

# The Nixon Administration

## MAIN IDEA

President Richard M. Nixon tried to steer the country in a conservative direction and away from federal control.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

American leaders of the early 1970s laid the foundations for the broad conservative base that exists today.

## Terms & Names

- Richard M. Nixon
- New Federalism
- revenue sharing
- Family Assistance Plan (FAP)
- Southern strategy
- stagflation
- OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)
- realpolitik
- détente
- SALT I Treaty

## One American's Story

In November of 1968, **Richard M. Nixon** had just been elected president of the United States. He chose Henry Kissinger to be his special adviser on foreign affairs. During Nixon's second term in 1972, as the United States struggled to achieve an acceptable peace in Vietnam, Kissinger reflected on his relationship with Nixon.

### A PERSONAL VOICE HENRY KISSINGER

"I . . . am not at all so sure I could have done what I've done with him with another president. . . . I don't know many leaders who would entrust to their aide the task of negotiating with the North Vietnamese, informing only a tiny group of people of the initiative."

—quoted in *The New Republic*, December 16, 1972



▲ President Nixon (right) confers with Henry Kissinger.

Nixon and Kissinger ended America's involvement in Vietnam, but as the war wound down, the nation seemed to enter an era of limits. The economic prosperity that had followed World War II was ending. President Nixon wanted to limit the federal government to reduce its power and to reverse some of Johnson's liberal policies. At the same time, he would seek to restore America's prestige and influence on the world stage—prestige that had been hit hard by the Vietnam experience.

## Nixon's New Conservatism

President Richard M. Nixon entered office in 1969 determined to turn America in a more conservative direction. Toward that end, he tried to instill a sense of order into a nation still divided over the continuing Vietnam War.

## Analyzing Political Cartoons

### "DOMESTIC LIFE"

Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Paul Szep frequently used Nixon as the subject of his cartoons. Although President Nixon focused his domestic policy on dismantling a number of Great Society social programs, his chief interest was foreign policy.

### SKILLBUILDER

#### Analyzing Political Cartoons

1. What does the cartoonist suggest about Nixon by showing him leaving with his bags packed?
2. Whom do the children represent in this cartoon?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK,  
PAGE R24.



### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**A** What was the goal of Nixon's New Federalism?

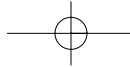
**NEW FEDERALISM** One of the main items on President Nixon's agenda was to decrease the size and influence of the federal government. Nixon believed that Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, by promoting greater federal involvement with social problems, had given the federal government too much responsibility. Nixon's plan, known as **New Federalism**, was to distribute a portion of federal power to state and local governments. **A**

To implement this program, Nixon proposed a plan to give more financial freedom to local governments. Normally, the federal government told state and local governments how to spend their federal money. Under **revenue sharing**, state and local governments could spend their federal dollars however they saw fit within certain limitations. In 1972, the revenue-sharing bill, known as the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act, became law.

**WELFARE REFORM** Nixon was not as successful, however, in his attempt to overhaul welfare, which he believed had grown cumbersome and inefficient. In 1969, the president advocated the so-called **Family Assistance Plan (FAP)**. Under the FAP, every family of four with no outside income would receive a basic federal payment of \$1,600 a year, with a provision to earn up to \$4,000 a year in supplemental income. Unemployed participants, excluding mothers of preschool children, would have to take job training and accept any reasonable work offered them.

Nixon presented the plan in conservative terms—as a program that would reduce the supervisory role of the federal government and make welfare recipients responsible for their own lives. The House approved the plan in 1970. However, when the bill reached the Senate, lawmakers from both parties attacked it. Liberal legislators considered the minimum payments too low and the work requirement too stiff, while conservatives objected to the notion of guaranteed income. The bill went down in defeat.

**NEW FEDERALISM WEARS TWO FACES** In the end, Nixon's New Federalism enhanced several key federal programs as it dismantled others. To win backing for his New Federalism program from a Democrat-controlled Congress, Nixon supported a number of congressional measures to increase federal spending for some social programs. Without fanfare, the Nixon administration increased Social



## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

### AMERICANS WALK ON THE MOON

Not all was political war during the Nixon administration. On July 20, 1969, one of America's long-held dreams became a reality.

Nearly ten years after John F. Kennedy challenged America to put a person on the moon, astronaut Neil Armstrong climbed down the ladder of his lunar module and stepped onto the surface of the moon. "That's one small step for man," Armstrong said, "one giant leap for mankind."

Americans swelled with pride and accomplishment as they watched the historic moon landing on their televisions. Speaking to the astronauts from the White House, President Nixon said, "For every American, this has to be the proudest day of our lives."



