

## PROMISE AND TURMOIL, THE 1960S

*Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage. . . . Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.*

John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961

**T**he 1960s were in many ways both the best and the worst of times. On the one hand, the postwar economic prosperity peaked in the 1960s. At the same time, racial strife, a controversial war in Vietnam, and student radicalism started to tear the country apart. The proud superpower began to learn its limits both in the jungles of Vietnam and on the streets at home.

### John F. Kennedy's New Frontier

The decade began with an election that proved symbolic of the changes that were to come.

#### ***The Election of 1960***

President Eisenhower had not been able to transfer his popularity to other Republicans, and the Democrats retained control of Congress through Eisenhower's last two years in office.

**Nixon** At their 1960 convention, the Republicans unanimously nominated Richard Nixon for president. During his eight years as Eisenhower's vice president, Nixon had gained a reputation as a statesman in his diplomatic travels to Europe and South America. In a visit to Moscow, he stood up to Nikita Khrushchev in the so-called kitchen debate (which took place in a model of an American kitchen) over the relative merits of capitalism and communism. Still young at 47, Nixon was known to be a tough and seasoned campaigner.

**Kennedy** Early in 1960, several Democrats believed they had a chance at the nomination. Liberal Democrats Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota and Adlai Stevenson of Illinois were in the contest, and southern Democrats supported

the Senate majority leader, Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas. In the primaries, however, a charismatic, wealthy, and youthful 43-year-old senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, defeated his rivals. Going into the convention, he had just enough delegates behind him to win the nomination. To balance the ticket, the New Englander chose a Texan, Lyndon B. Johnson, to be his vice presidential running mate—a choice that proved critical in carrying southern states in the November election.

**Campaign** The new medium of television was perhaps the most decisive factor in the close race between the two youthful campaigners, Nixon and Kennedy. In the first of four televised debates—the first such debates in campaign history—Kennedy appeared on-screen as more vigorous and comfortable than the pale and tense Nixon. On the issues, Kennedy attacked the Eisenhower administration for the recent recession and for permitting the Soviets to take the lead in the arms race. In reality, what Kennedy called a “missile gap” was actually in the U.S. favor, but his charges seemed plausible after *Sputnik*. As the first Catholic presidential candidate since Al Smith (1928), Kennedy’s religion became an issue in the minds of some voters. Religious loyalties helped Nixon in rural Protestant areas but helped Kennedy in the large cities.

**Results** In one of the closest elections in U.S. history, Kennedy defeated Nixon by a little more than 100,000 popular votes, and by a slightly wider margin of 303 to 219 in the electoral college. Many Republicans, including Nixon, felt the election had been stolen by Democratic political machines in states like Illinois and Texas by stuffing ballot boxes with “votes” of the deceased.

### ***Domestic Policy***

At 43, Kennedy was the youngest candidate ever to be elected president. His energy and sharp wit gave a new, personal style to the presidency. In his inaugural address, Kennedy spoke of “the torch being passed to a new generation” and promised to lead the nation into a New Frontier. The Democratic president surrounded himself with both business executives such as Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and academics such as economist John Kenneth Galbraith. For the sensitive position of attorney general, the president chose his younger brother, Robert. John Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline (“Jackie”), brought style, glamour, and an appreciation of the arts to the White House. The press loved Kennedy’s news conferences, and some later likened his administration to the mythical kingdom of Camelot and the court of King Arthur, the subject of a then-popular Broadway musical.

**New Frontier Programs** The promises of the New Frontier proved difficult to keep. Kennedy called for aid to education, federal support of health care, urban renewal, and civil rights, but his domestic programs languished in Congress. While few of Kennedy’s proposals became law during his thousand-day administration, most were passed later under President Johnson.

On economic issues, Kennedy had some success. He faced down big steel executives over a price increase he charged was inflationary and achieved a price rollback. In addition, the economy was stimulated by increased spending

for defense and space exploration, as the president committed the nation to land on the moon by the end of the decade.

### **Foreign Affairs**

With his domestic programs often blocked, Kennedy increasingly turned his attention to foreign policy issues. In 1961, he set up the Peace Corps, an organization that recruited young American volunteers to give technical aid to developing countries. Also in 1961, he organized the Alliance for Progress, which promoted land reform and economic development in Latin America. Kennedy did persuade Congress to pass the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, which authorized tariff reductions with the recently formed European Economic Community (Common Market) of Western European nations.

**Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961)** Kennedy made a major blunder shortly after entering office. He approved a Central Intelligence Agency scheme planned under the Eisenhower administration to use Cuban exiles to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba. In April 1961, the CIA-trained force of Cubans landed at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba but failed to set off a general uprising as planned. Trapped on the beach, the anti-Castro Cubans had little choice but to surrender after Kennedy rejected the idea of using U.S. forces to save them. Castro used the failed invasion to get even more aid from the Soviet Union and to strengthen his grip on power.

**Berlin Wall** Trying to shake off the embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs defeat, Kennedy agreed to meet Soviet premier Khrushchev in Vienna in the summer of 1961. Khrushchev seized the opportunity in Vienna to threaten the president by renewing Soviet demands that the United States pull its troops out of Berlin. Kennedy refused. In August, the East Germans, with Soviet backing, built a wall around West Berlin. Its purpose was to stop East Germans from fleeing to West Germany. As the wall was being built, Soviet and U.S. tanks faced off in Berlin. Kennedy called up the reserves, but he made no move to stop the completion of the wall. In 1963, the president traveled to West Berlin to assure its residents of continuing U.S. support. To cheering crowds, he proclaimed: "Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect, but we have never had to put up a wall to keep our people in. . . . As a free man, I take pride in the words, '*Ich bin ein Berliner*' [I am a Berliner]."

The Berlin Wall stood as a gloomy symbol of the Cold War until it was torn down by rebellious East Germans in 1989.

**Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)** The most dangerous challenge from the Soviets came in October 1962. U.S. reconnaissance planes discovered that the Russians were building underground sites in Cuba for the launching of offensive missiles that could reach the United States in minutes. Kennedy responded by announcing to the world that he was setting up a naval blockade of Cuba until the weapons were removed. A full-scale nuclear war between the superpowers seemed likely if Soviet ships challenged the U.S. naval blockade. After days of tension, Khrushchev finally agreed to remove the missiles from Cuba.

in exchange for Kennedy's pledge not to invade the island nation and to later remove some U.S. missiles from Turkey.

The Cuban missile crisis had a sobering effect on both sides. Soon afterward, a telecommunications hotline was established between Washington and Moscow to make it possible for the leaders of the two countries to talk directly during a crisis. In 1963, the Soviet Union and the United States—along with nearly 100 other nations—signed the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to end the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. This first step in controlling the testing of nuclear arms was offset by a new round in the arms race for developing missile and warhead superiority.

THE CARIBBEAN AND CENTRAL AMERICA



**Flexible Response** A different Cold War challenge were the many “brush-fire wars” in Africa and Southeast Asia, in which insurgent forces were often aided by Soviet arms and training. Such conflicts in the Congo (later renamed Zaire) in Africa and in Laos and Vietnam in Southeast Asia convinced the Kennedy administration to adopt a policy of flexible response. Moving away from Dulles’ idea of massive retaliation and reliance on nuclear weapons, Kennedy and McNamara increased spending on conventional (nonnuclear) arms and mobile military forces. While the flexible-response policy reduced the risk of using nuclear weapons, it also increased the temptation to send elite special forces, such as the Green Berets, into combat all over the globe.

### ***Assassination in Dallas***

After just two and a half years in office, President Kennedy’s “one brief, shining moment” was cut short on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, as two



bullets from an assassin's rifle found their mark. After the shocking news of Kennedy's murder, millions of stunned Americans were fixed to their televisions for days and even witnessed the killing of the alleged assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, just two days after the president's death. The Warren Commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, concluded that Oswald was the lone assassin. For years afterward, however, unanswered questions about the events in Dallas produced dozens of conspiracy theories pointing to possible involvement by organized crime, Castro, the CIA, and the FBI. For many Americans, the tragedy in Dallas and doubts about the Warren Commission marked the beginning of a loss of credibility in government.

**In Retrospect** At the time, John Kennedy's presidency inspired many idealistic young Americans to take seriously his inaugural message and to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." However, more recently, his belligerent Cold War rhetoric has drawn criticism from some historians. Nevertheless, the Kennedy legend has endured.

## **Lyndon Johnson's Great Society**

Two hours after the Kennedy assassination, Lyndon Johnson took the presidential oath of office aboard a plane at the Dallas airport. On the one hand, as a native of rural west Texas and a graduate of a little-known teacher's college, he seemed very unsophisticated compared to the wealthy, Harvard-educated Kennedy. On the other hand, Johnson was a skilled politician who had started his career as a devoted Roosevelt Democrat during the Great Depression.

As the new president, Johnson was determined to expand the social reforms of the New Deal. During his almost 30 years in Congress, he had learned how to get things done. Shortly after taking office, Johnson persuaded Congress to pass (1) an expanded version of Kennedy's civil rights bill, and (2) Kennedy's proposal for an income tax cut. The latter measure sparked an increase in jobs, consumer spending, and a long period of economic expansion in the sixties.

### ***The War on Poverty***

Michael Harrington's best-selling book on poverty, *The Other America* (1962), helped to focus national attention on the 40 million Americans still living in poverty. Johnson responded by declaring in 1964 an "unconditional war on poverty." The Democratic Congress gave the president almost everything that he asked for by creating the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and providing this antipoverty agency with a billion-dollar budget. The OEO sponsored a wide variety of self-help programs for the poor, such as Head Start for preschoolers, the Job Corps for vocational education, literacy programs, and legal services. The controversial Community Action Program allowed the poor to run antipoverty programs in their own neighborhoods.

