

## The 1970s – A Crisis in Confidence

**Perspective:** *Why break in to the DNC headquarters? After all, it's not like McGovern was terribly popular. But the CREEP didn't care, and a massive cover-up ensued after the break-in went bad. Nixon's massive victory in '72 wasn't enough to save him from his own missteps, and the 1970s was a decade filled with questions of confidence not only about the government, but about "American values" in general. Yet as I recall, the Bicentennial was fun...*

### I. NIXON IN POWER

The "New Nixon" appeared in 1969

A man of restraint, détente

A man with a strong staff who isolated him from Congress and his own cabinet

The "Old Nixon" was just beneath the surface

Shy, distrustful

Sought to run the show without input from anyone else (Congress, Supreme Court, etc)

Relied on NSA Kissinger for foreign policy help; ignored other advisers

### ***Reshaping the Great Society***

Promised to bring Americans together in his inaugural speech

Hoped to shift responsibility for social programs from federal to state government

Sought to make government more efficient

Capped welfare payments at \$ 2.5 billion per year

States made supplements

Had Attorney General John Mitchell ask for a delay in Mississippi school desegregation

Supreme Court denied this request

MS blamed the Court, not Nixon, for desegregation

Nixon appointed Warren Burger to replace Earl Warren

Nixon's southern appointees were blocked by the Senate

Nixon then appointed Harry Blackmun, Lewis Powell and William Rehnquist

Nixon's Court was moderate and did not overturn Warren Court decisions

### ***Nixonomics***

Vietnam had caused deficit spending

Nixon's solution was to reduce government spending and raise interest rates

Soon there was 6% inflation, business failures and a recession

Democrats labeled this plan "Nixonomics"

Problems worsened until Nixon froze wages and prices in August '71

Balance of trade declined with devaluation of the dollar and 10% import tax

Recession ended by 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 1972

### ***Building a Republican Majority***

Republicans lost ground in Congressional elections in 1970

VP Agnew emphasized moral and societal problems, blaming liberals for these

They regained some seats, but were unable to retake a majority (recession)

### ***In Search of Détente***

Henry Kissinger (refugee from Nazi Germany) designed Nixon's foreign policy

Saw the US/USSR power struggle as something to be managed, not won  
Both sought to withdraw from an arms race, ply the USSR with grain and technology,  
and open relations with China to increase USSR/China tensions  
Nixon toured China in February of 1972  
Brezhnev agrees to SALT I in May 1972  
Limited each nation to 200 ABMs  
Froze production of offensive ballistic missiles for 5 years

### ***Ending the Vietnam War***

- 3 part plan to end the Vietnam Conflict
  - 1. Gradual withdrawal of troops + “Vietnamization”
  - 2. Renewed bombing in Hanoi
    - The most controversial part of the plan
    - Air and ground strikes led to US student protests
    - Kent State (four killed, eleven wounded)
    - Jackson State (two killed)
    - Most Americans blamed rioting student for the deaths
    - Nixon sided with the “silent majority” rather than the “bums”
    - 400+ college campuses reported riots
  - 3. “Hard-line” negotiations with North Vietnam
    - Begun in 1969, completed in 1972
    - Hanoi signs truce after a series of bombing raids
    - POWs returned in exchange for US withdrawal
    - North Vietnam allowed to keep troops in the South
    - A negotiated surrender...***

## **II. THE CRISIS OF DEMOCRACY - What were these folks thinking?**

### ***The Election of 1972***

George McGovern of South Dakota won the nomination of the Democratic Party  
George Wallace got shot and was paralyzed  
Edmund Muskie lost his temper and front-runner status  
McGovern hoped to unite the New Left  
Nixon let others campaign for him  
Painted McGovern as an extremist  
Emphasized his prowess at foreign affairs  
Nixon wins in a landslide  
Party realignment seems to occur  
GOP makes gains in the Sunbelt  
Democratic blocks include minorities and low income voters

### ***The Watergate Scandal* (also see Watergate Chronology)**

The cover-up was unsuccessful  
Nixon disputed turning over the Oval Office tapes  
Claimed executive privilege  
Fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, but Leon Jaworski still wanted the tapes  
The Supreme Court ruled that Nixon had to turn over the tapes  
Nixon resigns on August 9, 1974

Showed the independence of the branches of government, the value of checks and balances  
Also showed several the inside of a jail cell...