▲ Neil Armstrong's photograph of Buzz Aldrin on the moon

Security, Medicare, and Medicaid payments and made food stamps more accessible.

However, the president also worked to dismantle some of the nation's social programs. Throughout his term, Nixon tried unsuccessfully to eliminate the Job Corps program that provided job training for the unemployed and in 1970 he vetoed a bill to provide additional funding for Housing and Urban Development. Confronted by laws that he opposed, Nixon also turned to a little-used presidential practice called impoundment. Nixon impounded, or withheld, necessary funds for programs, thus holding up their implementation. By 1973, it was believed that Nixon had impounded almost \$15 billion, affecting more than 100 federal programs, including those for health, housing, and education.

The federal courts eventually ordered the release of the impounded funds. They ruled that presidential impoundment was unconstitutional and that only Congress had the authority to decide how federal funds should be spent. Nixon did use his presidential authority to abolish the Office of Economic Opportunity, a cornerstone of Johnson's antipoverty program. **B**

**LAW AND ORDER POLITICS** As President Nixon fought with both houses of Congress, he also battled the more liberal elements of society, including the antiwar movement. Nixon had been elected in 1968 on a dual promise to end the war in Vietnam and mend the divisiveness within America that the war had created. Throughout his

first term, Nixon aggressively moved to fulfill both pledges. The president de-escalated America's involvement in Vietnam and oversaw peace negotiations with North Vietnam. At the same time, he began the "law and order" policies that he had promised his "silent majority"—those middle-class Americans who wanted order restored to a country beset by urban riots and antiwar demonstrations.

To accomplish this, Nixon used the full resources of his office—sometimes illegally. The FBI illegally wiretapped many left-wing individuals and the Democratic Party offices at the Watergate office building in Washington, D.C. The CIA also investigated and compiled documents on thousands of American dissidents—people who objected to the government's policies. The administration even used the Internal Revenue Service to audit the tax returns of antiwar and civil rights activists. Nixon began building a personal "enemies list" of prominent Americans whom the administration would harass.

Nixon also enlisted the help of his combative vice-president, Spiro T. Agnew, to denounce the opposition. The vice-president confronted the antiwar protesters and then turned his scorn on those who controlled the media, whom he viewed as liberal cheerleaders for the antiwar movement. Known for his colorful quotes, Agnew lashed out at the media and liberals as "an effete [weak] corps of impudent snobs" and "nattering nabobs of negativism."

## Nixon's Southern Strategy

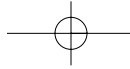
Even as President Nixon worked to steer the country along a more conservative course, he had his eyes on the 1972 presidential election. Nixon had won a slim majority in 1968—less than one percent of the popular vote. As president, he began

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Issues

**B** In what ways did Nixon both strengthen and weaken federal programs?





working to forge a new conservative coalition to build on his support. In one approach, known as the **Southern strategy**, Nixon tried to attract Southern conservative Democrats by appealing to their unhappiness with federal desegregation policies and a liberal Supreme Court. He also promised to name a Southerner to the Supreme Court.

**A NEW SOUTH** Since Reconstruction, the South had been a Democratic stronghold. But by 1968 many white Southern Democrats had grown disillusioned with their party. In their eyes, the party—champion of the Great Society and civil rights—had grown too liberal. This conservative backlash first surfaced in the 1968 election, when thousands of Southern Democrats helped former Alabama governor George Wallace, a conservative segregationist running as an independent, carry five Southern states and capture 13 percent of the popular vote.

Nixon wanted these voters. By winning over the Wallace voters and other discontented Democrats, the president and his fellow Republicans hoped not only to keep the White House but also to recapture a majority in Congress. **C**

**NIXON SLOWS INTEGRATION** To attract white voters in the South, President Nixon decided on a policy of slowing the country's desegregation efforts. In September of 1969, less than a year after being elected president, Nixon made clear his views on civil rights. "There are those who want instant integration and those who want segregation forever. I believe we need to have a middle course between those two extremes," he said.

Throughout his first term, President Nixon worked to reverse several civil rights policies. In 1969, he ordered the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to delay desegregation plans for school districts in South Carolina and Mississippi. Nixon's actions violated the Supreme Court's second *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling—which called for the desegregation of schools "with all deliberate speed." In response to an NAACP suit, the high court ordered Nixon to abide by the second *Brown* ruling. The president did so reluctantly, and by 1972, nearly 90 percent of children in the South attended desegregated schools—up from about 20 percent in 1969.