Like the New Deal, some of Johnson's programs produced results, while others did not. Nevertheless, before being cut back to pay for the far more costly Vietnam War, the War on Poverty did significantly reduce the number of American families living in poverty.

### ***The Election of 1964***

Johnson and his running mate, Senator Hubert Humphrey, went into the 1964 election with a clearly liberal agenda. In contrast, the Republicans nominated a staunch conservative, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, who advocated ending the welfare state, including TVA and Social Security. A TV ad by the Democrats pictured Goldwater as a dangerous extremist, who would be quick to involve the United States in nuclear war. However, the doomed Goldwater campaign did energize young conservatives and introduced new conservative voices, such as former film actor and TV host, Ronald Reagan of California.

Johnson won the election by a landslide, taking 61 percent of the popular vote—a higher figure than FDR’s landslide of 1936. In addition, Democrats now controlled both houses of Congress by better than a two-thirds margin. A Democratic president and Congress were in a position to pass the economic and social reforms originally proposed by President Truman in the 1940s.

### ***Great Society Reforms***

Johnson’s list of legislative achievements from 1963 to 1966 is long and includes new programs that would have lasting effects on U.S. society. Several of the most significant ones are listed in the table below.

Great Society Programs		
Title	Year Passed	Program
Food Stamp Act	1964	Expanded the federal program to help poor people buy food
National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities	1965	Provided federal funding for the arts and for creative and scholarly projects
Medicare	1965	Provided health insurance for all people 65 and older
Medicaid	1965	Provided funds to states to pay for medical care for the poor and disabled
Elementary and Secondary Education Act	1965	Provided federal funds to poor school districts; funds for special education programs; and funds to expand Head Start, an early childhood education program
Higher Education Act	1965	Provided federal scholarships for post-secondary education
Immigration Act	1965	Abolished discriminatory quotas based on national origins
Child Nutrition Act	1966	Added breakfasts to the school lunch program

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In addition to the programs listed in the table, Congress increased funding for mass transit, public housing, rent subsidies for low-income people, and crime prevention. Johnson also established two new cabinet departments: the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Congress, in response to Ralph Nader's book *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965), also passed regulations of the automobile industry that would save hundreds of thousands of lives in the following years. Clean air and water laws were enacted in part as a response to Rachel Carson's exposé of pesticides, *Silent Spring* (1962). Federal parks and wilderness areas were expanded. LBJ's wife, Lady Bird Johnson, contributed to improving the environment with her Beautify America campaign, which resulted in the Highway Beautification Act that removed billboards from federal roads.

**Evaluating the Great Society** Critics have attacked Johnson's Great Society for making unrealistic promises to eliminate poverty, for creating a centralized welfare state, and for being inefficient and very costly. On the other hand, defenders point out that these programs gave vitally needed assistance to millions of Americans who had previously been forgotten or ignored—the poor, the disabled, and the elderly. Johnson himself would jeopardize the Democrat's vast domestic achievements by escalating the war in Vietnam—a war that resulted in higher taxes and inflation.

### **Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965**

Ironically, a southern president succeeded in persuading Congress to enact the most important civil rights laws since Reconstruction. Even before the 1964 election, Johnson managed to persuade both a majority of Democrats and some Republicans in Congress to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which made segregation illegal in all public facilities, including hotels and restaurants, and gave the federal government additional powers to enforce school desegregation. This act also set up the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to end discrimination in employment on the basis of race, religion, sex, or national origin. Also in 1964, the 24th Amendment was ratified. It abolished the practice of collecting a poll tax, one of the measures that, for decades, had discouraged poor people from voting.

The following year, after the killings and brutality in Selma, Alabama, against the voting rights marches led by Martin Luther King Jr., President Johnson persuaded Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This act ended literacy tests and provided federal registrars in areas where blacks were kept from voting. The impact was most dramatic in the Deep South, where African Americans could vote for the first time since the Reconstruction era.

### **Civil Rights and Conflict**

The civil rights movement gained momentum during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies. A very close election in 1960 influenced President Kennedy not to press the issue of civil rights, lest he alienate white voters. But the defiance of the governors of Alabama and Mississippi to federal court rulings on integration

forced a showdown. In 1962, James Meredith, a young African American air force veteran, attempted to enroll in the University of Mississippi. A federal court guaranteed his right to attend. Supporting Meredith and the court order, Kennedy sent in 400 federal marshals and 3,000 troops to control mob violence and protect Meredith's right to attend class.

A similar incident occurred in Alabama in 1963. Governor George Wallace tried to stop an African American student from entering the University of Alabama. Once again, President Kennedy sent troops to the scene, and the student was admitted.

### ***The Leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.***

Civil rights activists and freedom riders who traveled through the South registering African Americans to vote and integrating public places were met with beatings, bombings, and murder by white extremists. Recognized nationally as the leader of the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remained committed to nonviolent protests against segregation. In 1963, he and some followers were jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, for what local authorities judged to be an illegal march. The jailing of King, however, proved to be a milestone in the civil rights movement because most Americans believed King to have been jailed unjustly. From his jail cell, King wrote an essay, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he argued:

[W]e need emulate neither the "do-nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of non-violence became an integral part of our struggle. . . .

One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. . . .

King's letter moved President Kennedy to support a tougher civil rights bill.

**March on Washington (1963)** In August 1963, King led one of the largest and most successful demonstrations in U.S. history. About 200,000 blacks and whites took part in the peaceful March on Washington in support of the civil rights bill. The highlight of the demonstration was King's impassioned "I Have a Dream" speech, which appealed for the end of racial prejudice and ended with everyone in the crowd singing "We Shall Overcome."

**March to Montgomery (1965)** A voting rights march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capitol of Montgomery was met with beatings and tear gas in what became known as "Bloody Sunday." Televised pictures of the violence



proved a turning point in the civil rights movement. The national outrage moved President Johnson to send federal troops to protect King and other marchers in another attempt to petition the state government. As a result, Congress passed the powerful Voting Rights Act of 1965. Nevertheless, young African Americans were losing patience with the slow progress toward equality and the continued violence against their people by white extremists.

### ***Black Muslims and Malcolm X***

Seeking a new cultural identity based on Africa and Islam, the Black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad preached black nationalism, separatism, and self-improvement. The movement had already attracted thousands of followers by the time a young man became a convert while serving in prison. He adopted the name Malcolm X. Leaving prison in 1952, Malcolm X acquired a reputation as the movement's most controversial voice. He criticized King as "an Uncle Tom" (subservient to whites) and advocated self-defense—using black violence to counter white violence. He eventually left the Black Muslims and moved away from defending violence, but he was assassinated by black opponents in 1965. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* remains an engaging testimony to one man's development from a petty criminal into a major leader.

### ***Race Riots and Black Power***

The radicalism of Malcolm X influenced the thinking of young blacks in civil rights organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Stokely Carmichael, the chairman of SNCC, repudiated nonviolence and advocated "black power" (especially economic power) and racial separatism. In 1966, the Black Panthers were organized by Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and other militants as a revolutionary socialist movement advocating self-rule for American blacks.

**Riots** Shortly after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the arrest of a young black motorist by white police in the black neighborhood of Watts in Los Angeles sparked a six-day race riot that killed 34 people and destroyed over 700 buildings. Race riots continued to erupt each summer in black neighborhoods of major cities through 1968 with increasing casualties and destruction of property. Rioters shouting slogans—"Burn baby, burn" and "Get whitey"—made whites suspect that black extremists and revolutionaries were behind the violence. There was little evidence, however, that the small Black Power movement was responsible for the violence. A federal investigation of the many riots, the Kerner Commission, concluded in late 1968 that racism and segregation were chiefly responsible and that the United States was becoming "two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." By the mid-1960s, the issue of civil rights had spread far beyond *de jure* segregation practiced under the law in the South and now included the *de facto* segregation and discrimination caused by racist attitudes in the North and West.

**Murder in Memphis** Martin Luther King, Jr., received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, but his nonviolent approach was under increasing pressure from

all sides. His effort to use peaceful marches in urban centers of the North, such as Chicago, met with little success. King also broke with President Johnson over the Vietnam War because that war was beginning to drain money from social programs. In April 1968, the nation went into shock over the news that King, while standing on a motel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee, had been shot and killed by a white man. Massive riots erupted in 168 cities across the country, leaving at least 46 people dead. The violence did not reflect the ideals of the murdered leader, but it did reveal the anger and frustrations among African Americans in both the North and the South. The violence also fed a growing “white backlash,” especially among white blue-collar voters, to the civil rights movement, which was soon reflected in election results.

## **The Warren Court and Individual Rights**

As chief justice of the Supreme Court from 1953 to 1969, Earl Warren had an impact on the nation comparable to that of John Marshall in the early 1800s. Warren’s decision in the desegregation case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) was by far the most important case of the 20th century involving race relations. Then in the 1960s the Warren Court made a series of decisions that profoundly affected the criminal justice system, state political systems, and the definition of individual rights. Before Warren’s tenure as chief justice, the Supreme Court had concentrated on protecting property rights. During and after his tenure, the Court focused more on protecting individual rights.

### ***Criminal Justice***

Several decisions of the Warren Court concerned a defendant’s rights. Four of the most important were the following:

- *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961) ruled that illegally seized evidence cannot be used in court against the accused.
- *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) required that state courts provide counsel (services of an attorney) for indigent (poor) defendants.
- *Escobedo v. Illinois* (1964) required the police to inform an arrested person of his or her right to remain silent.
- *Miranda v. Arizona* (1966) extended the ruling in *Escobedo* to include the right to a lawyer being present during questioning by the police.

