitude;
Death joins us to the great majority."

It became an in-joke among Democrats and protesters to hear Agnew and Nixon claim to represent the dead, perhaps as envoys of the Undead. This was only two years after Caesar Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* came out.

Foreign Policy

Nixon, in an attempt to bring stability to the nation, made many changes in foreign policy. He appointed Henry Kissinger as his national security advisor and later as his Secretary of State. Both believed in the philosophy of *realpolitik*, which put national interests in front of leaders' political ideologies and reasoned that peace could only come from negotiations, not war. During Nixon's presidency, he and Kissinger would work to try to ease the cold war.

Vietnam

Nixon promised to ease the United States out of the Vietnam war, and for the most part, he kept his promise. He and Kissinger called their plan to hand the war over to the South Vietnamese: **Vietnamization**. By the end of 1970, the number of troops in Vietnam had fallen from 540,000 in the beginning of 1969 to 335,000. By January of 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. In 1971 there were only 60,000 troops in Vietnam.

In order to compensate for the loss of troops in Vietnam, Nixon hiked up the bombing campaign. The Ho Chi Minh Trail which bordered and sometimes ran into the countries of Laos and Cambodia was bombed. Nixon wanted to keep his public image as a peace President, so the bombing of Cambodia was kept a secret.

Outrage and Tragedy

Nixon tried to end the war through peace talks with North Vietnam, but generally, these stalled because the North Vietnamese had a wait and see attitude towards the war. They believed that opposition to the war within America would eventually grow so strong that Nixon would be forced to remove American troops from the country.

Nixon tried to appeal to his "silent majority" and renew support for the war, but then, Cambodia fell into a civil war between Communist and non-Communist forces. Nixon decided to send troops into Cambodia to destroy Communist strongholds, and Americans were outraged that their leader, who had strived for an end to the war, had attacked a neutral country. Opposition, especially in colleges, grew stronger.

This was especially true in Kent State University in Ohio. When students burned down a military complex on the Kent State campus, the Ohio governor declared martial law, or emergency military rule. The students were furious.

On May 4th, they staged a protest on the campus lawn, but the National Guard troops told the students to disband, and that they had no right to assemble. The troops shot tear gas into the crowd, and the students ran. Some troops cornered a group between two buildings and suddenly, for unknown reasons, opened fire. Four students were killed and thirteen others were wounded.

Violence again struck at Jackson State in Mississippi. After a night of campus violence, police were called in to control the students, but eventually police opened fire on the students and two were killed. Witnesses recalled the police recklessly blasting the school's residence hall with their guns. The police claimed to be defending themselves from snipers.

The End of the War

In the fall of 1972, it seemed that peace was at hand. But at the last minute, the negotiations fell through because the South Vietnamese refused to have North Vietnamese forces in their country. Nixon decided to launch a last aggressive bombing campaign to try to scare the North Vietnamese into stopping the war, but they were persistent and continued to fight. In the beginning of 1975, the North Vietnamese launched a final major offensive. The South Vietnamese army collapsed, and soon, Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was in the Vietcong's grasp. Americans scrambled to evacuate from the country, and on April 29, Americans were evacuating by helicopter off the roof of the American embassy. In the early hours of April 30, 1975, Saigon fell to the Vietcong. Soon after, South Vietnam surrendered.

Upon return, the American troops had no welcome. Many Americans, angered at the outcome of the war or just angry that the war ever had to happen, just wanted to forget the ordeal. Vietnam lay in ruins, and almost 1.4 million Vietnamese lives (on either side) were claimed. Also, 58,000 Americans had died, 300,000 were wounded, and the U.S. had wasted \$150 billion on the war. Because people's homes were so badly destroyed in the war in Vietnam many decided to jump on boats and tried to find new places to live. Many came to the United States but many Americans had mixed feelings of this because they were reminded of their loss^[1] in Asia.

China

In 1969, Nixon wanted to ease the tensions of the Cold War to help the nation heal from the tragedy of Vietnam. He and Kissinger used *realpolitik*, the practice of basing decisions on the interests of the nation rather than the leaders' beliefs, to shape a new foreign policy. Nixon formed a foreign policy plan of *détente*, a plan of relaxing international tensions. Nixon's ultimate goal in his new plan was to achieve a so-called "balance of power" between the U.S., Europe, Soviet Union, China, and Japan so that no one nation could grow too strong.

To kick off his new plan, Nixon began to express friendliness to the People's Republic of China. The United States had severed ties with China after communists took control of the government in a political *coup d'état* (a sudden change of government by force) in 1949. In 1970, Nixon began hinting at new relations with China, and he stopped referring to the country as "Red China," which was an offensive term for the nation. By increasing relations with China, Nixon hoped that the Soviets would become more cooperative in talks with the U.S. because it would fear a U.S.-China alliance.

