**CHAPTER 26**

**The Age of Fracture: The 1970s**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Evaluate Richard Nixon as president, focusing on his policies in the United States and abroad.

**Objectives**

1. Discuss some of President Nixon’s foreign policy moves that had a long-term effect on America’s relationships with countries around the world.

2. Describe the ways in which Nixon helped institute what today would be considered very liberal concepts in American government.

* 1. Describe the events of Watergate and its ramifications for the country.

**Objectives**

1. Discuss the Watergate affair, in regard to both the actual events—Nixon’s most probable role—and the eventual outcome for his presidency and for the nation.

* 1. Describe the economic conditions of the 1970s, including stagflation and the end of the post-World War II economic boom, and describe how Presidents Ford and Carter attempted to confront the problem.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the issues affecting the American economy during the Nixon years, and analyze the extent to which his policies and actions contributed to this state of affairs.

* 1. Describe the perpetuation of 1960s-style activism and how it transformed into a politics of identity in the 1970s.

**Objectives**

1. Discuss the activism of minorities in America during the 1970s, specifically addressing African Americans, Native Americans, and Chicanos.

2. Describe the evolution of the women’s movement during the 1970s, specifically addressing the *Roe* v. *Wade* decision, women in the workplace, changing sexual mores, and the opposition to these events by American women who disagreed with the goals of the movement.

3. Discuss the development of the gay liberation movement, the environmental movement, and related issues in popular culture.

* 1. Evaluate the reactions to 1960s social movements and describe the rise of the New Right.

**Objectives**

1. Detail the tax revolts led by fiscal conservatives.

2. Analyze the divisions that emerged within American religion during the 1970s, and discuss the growth of the evangelical movement, showing its connection to the conservatism that was also sweeping the country.

**Chapter Summary**

America finally extricated itself from Vietnam during the 1970s with the help of President Richard Nixon. Bowing to political pressure from a Democratic Congress led Nixon to adopt quite liberal policies, such as the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. He also endorsed the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which sought to make workplaces safer. He doubled the budgets of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

Nixon’s overreaching ambition and dishonesty culminated in the Watergate fiasco. Although he escaped from much public judgment before his landslide victory in the 1972 election, he became embroiled in one of the nation’s biggest scandals, one that would in the end force his resignation as evidence mounted of a cover up organized at the highest level. His vice-president, Spiro Agnew, had already resigned under fire. Nixon resigned after a dramatic televised speech to the nation on August 9, 1974. The result of Nixon’s resignation was that America found itself with Gerald Ford as president, though Ford had not been elected to either office by the people. The credibility of the entire administration was under attack.

American optimism suffered in the 1970s as a loss of faith in government and institutions was matched by mediocre economic conditions. Especially troubling was the oil embargo by Arab nations against Israel’s military allies in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, which resulted in gasoline shortages and inflation. The new condition of stagflation, a combination of rising prices and unemployment, hit Northeastern and Midwestern cities especially hard. President Ford’s brief term passed with no economic improvement and only the SALT II agreement as a notable achievement. One of his first acts as president did not generate widespread goodwill: Ford offered Nixon a full presidential pardon. Jimmy Carter took over as his Democratic successor after the 1976 elections. Carter’s policies made little progress on solving economic problems of the decade. In the Middle East, Carter oversaw a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, called the Camp David Accords, in late 1978. However, his diplomatic successes in the Middle East were overshadowed when Islamic militants took fifty-two hostages from the American Embassy in Tehran.

Unlike the Americanization efforts of the past, the explosion of identity politics mimicked the diverse and changing society. Minorities, primarily African Americans, Chicanos, and Indians, benefited from the application of Affirmative Action programs. The Women’s Movements throughout the 1970s pushed for a greater level of equality. Meanwhile, the controversial *Roe* v. *Wade* Supreme Court decision pleased supporters of reproductive freedom while also enraging conservatives. The debate about abortion has increased the polarization between the left and the right ever since.