### ***Reapportionment***

Before 1962, many states included at least one house of its legislature (usually the senate) that had districts that strongly favored rural areas to the disadvantage of cities. In the landmark case of *Baker v. Carr* (1962), the Warren Court declared this practice unconstitutional. In *Baker* and later cases, the Court established the principle of “one man, one vote,” meaning that election districts would have to be redrawn to provide equal representation for all citizens.

### ***Freedom of Expression and Privacy***

Other rulings by the Warren Court extended the rights mentioned in the 1st Amendment to protect the actions of protesters, to permit greater latitude under freedom of the press, to ban religious activities sponsored by public schools, and to guarantee adults' rights to use contraceptives.

- *Yates v. United States* (1957) said that the 1st Amendment protected radical and revolutionary speech, even by Communists, unless it was a “clear and present danger” to the safety of the country.
- *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) ruled that state laws requiring prayers and Bible readings in the public schools violated the 1st Amendment’s provision for separation of church and state.
- *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) ruled that, in recognition of a citizen’s right to privacy, a state could not prohibit the use of contraceptives by adults. (This privacy case provided the foundation for later cases establishing a woman’s right to an abortion.)

The Warren Court’s defense of the rights of unpopular individuals, including people accused of crimes, provoked a storm of controversy. Critics called for Warren’s impeachment. Both supporters and critics agreed that the Warren Court profoundly changed the interpretation of constitutional rights.

### **Social Revolutions and Cultural Movements**

In the early and mid-1960s, various liberal groups began to identify with blacks’ struggle against oppressive controls and laws. The first such group to rebel against established authority were college and university students.

#### ***Student Movement and the New Left***

In 1962, a newly formed radical student organization called Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) held a meeting in Port Huron, Michigan. Following the leadership of Tom Hayden, the group issued a declaration of purposes known as the Port Huron Statement. It called for university decisions to be made through participatory democracy, so that students would have a voice in decisions affecting their lives. Activists and intellectuals who supported Hayden’s ideas became known as the New Left.

The first major student protest took place in 1964 on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. Calling their cause the Free Speech Movement, Berkeley students demanded an end to university restrictions on student political activities. By the mid-1960s, students across the country were protesting a variety of university rules, including those against drinking and dorm visits by members of the opposite sex. They also demanded a greater voice in the government of the university. Student demonstrations grew with the escalation of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Hundreds of campuses were disrupted or closed down by antiwar protests.



The most radical fringe of the SDS, known as the Weathermen, embraced violence and vandalism in their attacks on American institutions. In the eyes of most Americans, the Weathermen's extremist acts and language discredited the early idealism of the New Left.

### ***Counterculture***

The political protests of the New Left went hand in hand with a new counterculture that was expressed by young people in rebellious styles of dress, music, drug use, and, for some, communal living. The apparent dress code of the "hippies" and "flower children" of the 1960s included long hair, beards, beads, and jeans. The folk music of Joan Baez and Bob Dylan gave voice to the younger generation's protests, while the rock music of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Jim Morrison, and Janis Joplin provided the beat and lyrics for the counterculture. In 1969, a gathering of thousands of young people at the Woodstock Music Festival in upper New York State reflected the zenith of the counterculture. However, as a result of experimenting with hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD or becoming addicted to various other drugs, some young people destroyed their lives. The counterculture's excesses and the economic uncertainties of the times led to its demise in the 1970s.

**In Retrospect** The generation of baby boomers that came of age in the 1960s believed fervently in the ideals of a democratic society. They hoped to slay the dragons of unresponsive authority, poverty, racism, and war. However, the impatience of some activists with change, the use of violence, and the spread of self-destructive behavior discredited their cause in the eyes of others, particularly older Americans.

### ***Sexual Revolution***

One aspect of the counterculture that continued beyond the 1960s was a change in many Americans' attitudes toward sexual expression. Traditional beliefs about sexual conduct had originally been challenged in the late 1940s and 1950s by the pioneering surveys of sexual practice conducted by Alfred Kinsey. His research indicated that premarital sex, marital infidelity, and homosexuality were more common than anyone had suspected. Medicine (antibiotics for venereal disease) and science (the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960) also contributed to changing attitudes about engaging in casual sex with a number of partners. Moreover, overtly sexual themes in advertisements, magazines, and movies made sex appear to be just one more consumer product.

How deeply the so-called sexual revolution changed the behavior of the majority of Americans is open to question. There is little doubt, however, that premarital sex, contraception, abortion, and homosexuality became practiced more openly. Later, in the 1980s, there was a general reaction against the loosened moral codes as many blamed it for an increase in illegitimate births, especially among teenagers, an increase in rape and sexual abuse, and the spread of a deadly new disease, AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome).



## **The Women's Movement**

The increased education and employment of women in the 1950s, the civil rights movement, and the sexual revolution all contributed to a renewal of the women's movement in the 1960s. Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) gave the movement a new direction by encouraging middle-class women to seek fulfillment in professional careers in addition to filling the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. In 1966, Friedan helped found the National Organization for Women (NOW), which adopted the activist tactics of other civil rights movements to secure equal treatment of women, especially for job opportunities. By this time, Congress had already enacted two antidiscriminatory laws: the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These measures prohibited discrimination in employment and compensation on the basis of gender, but had been poorly enforced.

**Campaign for the ERA** Feminists achieved a major legislative victory in 1972 when Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This proposed constitutional amendment stated: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Although NOW and other groups campaigned hard for the ratification of the ERA, it just missed acceptance by the required 38 states. It was defeated in part because of a growing reaction against feminism by conservatives who feared the movement threatened the traditional roles of women.

**Achievements** Even without the ERA, the women's movement accomplished fundamental changes in attitudes and hiring practices. In increasing numbers, women moved into professions previously dominated by men: business, law, medicine, and politics. Although women still experienced the "glass ceiling" in the corporate world, American society at the beginning of the 21st century was less and less a man's world.

## **The Vietnam War to 1969**

Among the many divisive issues in the 1960s, none was as tragic as the war in Vietnam. Some 2.7 million Americans served in the conflict and 58,000 died in a failed effort to prevent South Vietnam from becoming communist.

### **Early Stages**

Vietnam was hardly mentioned in the election debates of 1960 between Nixon and Kennedy. U.S. involvement was minimal at that time, but every year thereafter, it loomed larger and eventually dominated the presidency of Lyndon Johnson and the thoughts of the nation.

**Buildup Under Kennedy** President Kennedy adopted Eisenhower's domino theory that, if Communist forces overthrew South Vietnam's government, they would quickly overrun other countries of Southeast Asia—Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Kennedy therefore continued U.S. military aid to South Vietnam's regime and significantly increased the number of military "advisers," who trained the South Vietnamese army and

guarded weapons and facilities. By 1963, there were more than 16,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam in support, not combat, roles. They provided training and supplies for South Vietnam's armed forces and helped create "strategic hamlets" (fortified villages).

However, the U.S. ally in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was not popular. He and his government steadily lost the support of peasants in the countryside, while in the capital city of Saigon, Buddhist monks set themselves on fire in the streets to protest Diem's policies. Kennedy began to question whether the South Vietnamese could win "their war" against Communist insurgents. Just two weeks before Kennedy himself was assassinated in Dallas, Diem was overthrown and killed by South Vietnamese generals. Historians later learned that the generals acted with the knowledge of the Kennedy administration.

**Tonkin Gulf Resolution** Lyndon Johnson became president just as things began to fall apart in South Vietnam. The country had seven different governments in 1964. During the U.S. presidential campaign, Republican candidate Barry Goldwater attacked the Johnson administration for giving only weak support to South Vietnam's fight against the Vietcong (Communist guerrillas). In August 1964, President Johnson and Congress took a fateful turn in policy. Johnson made use of a naval incident in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam's coast to secure congressional authorization for U.S. forces going into combat. Allegedly, North Vietnamese gunboats had fired on U.S. warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. The president persuaded Congress that this aggressive act was sufficient reason for a military response by the United States. Congress voted its approval of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which basically gave the president, as commander in chief, a blank check to take "all necessary measures" to protect U.S. interests in Vietnam.

Critics later called the full-scale use of U.S. forces in Vietnam an illegal war, because the war was not declared by Congress, as the Constitution requires. Congress, however, did not have this concern and did not withdraw its resolution. Until 1968, most Americans supported the effort to contain communism in Southeast Asia. Johnson was caught in a political dilemma to which there was no good solution. How could he stop the defeat of a weak and unpopular government in South Vietnam without making it into an American war—a war whose cost would doom his Great Society programs? If he pulled out, he would be seen as weak and lose public support.

### ***Escalating the War***

In 1965, the U.S. military and most of the president's foreign policy advisers recommended expanding operations in Vietnam to save the Saigon government. After a Vietcong attack on the U.S. base at Pleiku in 1965, Johnson authorized Operation Rolling Thunder, a prolonged air attack using B-52 bombers against targets in North Vietnam. In April, the president decided to use U.S. combat troops for the first time to fight the Vietcong. By the end of 1965, over 184,000 U.S. troops were in Vietnam, and most were engaged in a combat role. Johnson continued a step-by-step escalation of U.S. involvement in the war. Hoping

to win a war of attrition, American generals used search-and-destroy tactics, which only further alienated the peasants. By the end of 1967, the United States had over 485,000 troops in Vietnam (the peak was 540,000 in March 1969), and 16,000 Americans had already died in the conflict. Nevertheless, General William Westmoreland, commander of the U.S. forces in Vietnam, assured the American public that he could see “light at the end of the tunnel.”