### **III. ENERGY AND THE ECONOMY**

#### ***The October War***

Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on October 6, 1973

A result was the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)  
US gave aid to Israel, OPEC cut production until Israel agreed to give up lands taken in the Six Day War of 1967

A world-wide oil shortage resulted

Gas prices rose, gas shortages occurred

An energy crisis became apparent; US production and consumption was disproportionate

#### ***The Oil Shocks***

Cheap energy had been a mainstay of American life (industrial growth, cars, suburbs, etc)

In the 70s, OPEC raised the price of oil from \$3 per barrel to \$11.65 (Now? \$100 higher)

GNP dropped 6%, unemployment rose to 9% in 1974

Ford's major cuts could not offset budget deficits

Inflation and the economy worsened under Carter

Crude oil rose to \$30 per barrel by 1979

A short-term energy crisis and gas shortage resulted

#### ***The Search for an Energy Policy***

US economic reliance on fossil fuels was problematic

EPA passed rules to urge industry to switch to clean burning fuels

Clean Air Act (1970)

Strip mining and off shore drilling were still legal despite protests

Republicans favored expanded supplies, fuel price controls and greater use of nuclear energy

Democrats favored price controls, conservation and rationing

Congress funded the Alaskan pipeline and mandated fuel efficient cars

No real plan developed; energy usage and imports continued to increase

#### ***The Great Inflation***

Vietnam/Great Society caused huge budget deficits

Wages fell while prices increased dramatically—many prices doubled

Carter/Federal Reserve Chairman Volcker tightened the money supply

Interest rates achieved record levels

Prime rate reached 20% (house and car loans were skyrocketing!!!)

#### ***The Shifting American Economy***

Heavy industry (steel, autos, manufacturing) declined

IBM, Transamerica and high-tech industries did well

Industry shifted to the Sunbelt—educated but non-union labor

#### **IV. PRIVATE LIVES—PUBLIC ISSUES**

##### ***The Changing American Family***

Declines in two parent families and stay at home mom households  
Fewer families—by 1990, 30% of households were 1 person  
Divorce rates leveled off after doubling through the 60s and 70s  
Average age of marriage rises to above 25 (19 in the 50s)  
% of children living with only one parent doubled over 20 years

##### ***Gains and Setbacks for Women***

61% of new jobs in the era were filled by women  
most were “pink collar”  
many complained of a glass ceiling  
Women on the Supreme Court, at West Point and Annapolis  
Women’s earnings were 73% of men’s in 1999  
Increasing #s of women owned businesses  
ERA was approved by Congress  
“Equality of rights under the law shall not be abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.”  
Backed by NOW, opposed by Phyllis Schlafly  
Roe v Wade decided in 1973  
Protected a right to abortion in the first trimester with limited rights after  
Limited by the Hyde Amendment (1978)—no federal funds for abortions  
“Roe no more”...still a great controversy

##### ***The Gay Liberation Movement***

Folks began coming out of the closet, especially in major cities  
A gay rights plank added to the 1980 Democrat Platform  
AIDS led to greater activism in the 1980s  
Clinton enacted “Don’t ask, don’t tell”—not exactly a bold move  
Gay marriage became an “issue” in the late 90s  
1998 Matthew Shepard murder gained national attention  
Gays became a disproportionately powerful minority group by 2000  
Americans generally oppose discrimination against gays

#### **V. POLITICS AFTER WATERGATE**

##### ***The Ford Administration***

Ford was pleasant, unpretentious and likeable, but...  
He pardoned Nixon on September 8, 1974  
His attempt to end Watergate backlash failed badly  
Ford appointed Bush to the CIA to fix its rogue tendencies  
Ford was far more conservative than Nixon on social programs  
Vetoed 39 bills

##### ***The 1976 Campaign***

Carter was a nice, honest fellow  
Nearly squandered a 30 point lead in the polls  
Won a narrow victory in 1976

### ***Disenchantment with Carter***

Ok, so he was a nice, honest family man...but a good president?

No discernable political philosophy

A millionaire populist

Advised by a combination of outsiders and establishment

Deficits continued, reform attempts failed

Carter blamed the voters—an interesting strategy

His “national malaise” speech noted a “crisis of confidence”

Noted a weakened national will to face our country’s problems

***Gee—I wonder if these weak-willed, soul-less voters will re-elect Carter??***

## **VI. FROM DÉTENTE TO RENEWED COLD WAR**

### ***Retreat in Asia***

An ugly retreat from Saigon ended official US involvement in Vietnam

Ford ordered an attack on the Khmer Rouge (Cambodia) after the Mayaguez was seized

### ***Accommodation in Latin America***

Carter returns the canal to Panama (1977 treaty-2000 return of control)

Carter’s plan to base foreign aid on human rights reports falls short

Concerns in Nicaragua and El Salvador lead to direct US military aid

### ***The Quest for Peace in the Middle East***

Score one for Carter—the Camp David Peace Accords!

Begin (Israel) and Sadat (Egypt) agree to return the Sinai to Egypt

Leaving out the PLO and USSR perhaps alienated other Arab nations

Some trouble in Iran—the Ayatollah ousts the Shah (1979)

The Shah is exiled and comes to the US for medical treatment

Militants seize the US embassy and 58 hostages

An aborted rescue attempt by US forces causes 8 deaths

### ***The Cold War Resumes***

Carter’s emphasis on human rights seems like abandonment of détente

His advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (now advising Obama) hoped to “stock it to the Russians”

Speeded up the arms race with MX missiles and Trident subs

Used new relations with China to challenge the USSR

USSR invaded Afghanistan to ensure a friendly regime

Carter responded by boycotting the 1980 Moscow Olympics

Not a popular move in an election year

Between this and the rescue attempt, plus the economy → Carter might as well have been Herbert Hoover