Realizing the change in U.S. sentiment, China invited a U.S. table tennis team to visit the country in April 1971, and a week later, the U.S. opened trade between the two countries. After sending Kissinger on a secret visit to China, Nixon announced that he would go to Beijing, the Chinese capital. In February 1972, Nixon finally came to Beijing. Pictures of him at the Great Wall and attending Chinese banquets were in international news. In another seven years, Chinese relations would be fully restored.

The Soviet Union

Nixon was right about the Soviet Union. Fearing a Chinese alliance with America, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev agreed to meet with Nixon in Moscow in May of 1972. Again, pictures of Nixon with communist leaders filled the news. While in Moscow, Nixon signed the SALT I Treaty, or the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. The treaty limited the number of nuclear arms that the Soviet Union and the U.S. could possess.

Feeling that the Soviet Union was in scientific decline, Brezhnev agreed with the U.S. to work with it in trade and information. This way, the Soviet Union could also gain access to desperately needed American grain. As a result of the talk, the Arms Race slowed and international tensions eased.

Roe v. Wade

In March 1970, a Texas woman by the name of Norma McCorvey, unmarried and pregnant, decided to sue the state of Texas by the recommendation of Sarah Weddington, a young attorney. At the time, the vast majority of the other states had similar laws. At the time, Texas had a law in place that banned abortion in women, with the exception of women with life-threatening pregnancies. As part of standard court procedure, McCorvey was renamed Jane Roe, because she did not want her identity to be known by the court.

With rulings favoring both Roe and Dallas County district attorney Henry Wade in various levels of the courts, the case eventually landed in the Supreme Court. Argued first on December 13, 1971 and again on October 11, 1972 (at the court's request), Weddington contended that the Texas law (and therefore all abortion banning laws) were in violation of the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments, which gave a citizen the right to privacy, and that abortion laws violated the privacy of women.

The case was decided on January 22, 1973, with Harry Blackmun writing the ruling. With a 7-2 majority, the Court ruled that the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments did indeed collectively give a citizen the right to privacy, and that abortion laws did indeed violate the right to privacy of women.

Having recently appointed Warren Burger (the Chief Justice), Harry Blackmun, Lewis Powell, and William Rehnquist, Nixon was disappointed in the ruling. All of them Republicans, Nixon had presumed that the judges would rule conservatively. Only Rehnquist would dissent with the majority. The other dissenting vote was Byron White, who had been appointed by John F. Kennedy.

The ruling created the abortion divide that exists today. It gave the general pro-choice sentiment among the more liberal and progressive Democratic Party and the pro-life sentiment among more conservative and religious Republican Party. The case was reopened in 1992, only to reaffirm the ruling. Norma McCorvey would go on later to become a pro-life advocate.

Some compare the ruling to the F&S by Hitler.

Watergate and the Election of 1972

In 1971, Nixon had many doubts about the 1972 election. But this was before Nixon and Kissinger had vastly improved relations with the Soviet Union and China. By the time those tasks had been accomplished, much of the nation approved of Nixon. Even more in his favor was the Democratic disunity and the nomination of the radically liberal George McGovern. Some voters found his views disturbing.

Even so, Nixon's paranoia and the stress of the presidential campaign would conspire to send the nation reeling and his administration into crisis. Much later, it would be found that Nixon's campaign would stretch the truth, the law, and ethics.

To start his campaign Nixon asked a group of only the most loyal aides to create an "enemies list," a list of political opponents to the Nixon administration. Then, Nixon asked the IRS and the FBI to investigate those on the enemies list, and justified his actions by saying that he believed that those investigated were a threat to national security.

Nixon was slowly changing his campaign from a campaign for the presidency to a campaign against enemies.

Using some of the money allotted for his campaign, Nixon funded a secret group of "plumbers," who "plugged" information leaks that were damaging to the administration. Money also funded dirty tricks against Nixon's Democratic opponents.

In November of 1972, an unknowing public headed to the polls to cast votes for the President. Nixon won the election by a landslide, with almost 61 percent of the popular vote and 520 out of 537 electoral votes.

Things were quiet for a while after the election. In late 1973, countries in the Middle East imposed an embargo, or refusal to trade, on oil to the U.S. after the U.S. supported Israel in a short war against Egypt (the most powerful country in the region) and Syria. Prices for gas shot up in the U.S. and stations had to ration the gas, putting restrictions like "ten gallons per customer." Many people were laid off. Nixon worked to help relations with the Middle East, and in March 1974, the embargo was lifted. He was also able to get the U.S. out of Vietnam. Because of his work, Americans generally approved of Nixon.

Voters did not know that a little while after midnight on June 17, 1972 a security guard named Frank Wills had been patrolling in the parking garage of the Watergate complex, the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, and found tape on the locks to doors leading into the building. He removed the tape and thought little of it, but an hour later, he would find it replaced. He would call the police, and they would arrest five robbers inside the complex.