### Controversy

Misinformation from military and civilian leaders combined with Johnson’s reluctance to speak frankly with the American people about the scope and the costs of the war created what the media called a *credibility gap*. Johnson always hoped that a little more military pressure would bring the North Vietnamese to the peace table. The most damaging knowledge gap, however, may have been within the inner circles of government. Years later, Robert McNamara in his memoirs concluded that the leaders in Washington had failed to understand both the enemy and the nature of the war.

THE VIETNAM WAR



**Hawks versus Doves** The supporters of the war, the “hawks,” believed that the war was an act of Soviet-backed Communist aggression against South Vietnam and that it was part of a master plan to conquer all of Southeast Asia. The opponents of the war, the “doves,” viewed the conflict as a civil war fought by Vietnamese nationalists and some Communists who wanted to unite their country by overthrowing a corrupt Saigon government.

Some Americans opposed the war because of its costs in lives and money. They believed the billions spent in Vietnam could be better spent on the problems of the cities and the poor in the United States. By far the greatest opposition came from students on college campuses who, after graduation, would become eligible to be drafted into the military and shipped off to Vietnam. In November 1967, the antiwar movement was given a political leader when scholarly Senator Eugene F. McCarthy of Minnesota became the first antiwar advocate to challenge Johnson for the 1968 Democratic presidential nomination.

**Tet Offensive** On the occasion of their Lunar New Year (Tet) in January 1968, the Vietcong launched an all-out surprise attack on almost every provincial capital and American base in South Vietnam. Although the attack took a fearful toll in the cities, the U.S. military counterattacked, inflicted much heavier losses on the Vietcong, and recovered the lost territory. Even so, in political terms, the American military victory proved irrelevant to the way the Tet Offensive was interpreted at home. The destruction viewed by millions on the TV news appeared as a colossal setback for Johnson’s Vietnam policy. Thus, for the Vietcong and North Vietnamese, Tet was a tremendous political victory in demoralizing the American public. In the New Hampshire primary in February, the antiwar McCarthy took 42 percent of the vote against Johnson.

**LBJ Ends Escalation** The Joint Chiefs of Staff responded to Tet by requesting 200,000 more troops to win the war. By this time, however, the group of experienced Cold War diplomats who advised Johnson had turned against further escalation of the war. On March 31, 1968, President Johnson went on television and told the American people that he would limit the bombing of North Vietnam and negotiate peace. He then surprised everyone by announcing that he would not run again for president.

In May 1968, peace talks between North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the United States started in Paris, but they were quickly deadlocked over minor issues. The war continued, and tens of thousands more died. But the escalation of the number of U.S. troops in Vietnam had stopped, and under the next administration it would be reversed.

## Coming Apart at Home, 1968

Few years in U.S. history were as troubled or violent as 1968. The Tet offensive and the withdrawal of Johnson from the presidential race were followed by the senseless murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and destructive riots in cities across the country. As the year unfolded, Americans wondered if their nation was coming apart from internal conflicts over the war issue, the race issue, and the generation gap between the baby boomers and their parents.



### ***Second Kennedy Assassination***

In 1964, Kennedy's younger brother, Robert Kennedy, had become a senator from New York. Four years later, he decided to enter the presidential race after McCarthy's strong showing in New Hampshire. Bobby Kennedy was more effective than McCarthy in mobilizing the traditional Democratic blue-collar and minority vote. On June 5, 1968, he won a major victory in California's primary, but immediately after his victory speech, he was shot and killed by a young Arab nationalist who opposed Kennedy's support for Israel.

### ***The Election of 1968***

After Robert Kennedy's death, the election of 1968 turned into a three-way race between two conservatives—George Wallace and Richard Nixon—and one liberal, Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

**Democratic Convention at Chicago** When the Democrats met in Chicago for their party convention, it was clear that Hubert Humphrey had enough delegates to win the nomination. As vice president, he had loyally supported Johnson's domestic and foreign policies. He controlled the convention, but the antiwar demonstrators were determined to control the streets. Chicago's mayor Richard Daley had the police out in mass, and the resulting violence went out on television across the country as a "police riot." Humphrey left the convention as the nominee of a badly divided Democratic party, and early polls showed he was a clear underdog in a nation sick of disorder and protest.

**White Backlash and George Wallace** The growing hostility of many whites to federal desegregation, antiwar protests, and race riots was tapped by Governor George Wallace of Alabama. Wallace was the first politician of late-20th-century America to marshal the general resentment against the Washington establishment ("pointy-head liberals," as he called them) and the two-party system. He ran for president as the self-nominated candidate of the American Independent party, hoping to win enough electoral votes to throw the election into the House of Representatives.

**Return of Richard Nixon** Many observers thought Richard Nixon's political career had ended in 1962 after his unsuccessful run for governor of California. In 1968, however, a new, more confident and less negative Nixon announced his candidacy and soon became the front-runner in the Republican primaries. The favorite of the party regulars, he had little trouble securing his nomination at the Republican convention. For his running mate, he selected Governor Spiro Agnew of Maryland, whose rhetoric was similar to that of George Wallace. Nixon was a "hawk" on the Vietnam War and ran on the slogans of "peace with honor" and "law and order."

**Results** Wallace and Nixon started strong, but the Democrats began to catch up, especially in northern urban centers, as Humphrey preached to the faithful of the old New Deal coalition. On election night, Nixon defeated Humphrey by a very close popular vote but took a substantial majority of the electoral vote (301 to 191), ending any threat that the three-candidate election would end up in the House of Representatives.

The significance of the 1968 election is clear in the combined total of Nixon's and Wallace's popular vote of almost 57 percent. Apparently, most Americans wanted a time out to heal the wounds inflicted on the national psyche by the upheavals of the 1960s. Supporters of Nixon and Wallace had had enough of protest, violence, permissiveness, the counterculture, drugs, and federal intervention in social institutions. Elections in the 1970s and 1980s would confirm that the tide was turning against New Deal liberalism in favor of the conservatives.

#### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM?**

The U.S. war in Vietnam had been long and deadly. Marked by failures in both political and military leadership, the war initiated a period of widespread distrust of the government. What went wrong? Critics of the war argued that the United States failed in Vietnam because neither the government nor the military understood the nature of the war. Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon viewed the conflict strictly in Cold War terms as an act of aggression by the Communist "monolith" to take over another part of the world, instead of a civil war in which a former colony was trying to gain its independence from Western colonialism. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in his book *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (1995), laments that members of the Johnson administration lacked Asian experts to advise them on the formulation of Vietnam policy.

In contrast, General William Westmoreland and other military leaders of the era blamed the civilian government for placing restrictions on the conduct of the war that prevented the military from winning it. In their view, the war could have been won if only the U.S. military had been permitted to take the offensive and bring the war to a swift conclusion. The generals blamed the media for turning the American people against the war. Westmoreland and others argued that the telecasts of the Tet Offensive forced a change in the conduct of the war, just at the point that the U.S. military was beginning to win it.

Many observers have attempted to extract lessons from Vietnam, hoping that the mistakes of the past can be avoided in the future. To many critics of the war, it appeared that the most important mistake was attempting to impose an unsatisfactory regime on a country and that the United States should not go into a war if no vital national interests are at stake. Many critics concluded that a president and Congress should not lead the nation into future war unless they are confident that they can rally and sustain the support of the American people behind the effort over time.

## KEY TERMS BY THEME

### Kennedy: Domestic Issues (POL)

Election of 1960  
John F. Kennedy  
New Frontier  
Robert Kennedy  
Jacqueline Kennedy  
race to the moon  
assassination in Dallas  
Warren Commission

### Kennedy: Foreign Policy (WOR)

Peace Corps  
Alliance for Progress  
Trade Expansion Act (1962)  
Bay of Pigs  
Berlin Wall  
Cuban missile crisis (1962)  
flexible response  
Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

### Johnson: Domestic Programs (POL, WXT)

Lyndon Johnson  
Great Society  
War on Poverty  
Michael Harrington, *The Other America*  
Election of 1964  
Barry Goldwater  
Medicare; Medicaid  
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965)  
Immigrant Act (1965)  
National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities  
DOT and HUD  
Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed*  
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Lady Bird Johnson  
Civil Rights Act of 1964  
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
24th Amendment  
Voting Rights Act of 1965

### Civil Rights and Black Power (ID, POL)

James Meredith  
George Wallace  
Martin Luther King Jr.  
March on Washington (1963)  
“I Have a Dream” speech  
March to Montgomery  
Black Muslims  
Malcolm X  
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee  
Congress of Racial Equality  
Stokely Carmichael  
Black Panthers  
Watts riots, race riots  
de facto segregation  
Kerner Commission  
King assassination (1968)

### Rights of Americans (POL)

Warren Court  
*Mapp v. Ohio*  
*Gideon v. Wainwright*  
*Escobedo v. Illinois*  
*Miranda v. Arizona*  
reapportionment  
*Baker v. Carr*  
“one man, one vote”  
*Yates v. United States*  
separation of church and state

*Engel v. Vitale*  
*Griswold v. Connecticut*  
privacy and contraceptives

### Social Conflict (ID, CUL)

Students for a Democratic Society  
New Left  
Weathermen  
counterculture  
Woodstock  
Alfred Kinsey  
sexual revolution  
women’s movement  
Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*  
National Organization for Women  
Equal Pay Act (1963)  
Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

### Vietnam War to 1969 (WOR)

military “advisers”  
fall of Diem  
Tonkin Gulf Resolution  
escalation of troops  
General Westmoreland  
credibility gap  
Tet Offensive  
hawks and doves

### 1968 Election (POL)

LBJ withdraws  
Eugene McCarthy  
Robert Kennedy  
RFK assassination  
Hubert Humphrey  
Chicago convention  
white backlash  
George Wallace  
Richard Nixon

## LIMITS OF A SUPERPOWER, 1969–1980

*If, when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation, the United States, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world.*

Richard Nixon, Address to the Nation, April 30, 1970

In 1969, television viewers around the world witnessed the astonishing sight of two American astronauts walking on the moon's surface. This event, followed by a series of other successes for the U.S. space program, represented some of the high points of the 1970s. Offsetting these technological triumphs, however, were shocking revelations about White House participation in the Watergate crime, a stagnant economy, and the fall of South Vietnam to communism. Increased foreign economic competition, oil shortages, rising unemployment, and high inflation made Americans aware that even the world's leading superpower would have to adjust to a fast-changing, less manageable world.