Gay and lesbian activists added their voices to the call for social justice. In 1969, a police raid on the bar at the Stonewall Inn in New York City sparked the Gay Liberation Movement. Growing awareness of pollution helped create the environmental movement. Many of these messages and the conservative responses could be found in popular culture. In particular, the new music of the decade—disco—has been interpreted by historians as an illustration of narcissism on the one hand and as a last gasp of the “coming together” attitude of the 1960s on the other.

Fiscal conservatives in California fomented tax revolts. The Republican Party nationally linked this movement with calls for a return to “Family Values.” Their cause scored a political victory with the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment for women. It is doubtful if many Americans were sad to see the 1970s come to an end. But just how different would the 1980s be?

**Chapter Outline**

I. President Nixon

A. Nixon’s Foreign Policy

1. Ping-Pong Diplomacy

2. SALT and the Cold War

3. Latin America and Africa

B. Nixon the Accidental Liberal

1. Increasing the Size of Government

II. Watergate

III. The Troubled Economy and Politics Adrift

A. Economic Woes

1. Oil Embargo

2. The Decline of Cities

B. President Ford

1. Domestic Policy

2. Foreign Policy

C. President Carter

1. The Election of 1976

2. Domestic Policy

3. Foreign Policy

IV. The Rise of Identity Politics

A. Identifying with a Group

1. African American Activism

2. Affirmative Action and Busing

3. The Chicano Movement

4. Red Power

B. The Women’s Movement

1. ERA and Equal Rights

2. *Roe* v. *Wade*

3. Social and Economic Participation

4. The Sexual Revolution

C. The Gay Liberation Movement

D. High Tide of Environmentalism

E. Popular Culture

V. The Rise of the New Right

A. Economic and Political Conservatism

B. The Religious Right

1. “Family Values”

VI. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

1. Richard Nixon: Was “Tricky Dicky” a Suitable Nickname for this President?

2. The Convergence of Political and Religious Conservatism in the New Right

3. How Table Tennis Helped Bring Two Old Enemies Together

4. America’s Support of Israel in the Wars of the 1970s

5. The United States under Economic Attack: The Oil Embargo of 1973

6. Stagflation and its Effect on the American Economy

7. Jimmy Carter’s Doomed Presidency

(26-3). There were at least four reasons why the Watergate scandal was so pivotal in American life:

a. The death of political idealism

b. Americans turn inward

c. The irony

d. New political scrutiny

Combine the Reasons Why into an examination of primary sources about Nixon such as those found at <http://nixontapes.org/>. Have students read a specific transcript or listen to the audio file of the instructor’s or student’s choice. Extract evidence that corroborates or conflicts the Reasons Why with the actions of the Executive Branch. Instructors can conclude by asking the students if and how they think Watergate is still significant today.

**The Reasons Why**

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to complete a project to be presented in class or to write a more traditional research paper. Or instructors could decide which they prefer to have students do. Given below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

1. What was it like to wait in gas lines to pay high prices to fill one’s gas-guzzling automobile? Students should investigate the 1973 Arab oil embargo on the United States, and compile a set of newspaper and news magazine articles from that time period. They should use these articles to prepare a five-minute presentation for the class on their findings. [This would be a good project to offer as extra credit, to an individual or to a group.]

2. Analyzing American popular culture through advertising—students should comb the Internet to find examples of advertising from the 1970s, and use library resources to find magazines that contain national ad campaigns. They should bring some of the more unusual ones to class to share in a class discussion. [At the end, let students nominate and vote on the “greatest ads of the 1970s.”]

3. Working in groups of four or five, students should prepare a biographical sketch of one of the following people: James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, William F. Buckley, Betty Friedan, Phyllis Schlafly, or Gerald Ford. They should present their findings to the class.

4. Screen *Saturday Night Fever* in class. Have students write a review of the film in regard to how accurately it depicts social and economic changes of the era.