The subsequent arrests of "plumbers" Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt would slowly but surely send tremors through the presidency. Initially, the Nixon administration denied that it had anything to do with the two plumbers or the bugs that the five men were trying to plant in the telephones of the Democratic headquarters (bugs are telephone listening devices, commonly used by spies and others in the field of espionage) when investigators gathered info that suggested it did. Ronald Ziegler, Nixon's press secretary, decried the break-in a "third rate burglary."

Hearing of the incident at the Watergate complex, the Washington Post, a prominent Washington D.C. newspaper with a national circulation, started publishing a series of articles linking Nixon to the burglary. Also, after questioning, one of the burglars confessed that the White House lied about its involvement in the break-in. Still, only about half of Americans had even heard of the robbery.

In early 1973, the Senate voted to hold hearings on the Watergate break-in. They asked the Department of Justice to hire a special prosecutor outside of the Nixon-influenced department to investigate Watergate. Slowly, Cox and Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina would reveal the massive scandal going on in the White house. In May, former deputy White House counsel John Dean, a source close to Nixon, would testify that there indeed had been a cover up and that it had been directed by Nixon himself.

The extent of Nixon's desperation would become evident in October 1973 when Cox ordered that Nixon hand over tapes from a secret taping system that recorded conversations in the President's office. He refused on *executive privilege* grounds, contending that the release of the tapes would compromise national security.

When Cox tried to get an injunction for the release of the tapes, Nixon ordered Elliot Richardson, the attorney general, to fire Cox (after all, it was the Justice Department that had hired Cox), but Richardson refused and resigned. Nixon then ordered Deputy Attorney General William Ricketts to fire Cox, but he, like Richardson, refused and resigned. Finally, Nixon got a minor Justice Department official, Solicitor General Robert Bork, to fire Cox. The series of resignations and the firing of Cox became known as the Saturday Night Massacre. The public was outraged.

At the height of the Watergate scandal, the Department of Justice uncovered another: Vice President Spiro Agnew had accepted bribes as the governor of Maryland. He resigned on October 10, 1973. Nixon nominated Michigan congressman Gerald Ford as his Vice President, who was quickly confirmed.

The House of Representatives decided to initiate the impeachment process as public outrage mounted over the Saturday Night Massacre. If a majority voted to charge the President of high crimes and misdemeanors, he would be tried by the Senate and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court would preside over the trial. If 67 of the 100 senators

voted to find Nixon guilty, he would be expelled from office.

In April of 1974, Nixon decided to release heavily edited transcripts of the tapes to try to improve his image. This only led to more public protest, and the Supreme Court eventually ruled that Nixon had to hand over the tapes. After a conversation on one of the tapes revealed that Nixon had ordered a cover up of the robbery, the public was stunned and the House mulled impeachment. Before any more damage could be done, Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974. He would be the first and (so far) only president to resign and Gerald Ford would become the only president not elected to the office of president or vice president.

The impact of the scandal was wide and far-reaching. Among other things, Congress passed a series of laws sharply limiting a president's power to wage undeclared war, limiting campaign spending and strengthening public access to government information. Also, it proved that the Constitution's system of checks and balances could work to bring an abusive or tyrannical president out of power. But by far the biggest impact of the crisis was the loss of the public's faith and trust in politicians and elected officials; cynicism concerning the ethics, behavior, and motives of elected officials would be deep and lasting. Because of Nixon's party affiliation and the outrage over a preemptive pardon that Ford granted Nixon after he became president, people associated corruption with the Republican party. Decades of gerrymandering by New Dealers and their successors had assured nearly-impregnable overwhelming Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress since the 1930s. Fallout from Watergate assured that this trend would continue in the midterm elections of November 1974. The Republicans would pay the ultimate price for Watergate in 1976, with Ford losing the White House to a relative political newcomer.

President Carter

Jimmy Carter (James Earl Carter, Jr.), the thirty-ninth president of the United States, was born Oct. 1, 1924, in the small farming town of Plains, Ga., and grew up in the nearby community of Archery. His father, James Earl Carter, Sr., was a farmer and businessman; his mother, Lillian Gordy Carter, a registered nurse.

He was educated in the public school of Plains, attended Georgia Southwestern College and the Georgia Institute of Technology, and received a bachelor of science degree from the United States Naval Academy in 1946. In the Navy he became a submariner, serving in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets and rising to the rank of lieutenant. In 2002 President Carter was given the Nobel Peace Prize. He is the only American president to ever get a Nobel Peace Prize after his presidency. Carter was also against the death penalty in the United States. His thoughts on it were to remove the death penalty with life in prison which was not heard of at the time.

References

- [1] A People and A Nation

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