### Richard Nixon's Foreign Policy

In his January 1969 inaugural address, President Nixon promised to bring Americans together after the turmoil of the 1960s. However, suspicious and secretive by nature, Nixon soon began to isolate himself in the White House and create what Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called an "imperial presidency." Nixon's first interest was international relations, not domestic policy. Together with his national security adviser, Henry Kissinger (who became secretary of state during Nixon's second term), Nixon fashioned a pragmatic foreign policy that reduced the tensions of the Cold War.

### Vietnam

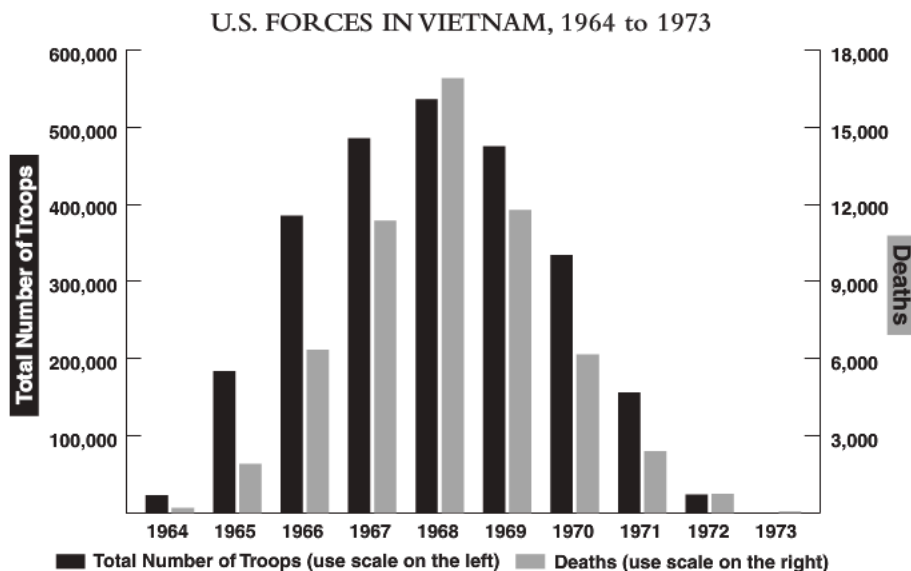
When Nixon took office, more than half a million U.S. troops were in Vietnam. His principal objective was to find a way to reduce U.S. involvement in the war while at the same time avoiding the appearance of conceding defeat. In a word, Nixon said the United States was seeking nothing less than "peace with honor."



**“Vietnamization.”** Almost immediately, the new president began the process called “Vietnamization.” He announced that he would gradually withdraw U.S. troops from Vietnam and give the South Vietnamese the money, the weapons, and the training that they needed to take over the full conduct of the war. Under this policy, U.S. troops in South Vietnam went from over 540,000 in 1969 to under 30,000 in 1972. Extending the idea of disengagement to other parts of Asia, the president proclaimed the *Nixon Doctrine*, declaring that in the future Asian allies would receive U.S. support but without the extensive use of U.S. ground forces.

**Opposition to Nixon’s War Policies** Nixon’s gradual withdrawal of forces from Vietnam reduced the number of antiwar protests. However, in April 1970, the president expanded the war by using U.S. forces to invade Cambodia in an effort to destroy Vietnamese Communist bases in that country. A nationwide protest on college campuses against this action resulted in the killing of four youths by National Guard troops at Kent State in Ohio and two students at Jackson State in Mississippi. In reaction to the escalation of the war, the U.S. Senate (but not the House) voted to repeal the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Also in 1970, the American public was shocked to learn about a 1968 massacre of women and children by U.S. troops in the Vietnamese village of My Lai. Further fueling the antiwar sentiment was the publication by the *New York Times* of the Pentagon Papers, a secret government history documenting the mistakes and deceptions of government policy-makers in dealing with Vietnam. The papers had been turned over, or “leaked,” to the press by Daniel Ellsberg, a former Defense Department analyst.



**Source:** U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. Vietnam Conflict Extract Data File and other sources.

**Peace Talks, Bombing Attacks, and Armistice** On the diplomatic front, Nixon had Kissinger conduct secret meetings with North Vietnam's foreign minister, Le Duc Tho. Kissinger announced in the fall of 1972 that "peace is at hand," but this announcement proved premature. When the two sides could not reach a deal, Nixon ordered a massive bombing of North Vietnam (the heaviest air attacks of the long war) to force a settlement. After several weeks of B-52 bomber attacks, the North Vietnamese agreed to an armistice, in which the United States would withdraw the last of its troops and get back over 500 prisoners of war (POWs). The Paris Accords of January 1973 also promised a cease-fire and free elections. In practice, however, the armistice did not end the war between the North and the South and left tens of thousands of enemy troops in South Vietnam. Before the war ended, the death toll probably numbered more than a million.

The armistice finally allowed the United States to extricate itself from a war that had claimed over 58,000 American lives. The \$118 billion spent on the war began an inflationary cycle that racked the U.S. economy for years afterward.

### ***Détente with China and the Soviet Union***

Nixon and Kissinger strengthened the U.S. position in the world by taking advantage of the rivalry between the two Communist giants, China and the Soviet Union. Their diplomacy was praised for bringing about *détente*—a deliberate reduction of Cold War tensions. Even after Watergate ended his presidency in disgrace, Nixon's critics would admit that his conduct of foreign affairs had enhanced world peace.

**Visit to China** Nixon knew that only an outspoken critic of communism like himself could take the bold step of improving relations with "Red" China (Mao Zedong's Communist regime) without being condemned as "soft" on communism. After a series of secret negotiations with Chinese leaders, Nixon astonished the world in February 1972 by traveling to Beijing to meet with Mao. His visit initiated diplomatic exchanges that ultimately led to U.S. recognition of the Communist government in 1979.

**Arms Control with the U.S.S.R.** Nixon used his new relationship with China to put pressure on the Soviets to agree to a treaty limiting antiballistic missiles (ABMs), a new technology that would have expanded the arms race. After the first round of Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT I), U.S. diplomats secured Soviet consent to a freeze on the number of ballistic missiles carrying nuclear warheads. While this agreement did not end the arms race, it was a significant step toward reducing Cold War tensions and bringing about *détente*.

### **Nixon's Domestic Policy**

Throughout the 1970s, the Democrats continued to hold majorities in both houses of Congress. The Republican president had to live with this reality and obtain some concessions from Congress through moderation and compromise. At the same time, Nixon laid the foundation for a shift in public opinion toward conservatism and for Republican gains that would challenge and overthrow the Democratic control of Congress in the 1980s and 1990s.

### ***The New Federalism***

Nixon tried to slow down the growth of Johnson's Great Society programs by proposing the Family Assistance Plan, which would have replaced welfare by providing a guaranteed annual income for working Americans. The Democratic majority in Congress easily defeated this initiative. The Republican president did succeed, however, in shifting some of the responsibility for social programs from the federal to the state and local levels. In a program known as revenue sharing, or the New Federalism, Congress approved giving local governments \$30 billion in block grants over five years to address local needs as they saw fit (instead of specific uses of federal money being controlled by Washington). Republicans hoped revenue sharing would check the growth of the federal government and return responsibility to the states, where it had rested before the New Deal.

Nixon attempted to bypass Congress by impounding (not spending) funds appropriated for social programs. Democrats protested that such action was an abuse of executive powers. The courts agreed with the president's critics, arguing that it was a president's duty to carry out the laws of Congress, whether or not the president agreed with them.

### ***Nixon's Economic Policies***

Starting with a recession in 1970, the U.S. economy throughout the 1970s faced the unusual combination of economic slowdown and high inflation—a condition referred to as *stagflation* (*stagnation plus inflation*). To slow inflation, Nixon at first tried to cut federal spending. However, when this policy contributed to a recession and unemployment, he adopted Keynesian economics and deficit spending so as not to alienate middle-class and blue-collar Americans. In August 1971, he surprised the nation by imposing a 90-day wage and price freeze. Next, he took the dollar off the gold standard, which helped to devalue it relative to foreign currencies. This action, combined with a 10 percent surtax on all imports, improved the U.S. balance of trade with foreign competitors.

By the election year of 1972, the recession was over. Also in that year, Congress approved automatic increases for Social Security benefits based on the annual rise in the cost of living. This measure protected seniors, the poor, and the disabled from the worst effects of inflation but also contributed to budget problems in the future. In 1972, Congress also passed Title IX, a statute to end sex discrimination in schools that receive federal funding. Though far-reaching, the law is best known for its requirement that schools provide girls with equal athletic opportunities. Many believe that these new opportunities in athletics proved to be a key step in promoting women's equality.