**Additional www Resources**

*Watergate: The Scandal That Brought Down Richard Nixon*.

<http://www.watergate.info/>

*What Were the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords?* Palestine Facts.

<http://palestinefacts.org/pf_1967to1991_egypt_campdavid_1978.php>

*The Rise of American Conservatism: a Brief History*, Michael O’Shea.

<http://michaeloshea.blogspot.com/2007/03/rise-of-american-conservatism-brief.html>

*Three Mile Island 1979*. The World Nuclear Organization.

<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf36.html>

**Primary Source Discussions**

**Assignment Name: State Department Briefing on the Statues of Chile, 1970**

*Introduction*: The leftist rule of Salvador Allende in Chile frightened the United States. The coup that overthrew him in 1973 has been backed by the American CIA. His successor, military general Pinochet, proved to be extremely repressive, broke off relations with Cuba, nationalized the country’s copper mines, and controlled most areas of the economy. Only after 1990 has Chile moved toward democracy; economically, too, Chile has prospered.

*Visit URL*: http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/ch20-01.htm

[Read a State Department briefing on the status of Chile, 1970](http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB8/ch20-01.htm) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions*:

1. What were the main concerns of the American government about the rule of Salvador Allende in Chile? Were the concerns justified?
2. What actions were being considered most in these documents? According to its own assessments, did it appear that the United States had much hope for success?
3. What were the main observations made about the negative consequences of taking action against Allende? Did those things, in fact, take place after the coup? Why or why not?
4. If you had been studying the report, and you had completed the advantages and disadvantages of taking action or not, what do you think your recommendation would have been? Explain your reasons.

**Assignment Name: *Saturday Night Live’s* Transcript of Chevy Chase’s Impression of Gerald Ford**

*Introduction*: Chevy Chase has made Americans laugh for decades. Never afraid to show himself acting goofy, he comes off looking lovable and affable. As they have tried to caricature every president and most other famous people, the cast of *Saturday Night Live* worked on how to portray the new president, Gerald Ford. Ford was had a few clumsy incidents while in office, once falling down a flight of stairs while leaving an airplane. Chase was quickly able to latch on to Ford’s mannerisms, and he was already good at “pratfalls,” so he assumed the character of Ford on *SNL* for the rest of Ford’s presidency. This transcript is all that was available at the time of publication. You might search for the scene on YouTube or elsewhere on the Internet. It would be worth the search!

*Visit URL*: http://snltranscripts.jt.org/75/75dford.phtml

[Read *Saturday Night Live’s* transcript of Chevy Chase’s impression of Gerald Ford](http://snltranscripts.jt.org/75/75dford.phtml) then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions*:

1. What were the items that the “president” fumbled with in trying to take his place at the podium?
2. What sorts of jibes did Chase make toward President Ford concerning his manner of speaking?
3. Americans found this portrayal hilarious. Do you think they might have laughed even harder if Ford had been elected president?
4. In what ways do you think the politically oriented humor of *Saturday Night Live* has been used to get Americans through tough times during its lifetime?

**Assignment Name: Primary Source Assignment: Roe v. Wade 1973**

*Title:* [Roe v. Wade (1973](http://college.cengage.com/history/wadsworth_9781133309888/unprotected/ps/ah2roe_v_wade.html))

*Introduction*: Follow the link below.

*Visit URL*: http://college.cengage.com/history/wadsworth\_9781133309888/unprotected/ps/ah2roe\_v\_wade.html

[Roe v. Wade (1973)](http://college.cengage.com/history/wadsworth_9781133309888/unprotected/ps/ah2roe_v_wade.html)

*Instructions*: After reading the introduction and the primary source provided, answer the questions below.

1. What is the main outcome of this decision?
2. How does the ruling use the right of privacy?
3. Upon what other legal considerations is the ruling based?
4. What does the ruling say about the first trimester of pregnancy?
5. Why does this ruling continue to be controversial?