

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 1st 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