### ***Southern Strategy***

Having received just 43 percent of the popular vote in 1968, Nixon was well aware of being a minority president. He devised a political strategy to form a Republican majority by appealing to the millions of voters who had become disaffected by antiwar protests, black militants, school busing to achieve racial balance, and the excesses of the youth counterculture. Nixon referred to these



conservative Americans as the “silent majority.” Many of them were Democrats, including southern whites, northern Catholic blue-collar workers, and recent suburbanites who disagreed with the liberal drift of their party.

To win over the South, the president asked the federal courts in that region to delay integration plans and busing orders. He also nominated two southern conservatives (Clement Haynsworth and G. Harold Carswell) to the Supreme Court. Though the courts rejected his requests and the Senate refused to confirm the two nominees, his strategy played well with southern white voters. At the same time, Nixon authorized Vice President Spiro Agnew to make verbal assaults on war protesters and to attack the press as liberal.

### ***The Burger Court***

As liberal justices of the Supreme Court retired, Nixon replaced them with more conservative members. However, like other presidents, Nixon found that his appointees did not always rule as he had hoped. In 1969, after Chief Justice Earl Warren resigned, Nixon appointed Warren E. Burger of Minnesota to replace him. The Burger Court was more conservative than the Warren Court, but several of its major decisions angered conservatives. For example, in 1971 the court ordered busing to achieve racial balance in the schools, and in 1972 it issued strict guidelines that made carrying out the death penalty more difficult. The court’s most controversial ruling was *Roe v. Wade* (1973). In this 7–2 decision, the high court struck down many state laws prohibiting abortions as a violation of a women’s right to privacy. Finally, in the last days of Nixon’s Watergate agony (described later in this chapter), the court that he tried to shape denied his claims to executive privilege and ordered him to turn over the Watergate tapes (*United States v. Nixon*, 1974).

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

The success of Nixon’s southern strategy became evident in the presidential election of 1972 when the Republican ticket won majorities in every southern state. Nixon’s reelection was practically assured by (1) his foreign policy successes in China and the Soviet Union, (2) the removal of George Wallace from the race by an assassin’s bullet that paralyzed the Alabama populist, and (3) the nomination by the Democrats of a very liberal, antiwar, antiestablishment candidate, Senator George McGovern of South Dakota.

McGovern’s campaign quickly went off track. After some indecision, he dropped his vice presidential candidate, Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, when it was discovered that he had undergone electroshock treatment for depression. On election day, Nixon overwhelmed McGovern in a landslide victory that carried every state but Massachusetts and won 61 percent of the popular vote. The Democrats still managed to keep control of both houses of Congress. Nevertheless, the voting patterns for Nixon indicated the start of a major political realignment of the Sunbelt and suburban voters, who were forming a new Republican majority. Nixon’s electoral triumph in 1972 made the Watergate revelations and scandals of 1973 all the more surprising.



## **Watergate**

The tragedy of Watergate went well beyond the public humiliation of Richard Nixon and the conviction and jailing of 26 White House officials and aides. Watergate had a paralyzing effect on the political system in the mid-1970s, a critical time both at home and overseas, when the country needed respected, strong, and confident leadership.

### ***White House Abuses***

In June 1972, a group of men hired by Nixon's reelection committee were caught breaking into the offices of the Democratic national headquarters in the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C. This break-in and attempted bugging were only part of a series of illegal activities and "dirty tricks" conducted by the Nixon administration and the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP).

Earlier, Nixon had ordered wiretaps on government employees and reporters to stop news leaks such as one that had exposed the secret bombing of Cambodia. The president's aides created a group, called the "plumbers," to stop leaks as well as to discredit opponents. Before Watergate, the "plumbers" had burglarized the office of psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the person behind the leaking of the Pentagon Papers, in order to obtain information to discredit Ellsberg. The White House had also created an "enemies list" of prominent Americans who opposed Nixon, the Vietnam War, or both. People on this list were investigated by government agencies, such as the IRS. The illegal break-in at Watergate reflected the attitude in the Nixon administration that any means could be used to promote the national security—an objective that was often confused with protecting the Nixon administration from its critics.

### ***Watergate Investigation***

No solid proof demonstrated that President Nixon ordered any of these illegal activities. However, after months of investigation, it became clear that Nixon did engage in an illegal cover-up to avoid scandal. Tough sentencing of the Watergate burglars by federal judge John Sirica led to information about the use of money and a promise of pardons by the White House staff to keep the burglars quiet. A Senate investigating committee headed by Democrat Sam Ervin of North Carolina brought the abuses to the attention of Americans through televised hearings. A highlight of these hearings was the testimony of a White House lawyer, John Dean, who linked the president to the cover-up. Nixon's top aides, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, resigned to protect him and were later indicted, as were many others, for obstructing justice.

The discovery of a taping system in the Oval Office led to a year-long struggle between Nixon, who claimed executive privilege for the tapes, and investigators, who wanted the tapes to prove the cover-up charges.

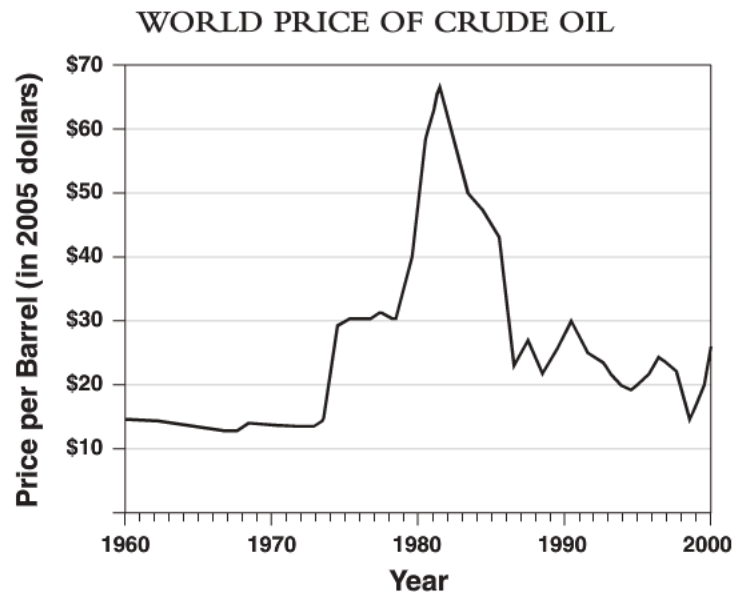
The Nixon administration received another blow in the fall of 1973, when Vice President Agnew had to resign because he had taken bribes when governor of Maryland. Replacing him was Michigan Representative Gerald Ford.

### ***Other Developments in 1973***

Although the Watergate affair absorbed most of Nixon's attention during his shortened second term, important developments occurred at home and abroad.

**War Powers Act** Further discrediting Nixon was the news that he had authorized 3,500 secret bombing raids in Cambodia, a neutral country. Congress used the public uproar over this information to attempt to limit the president's powers over the military. In November 1973, after a long struggle, Congress finally passed the War Powers Act over Nixon's veto. This law required Nixon and any future president to report to Congress within 48 hours after taking military action. It further provided that Congress would have to approve any military action that lasted more than 60 days.

**October War and Oil Embargo** In world politics, the most important event of 1973 was the outbreak of another Middle Eastern war. On October 6, on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, the Syrians and Egyptians launched a surprise attack on Israel in an attempt to recover the lands lost in the Six-Day War of 1967. President Nixon ordered the U.S. nuclear forces on alert and airlifted almost \$2 billion in arms to Israel to stem their retreat. The tide of battle quickly shifted in favor of the Israelis, and the war was soon over.



Source: U.S. Energy Administration

The United States was made to pay a huge price for supporting Israel. The Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) placed an embargo on oil sold to Israel's supporters. The embargo caused a worldwide oil shortage and long lines at gas stations in the United States. Even worse was the impact on the U.S. economy, which now suffered from runaway

inflation, the loss of manufacturing jobs, and a lower standard of living for blue-collar workers. Consumers switched from big American-made cars to smaller, more fuel-efficient Japanese cars, which cost U.S. automobile workers over 225,000 jobs. Congress responded by enacting a 55-miles-per-hour speed limit to save gasoline and approving construction of a controversial oil pipeline to tap American oil reserves in Alaska. No government program, however, seemed to bolster the sluggish economy or stem high inflation rates, which continued to the end of the decade.

### ***Resignation of a President***

In 1974, Nixon made triumphal visits to Moscow and Cairo, but at home his reputation continued to slide. In October 1973, the president appeared to be interfering with the Watergate investigation when he fired Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor assigned to the case. In protest, the U.S. attorney general resigned. The House of Representatives began impeachment hearings, which caused Nixon to reveal transcripts of some of the Watergate tapes in April 1974. Still, it took a Supreme Court decision in July to force him to turn over the tapes to the courts and Congress. Included on one tape made just days after the Watergate burglary was an 18 ½-minute gap that had been erased. Meanwhile, the House Judiciary Committee voted three articles of impeachment: (1) obstruction of justice, (2) abuse of power, and (3) contempt of Congress.

The conversations recorded on the tapes shocked friends and foes alike. The transcript of one such White House conversation clearly implicated Nixon in the cover-up only days after the Watergate break-in. Faced with certain impeachment in the House and a trial in the Senate, Richard Nixon chose to resign on August 9, 1974. Vice President Gerald Ford then took the oath of office as the first unelected president in U.S. history.

**Significance** To some, the final outcome of the Watergate scandal (Nixon leaving office under pressure) proved that the U.S. constitutional system of checks and balances worked as it was intended. For others, the scandal underlined the dangerous shift of power to the presidency that began with Franklin Roosevelt and had been expanded during the Cold War. Without a doubt, Watergate contributed to a growing loss of faith in the federal government.