In a further attempt to chip away at civil rights advances, Nixon opposed the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The act had added nearly one million African Americans to the voting rolls. Despite the president's opposition, Congress voted to extend the act. **D**

**CONTROVERSY OVER BUSING** President Nixon then attempted to stop yet another civil rights initiative—the integration of schools through busing. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* that school districts may bus students to other schools to end the pattern of all-black or all-white educational institutions. White students and parents in cities such as Boston and Detroit angrily protested busing. One South Boston mother spoke for other white Northerners, many of whom still struggled with the integration process.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

"I'm not against any individual child. I am not a racist, no matter what those high-and-mighty suburban liberals with their picket signs say. I just won't have my children bused to some . . . slum school, and I don't want children from God knows where coming over here."

—A South Boston mother quoted in *The School Busing Controversy, 1970–75*

### MAIN IDEA

#### Forming Generalizations

**C** Why had many Democratic voters in the South become potential Republican supporters by 1968?

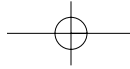
### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**D** Why did President Nixon oppose the extension of the Voting Rights Act?

A demonstrator in Boston protests court-ordered school busing during the early 1970s.





## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT



### THE TWENTY-SIXTH AMENDMENT

During President Nixon's first term, the Twenty-sixth Amendment was ratified in 1971, extending voting rights to Americans 18 years or older. The amendment was one example of efforts in the 1960s and 1970s to expand opportunities to participate in government.

At the time, liberals supported the amendment because they believed that young people were more likely to be liberal. Conservatives opposed it because they didn't want to extend the vote to more liberals.

Opponents also argued that the amendment would be too expensive for states to administer and that 18-year-olds were not mature enough for the responsibility. Many Americans, however, considered it unfair to be asked to fight and die for their country in Vietnam without being allowed to vote.

Nixon also opposed integration through busing and went on national television to urge Congress to halt the practice. While busing continued in some cities, Nixon had made his position clear to the country—and to the South.

**A BATTLE OVER THE SUPREME COURT** During the 1968 campaign, Nixon had criticized the Warren Court for being too liberal. Once in the White House, Nixon suddenly found himself with an opportunity to change the direction of the court. During Nixon's first term, four justices, including chief justice Earl Warren, left the bench through retirement. President Nixon quickly moved to put a more conservative face on the Court. In 1969, the Senate approved Nixon's chief justice appointee, U.S. Court of Appeals judge Warren Burger.

Eventually, Nixon placed on the bench three more justices, who tilted the Court in a more conservative direction. However, the newly shaped Court did not always take the conservative route—for example, it handed down the 1971 ruling in favor of racially integrating schools through busing. **E**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**E** What was Nixon's Southern strategy and how did he implement it?

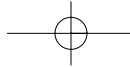
## Confronting a Stagnant Economy

One of the more pressing issues facing Richard Nixon was a troubled economy. Between 1967 and 1973, the United States faced high inflation and high unemployment—a situation economists called **stagflation**.

**THE CAUSES OF STAGFLATION** The economic problems of the late 1960s and early 1970s had several causes. Chief among them were high inflation—a result of Lyndon Johnson's policy to fund the war and social programs through deficit spending. Also, increased competition in international trade, and a flood of new workers, including women and baby boomers, led to stagflation. Another cause of the nation's economic woes was its heavy dependency on foreign oil. During the 1960s, America received much of its petroleum from the oil-producing countries of the

**Dependent on foreign oil, Americans in 1979 wait in line for gas during the oil embargo.**





### Vocabulary

**cartel:** a bloc of independent business organizations that controls a service or business

### Background

See *embargo* on page R40 in the Economics Handbook.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**F** What factors brought on the country's economic problems in the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Middle East. Many of these countries belonged to a cartel called **OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)**. During the 1960s, OPEC gradually raised oil prices. Then in 1973, the Yom Kippur War broke out, with Israel against Egypt and Syria. When the United States sent massive military aid to Israel, its longtime ally, the Arab OPEC nations responded by cutting off all oil sales to the United States. When OPEC resumed selling its oil to the United States in 1974, the price had quadrupled. This sharp rise in oil prices only worsened the problem of inflation.

**NIXON BATTLES STAGFLATION** President Nixon took several steps to combat stagflation, but none met with much success. To reverse deficit spending, Nixon attempted to raise taxes and cut the budget. Congress, however, refused to go along with this plan. In another effort to slow inflation, Nixon tried to reduce the amount of money in circulation by urging that interest rates be raised. This measure did little except drive the country into a mild recession, or an overall slowdown of the economy. **F**

In August 1971, the president turned to price and wage controls to stop inflation. He froze workers' wages as well as businesses' prices and fees for 90 days. Inflation eased for a short time, but the recession continued.