### **Gerald Ford in the White House**

Before Nixon chose him to replace Vice President Agnew in 1973, Gerald Ford had served in Congress for years as a representative from Michigan and as the Republican minority leader of the House. Ford was a likeable and unpretentious man, but many questioned his ability to be president.

### ***Pardoning of Nixon***

In his first month in office, President Ford lost the goodwill of many by granting Nixon a full and unconditional pardon for any crime that he might have committed. The pardon was extended even before any formal charges or indictment had been made by a court of law. Ford was accused of making a “corrupt

bargain” with Nixon, but he explained that the purpose of the pardon was to end the “national nightmare,” instead of prolonging it for months, if not years. Critics were angered that the full truth of Nixon’s deeds never came out.

### ***Investigating the CIA***

During Ford’s presidency (1974–1977), the Democratic Congress continued to search for abuses in the executive branch, especially in the CIA. This intelligence agency was accused of engineering the assassination of foreign leaders, among them the Marxist president of Chile, Salvador Allende. Ford appointed former Texas Congressman George H. W. Bush to reform the agency.

### ***Failure of U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia***

President Ford was unable to get additional funds from Congress for the South Vietnamese, who in 1974 were facing strong attack from Communist forces.

**Fall of Saigon** In April 1975, the U.S.-supported government in Saigon fell to the enemy, and Vietnam became one country under the rule of the Communist government in Hanoi (North Vietnam’s capital). Just before the final collapse, the United States was able to evacuate about 150,000 Vietnamese who had supported the United States and now faced certain persecution. The fall of South Vietnam marked a low point of American prestige overseas and confidence at home.

**Genocide in Cambodia** Also in 1975, the U.S.-supported government in Vietnam’s neighbor, Cambodia, fell to the Khmer Rouge, a radical Communist faction that killed over a million of its own people in a brutal relocation program to rid the country of western influence. Together the wars in Southeast Asia created 10 million refugees, many of whom fled to the United States.

**Future of Southeast Asia** The fall of Cambodia seemed to fulfill Eisenhower’s domino theory, but in fact the rest of Southeast Asia did not fall to communism. Instead, nations such as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia emerged as the “little tigers” of the vigorously growing Asian (Pacific Rim) economy. Some argued that U.S. support of South Vietnam was not a waste, because it bought time for other nations of East Asia and Southeast Asia to develop and better resist communism.

### ***The Economy and Domestic Policy***

On domestic matters, Ford proved less accommodating and more conservative than Nixon. His chief concern was bringing inflation under control. He urged voluntary measures on the part of businesses and consumers, including the wearing of WIN buttons (Whip Inflation Now). Not only did inflation continue, but the economy also sank deeper into recession, with the unemployment rate reaching more than 9 percent. Ford finally agreed to a Democratic package to stimulate the economy, but he vetoed 39 other Democratic bills.

**Bicentennial Celebration** In 1976, the United States celebrated its 200th birthday. Americans’ pride in their history helped to put Watergate and Vietnam behind them. Even the lackluster presidency of Gerald Ford served the purpose of restoring candor and humility to the White House.



## ***The Election of 1976***

Watergate still cast its gloom over the Republican party in the 1976 elections. President Ford was challenged for the party's nomination by Ronald Reagan, a former actor and ex-governor of California, who enjoyed the support of the more conservative Republicans. Ford won the nomination in a close battle, but the conflict with Reagan hurt him in the polls.

**Emergence of Jimmy Carter** A number of Democrats competed for their party's nomination, including a little-known former governor of Georgia, James Earl (Jimmy) Carter. With Watergate still on voters' minds, Carter had success running as an outsider against the corruption in Washington. His victories in open primaries reduced the influence of more experienced Democratic politicians. After watching his huge lead in the polls evaporate in the closing days of the campaign, Carter managed to win a close election (287 electoral votes to 241 for Ford) by carrying most of the South and getting an estimated 97 percent of the African American vote. In the aftermath of Watergate, the Democrats also won strong majorities in both houses of Congress.

## ***Jimmy Carter's Presidency***

The informal style of Jimmy Carter signaled an effort to end the imperial presidency. On his inaugural day, he walked down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House instead of riding in the presidential limousine. Public images of the president carrying his own luggage may have impressed average Americans. However, veteran members of Congress always viewed Carter as an outsider who depended too much on his politically inexperienced advisers from Georgia. Even Carter's keen intelligence and dedication to duty may have been partly a liability in causing him to pay close attention to all the details of government operations. Critics observed that, when it came to distinguishing between the forest and the trees, Carter was a "leaf man."

## ***Foreign Policy***

The hallmark of Carter's foreign policy was human rights, which he preached with Wilsonian fervor to the world's dictators.

**Human Rights Diplomacy** Carter appointed Andrew Young, an African American, to serve as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Carter and Young championed the cause of human rights around the world, especially by opposing the oppression of the black majority in South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) by all-white governments. In Latin America, human rights violations by the military governments of Argentina and Chile caused Carter to cut off U.S. aid to those countries.

**Panama Canal** The Carter administration attempted to correct inequities in the original Panama Canal Treaty of 1903 by negotiating a new treaty. In 1978, after long debate, the Senate ratified a treaty that would gradually transfer operation and control of the Panama Canal from the United States to the Panamanians, a process to be completed by the year 2000. Opponents would remember Carter's "giveaway" of the canal in the 1980 election.

**Camp David Accords (1978)** Perhaps Carter's single greatest achievement as president was arranging a peace settlement between Egypt and Israel. In 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat took the first courageous step toward Middle East peace by visiting Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in Jerusalem. President Carter followed this bold initiative by inviting Sadat and Begin to meet again at the presidential retreat in Camp David, Maryland. With Carter acting as an intermediary, the two leaders negotiated the Camp David Accords (September 1978), which provided a framework for a peace settlement between their countries.

Later, as a result of a peace treaty concluded in 1979, Egypt became the first Arab nation to recognize the nation of Israel. In return, Israel withdrew its troops from the Sinai territory taken from Egypt in the Six-Day War of 1967. The treaty was opposed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and most of the Arab world, but it proved the first step in the long road to a negotiated peace in the Middle East.

**Iran and the Hostage Crisis** The Middle East provided Carter's greatest frustration. In Iran, anti-American sentiment had been strong since the United States had helped overthrow the country's democratically elected leader in 1953 and install a dictatorial government. In 1979, Islamic fundamentalists in Iran, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrew the shah who was then leading the Iranian government. The shah had kept the oil flowing for the West during the 1970s, but his autocratic rule and policy of westernization had alienated a large part of the Iranian population.

With the ayatollah and fundamentalists in power, Iranian oil production ground to a halt, causing the second worldwide oil shortage of the decade and another round of price increases. U.S. impotence in dealing with the crisis became more evident in November 1979 when Iranian militants seized the U.S. embassy in Teheran and held more than 50 members of the American staff as prisoners and hostages. The hostage crisis dragged out through the remainder of Carter's presidency. In April 1980, Carter approved a rescue mission, but the breakdown of the helicopters over the Iranian desert forced the United States to abort the mission. For many Americans, Carter's unsuccessful attempts to free the hostages became a symbol of a failed presidency.

**Cold War** President Carter attempted to continue the Nixon-Ford policy of détente with China and the Soviet Union. In 1979, the United States ended its official recognition of the Nationalist Chinese government of Taiwan and completed the first exchange of ambassadors with the People's Republic of China. At first, détente also moved ahead with the Soviet Union with the signing in 1979 of a SALT II treaty, which provided for limiting the size of each superpower's nuclear delivery system. The Senate never ratified the treaty, however, as a result of a renewal of Cold War tensions over Afghanistan.

In December 1979, Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan—an aggressive action that ended a decade of improving U.S.-Soviet relations. The United States feared that the invasion might lead to a Soviet move to control the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Carter reacted by (1) placing an embargo on grain exports

and the sale of high technology to the Soviet Union, and (2) boycotting the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. After having campaigned for arms reduction, Carter now had to switch to an arms buildup.

### ***Domestic Policy: Dealing with Inflation***

At home, the biggest issue was the growing inflation rate. At first Carter tried to check inflation with measures aimed at conserving oil energy and reviving the U.S. coal industry. However, the compromises that came out of Congress failed either to reduce the consumption of oil or to check inflation. In 1979–1980, inflation seemed completely out of control and reached the unheard of rate of 13 percent.

**Troubled Economy** Inflation slowed economic growth as consumers and businesses could no longer afford the high interest rates that came with high prices. The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Paul Volcker, hoped to break the back of inflation by pushing interest rates even higher, to 20 percent in 1980. These rates especially hurt the automobile and building industries, which laid off tens of thousands of workers. Inflation also pushed middle-class taxpayers into higher tax brackets, which led to a “taxpayers’ revolt.” Government social programs that were indexed to the inflation rate helped to push the federal deficit to nearly \$60 billion in 1980. Many Americans had to adjust to the harsh truth that, for the first time since World War II, their standard of living was on the decline.

### ***Loss of Popularity***

The Iranian hostage crisis and worsening economic crisis hurt Carter in the opinion polls. In 1979, in what the press called Carter’s “national malaise” speech, he blamed the problems of the United States on a “moral and spiritual crisis” of the American people. By that time, however, many Americans blamed the president for weak and indecisive leadership. By the election year 1980 his approval rating had fallen to only 23 percent. In seeking a second term, the unpopular president was clearly vulnerable to political challenges from both Democrats and Republicans.

### ***American Society in Transition***

Social changes in the 1970s were of potentially even greater significance than politics. By the end of the decade, for the first time, half of all Americans lived in the fastest-growing sections of the country—the South and the West. Unlike the previous decade, which was dominated by the youth revolt, Americans were conscious in the seventies that the population was aging. The fastest growing age group consisted of senior citizens over 65.

The country’s racial and ethnic composition was also changing noticeably in the late 20th century. By 1990, minority groups made up 25 percent of the population. The Census Bureau predicted that, by 2050, as much as half the population would be Hispanic American, African American, or Asian



American. Cultural pluralism was replacing the melting pot as the model for U.S. society, as diverse ethnic and cultural groups strove not only to end discrimination and improve their lives, but also to celebrate their unique traditions.

### ***Growth of Immigration***

Before the 1960s, most immigrants to the United States had come from Europe and Canada. By the 1980s, 47 percent of immigrants came from Latin America, 37 percent from Asia, and less than 13 percent from Europe and Canada. In part, this dramatic shift was caused by the arrival of refugees leaving Cuba and Vietnam after the Communist takeovers of these countries. Of far greater importance was the impact of the Immigration Act of 1965, which ended the ethnic quota acts of the 1920s favoring Europeans and thereby opened the United States to immigrants from all parts of the world.

**Undocumented Immigrants** How many immigrants entered the United States illegally every year could only be estimated, but by the mid-1970s, as many as 12 million foreigners were in the U.S. illegally. The rise in immigrants from countries of Latin America and Asia led to the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which penalized employers for hiring immigrants who had entered the country illegally or had overstayed their visas, while also granting amnesty to undocumented immigrants arriving by 1982. Even so, many Americans concluded that the nation had lost control of its own borders, as both legal and undocumented immigrants continued to flock to the United States at an estimated million persons a year.

### ***Demands for Minority Rights***

One aspect of the protest movements of the 1960s that continued into later decades was the movement by a variety of minorities to gain both relief from discrimination and recognition for their contributions to U.S. society.

**Hispanic Americans** Most Hispanic Americans before World War II lived in the southwestern states, but in the postwar years new arrivals from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and South and Central America increasingly settled in the East and Midwest. Mexican workers, after suffering deportation during the Great Depression, returned to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to take low-paying agricultural jobs. They were widely exploited before a long series of boycotts led by Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organization finally gained collective bargaining rights for farm workers in 1975. Mexican American activists also won a federal mandate for bilingual education requiring schools to teach Hispanic children in both English and Spanish. In the 1980s, a growing number of Hispanic Americans were elected to public office, including as mayors of Miami, San Antonio, and other large cities. The Census Bureau reported that, in 2000, Hispanics, including Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin Americans, had become the country's largest minority group.



**American Indian Movement** In the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration had made an unsuccessful attempt to encourage American Indians to leave reservations and assimilate into urban America. American Indian leaders resisted the loss of cultural identity that would have resulted from such a policy. To achieve self-determination and revival of tribal traditions, the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in 1968. Militant actions soon followed, including AIM's takeover of the abandoned prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay in 1969. AIM members also occupied Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1973, site of the infamous massacre of American Indians by the U.S. cavalry in 1890.

American Indians had a number of successes in both Congress and the courts. Congress' passage of the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 gave reservations and tribal lands greater control over internal programs, education, and law enforcement. American Indians also used the federal courts successfully to regain property or compensation for treaty violations. They attacked widespread unemployment and poverty on reservations by improving education, through the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, and by building industries and gambling casinos on reservations, under the self-determination legislation. Interest in the cultural heritage of American Indians was also overcoming old prejudices. By the 2010 census, nearly three million people identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native, and over two million more identified themselves as a combination of American Indian or Alaska Native and some other ethnic group.

American Indian Population of the United States, 1950 to 2010		
Year	Total	Percentage
1950	343,410	0.2
1960	508,675	0.3
1970	827,255	0.4
1980	1,420,400	0.6
1990	1,959,234	0.8
2000	2,475,956	0.9
2010	2,932,248	0.9

Figures include Alaska Natives

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Asian Americans** Americans of Asian descent had become the fastest growing ethnic minority by the 1980s. The largest group of Asian Americans were of Chinese ancestry, followed by Filipinos, Japanese, Indians, Koreans, and Vietnamese. A strong dedication to education resulted in Asian Americans being well represented in the best colleges and universities. However, at times, Asian Americans suffered from discrimination, envy, and Japan-bashing, while the less educated immigrants earned well below the national average.

**Gay Liberation Movement** In 1969, a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, sparked both a riot and the gay rights movement. Gay activists urged homosexuals to be open about their identity and to work to end discrimination and violent abuse. By the mid-1970s, homosexuality was no longer classified as a mental illness and the federal Civil Service dropped its ban on employment of homosexuals. In 1993, President Clinton attempted to end discrimination against gays and lesbians in the military, but settled for the compromise “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. People would not be asked or expected to describe their sexual identity, but the military could still expel people for being gay or lesbian.

### ***The Environmental Movement***

While the Progressive era conservation movement was fairly small and led by politicians such as Theodore Roosevelt, the modern environmental movement had wide spread popular support. The participation of 20 million citizens in the first Earth Day in 1970 reflected the nation’s growing concerns over air and water pollution and the destruction of the natural environment, including wildlife. Media coverage of industrial disasters increased public questioning of the benefits of industry and new technologies, in what some called a “post-modern” culture. Massive oil spills around the world, from off the coast of Santa Barbara California in 1969 to the *Exxon Valdez* oil tanker accident in Alaska in 1989, reinforced fears about the deadly combination of human error and modern technology. Public opinion also turned against building additional nuclear power plants after an accident at the Three Mile Island power plant in Pennsylvania (1979) and the deadly explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in the Soviet Union (1986).

**Protective Legislation** The environmental movement borrowed tactics from other protest movements to secure legislation to stop pollution and destruction of nature. In 1970, Congress passed the Clean Air Act and created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and followed this legislation in 1972 with the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. In 1980, the Superfund was created to clean up toxic dumps, such as Love Canal in Niagara Falls, New York. These laws regulated toxic substances, public drinking water systems, dumping of waste, and protected natural environments and wildlife, such as the American bald eagle. In the 1980s, the backlash from business and industry would try to reverse the impact of this legislation.

### ***Conservative Shift***

The protest movements by diverse groups in American society seemed to produce more social stress and fragmentation. Combined with a slowing economy and a declining standard of living, these forces left many Americans feeling angry and bitter. A conservative reaction to the liberal policies of the New Deal and the Great Society was gaining strength in the late 1970s and would prove a powerful force in the politics of the next decade.

#### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: END OF THE IMPERIAL PRESIDENCY?**

The Cold War, and the Vietnam War in particular, caused critics in the 1970s to fear the expansion and abuse of power by presidents. They saw parallels between the decline of the Roman Republic and the rise of the powerful emperor system of the Roman Empire during Rome's expansion, and the developments in the political system of the United States during its emergence as a superpower after World War II. The actions of Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandals confirmed many Americans' fears.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argued in his book *The Imperial Presidency* (1973) that the United States' exercise of world leadership had gradually undermined the original intent of the Constitution and the war powers of Congress. Cold War presidents had used national security, the need for secrecy, executive privilege, and the mystique of the high office to concentrate power into the White House. The end of the Vietnam War, the resignation of Richard Nixon, and the War Powers Act of 1973 seemed to end the dangers of the imperial presidency. Presidents Ford and Carter proved comparatively weak presidents, and power had seemed to shift back to the Congress, as the Founders had intended.

Schlesinger concluded that the U.S. would continue to need a strong president, but one working within the limits of the Constitution. The issue of the proper constitutional limits on presidential powers reemerged after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. What are the constitutional limits on presidential powers to fight terrorists given invasive reach of the newest electronic and military technologies?

## KEY TERMS BY THEME

### Nixon Foreign Policy (WOR)

Henry Kissinger  
Vietnamization  
Nixon Doctrine  
Kent State  
My Lai  
Pentagon Papers  
Paris Accords of 1973  
détente  
China visit  
antiballistic missiles  
Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)  
Middle East War (1973)  
OPEC; oil embargo

### Nixon Domestic Policy (POL)

New Federalism  
stagflation  
southern strategy  
wage and price controls  
off the gold standard  
cost of living indexed  
Title IX  
Burger Court  
*Roe v. Wade* (1973)  
election of 1972  
George McGovern  
Watergate cover-up  
“plumbers”  
“enemies list”  
*United States v. Nixon*  
War Powers Act (1973)  
impeachment and resignation  
“imperial presidency”

### Ford Presidency (POL, WOR)

Gerald Ford  
pardon of Nixon  
reform of CIA  
fall of Saigon  
Cambodia genocide  
battle over inflation  
Bicentennial  
election of 1976

### Carter Presidency (WOR, POL)

James Earl (Jimmy) Carter  
human rights  
Panama Canal Treaty (1978)  
Camp David Accords (1978)  
Iranian hostage crisis  
recognition of China  
Soviet Afghanistan invasion  
Paul Volcker, high interest rates  
“malaise” speech

### American Identities (ID, PEO)

cultural pluralism  
impact of 1965 immigration law  
Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)  
Hispanic Americans  
Cesar Chavez  
American Indian Movement  
Indian Self-Determination Act (1975)  
gaming casinos  
Asian Americans  
gay liberation movement

### Environmental Movement (ENV)

Earth Day (1970)  
*Exxon Valdez* accident  
Three Mile Island  
Chernobyl meltdown  
Clean Air Act (1970)  
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)  
Clean Water Act (1972)  
Environmental Superfund (1980)  
Endangered Species Act (1973)