## Nixon's Foreign Policy Triumphs

Richard Nixon admittedly preferred world affairs to domestic policy. "I've always thought this country could run itself domestically without a president," he said in 1968. Throughout his presidency, Nixon's top priority was gaining an honorable peace in Vietnam. At the same time, he also made significant advances in America's relationships with China and the Soviet Union.

**KISSINGER AND REALPOLITIK** The architect of Nixon's foreign policy was his adviser for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger. Kissinger, who would later become Nixon's secretary of state, promoted a philosophy known as **realpolitik**, from a German term meaning "political realism." According to realpolitik, foreign policy should be based solely on consideration of power, not ideals or moral principles. Kissinger believed in evaluating a nation's power, not its philosophy or beliefs. If a country was weak, Kissinger argued, it was often more practical to ignore that country, even if it was Communist.

Realpolitik marked a departure from the former confrontational policy of containment, which refused to recognize the major Communist countries. On the other hand, Kissinger's philosophy called for the United States to fully confront the powerful nations of the globe. In the world of realpolitik, however, confrontation largely meant negotiation as well as military engagement.

Nixon shared Kissinger's belief in realpolitik, and together the two men adopted a more flexible approach in dealing with Communist nations. They called their policy **détente**—a policy aimed at easing Cold War tensions. One of the most startling applications of détente came in early 1972 when President Nixon—who had risen in politics as a strong anti-Communist—visited Communist China. **G**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**G** What was the philosophy of realpolitik?

## WORLD STAGE



### THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

On October 6, 1973, Syria and Egypt invaded Israel on Yom Kippur, the most sacred Jewish holiday. The war—the climax of years of intense border disputes—was short but brutal. Even though fighting lasted only three weeks, as many as 7,700 Egyptians, 7,700 Syrians, and 4,500 Israelis were killed or wounded.

Although the United States supplied massive amounts of military aid to Israel, U.S. officials also worked to broker a cease-fire between the warring nations. In what became known as "shuttle diplomacy," Secretary of State Henry Kissinger traveled back and forth between Middle Eastern countries in an attempt to forge a peace agreement. Kissinger's diplomatic efforts finally paid off. Israel signed an official peace accord with Egypt in January 1974. Four months later in May, Israel signed a cease-fire with Syria.





◀ **President Nixon** tours the Great Wall as part of his visit to China in 1972.

## KEY PLAYER



**RICHARD M. NIXON**  
1913–1994

The hurdles that Richard Nixon overcame to win the presidency in 1968 included his loss in the 1960 presidential race and a 1962 defeat in the race for governor of California.

Nixon faced many obstacles from the start. As a boy, he rose every day at 4 A.M. to help in his father's grocery store. Nixon also worked as a janitor, a bean picker, and a barker at an amusement park.

The Nixon family suffered great tragedy when one of Nixon's brothers died from meningitis and another from tuberculosis.

None of these traumatic experiences, however, dulled the future president's ambition. Nixon finished third in his law class at Duke University, and after serving in World War II, he launched his political career.

After winning a seat in Congress in 1946, Nixon announced, "I had to win. That's the thing you don't understand. The important thing is to win."

**NIXON VISITS CHINA** Since the takeover of mainland China by the Communists in 1949, the United States had not formally recognized the Chinese Communist government. In late 1971, Nixon reversed that policy by announcing to the nation that he would visit China "to seek the normalization of relations between the two countries."

By going to China, Nixon was trying, in part, to take advantage of the decade-long rift between China and the Soviet Union. China had long criticized the Soviet Union as being too "soft" in its policies against the West. The two Communist superpowers officially broke ties in 1960. Nixon had thought about exploiting the fractured relationship for several years. "We want to have the Chinese with us when we sit down and negotiate with the Russians," he told a reporter in 1968. Upon his arrival at the Beijing Airport in February, 1972, Nixon recalls his meeting with Chinese premier Zhou En-lai.

## A PERSONAL VOICE RICHARD M. NIXON

**"I knew that Zhou had been deeply insulted by Foster Dulles's refusal to shake hands with him at the Geneva Conference in 1954. When I reached the bottom step, therefore, I made a point of extending my hand as I walked toward him. When our hands met, one era ended and another began."**

—*The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*

Besides its enormous symbolic value, Nixon's visit also was a huge success with the American public. Observers noted that it opened up diplomatic and economic relations with the Chinese and resulted in important agreements between China and the United States. The two nations agreed that neither would try to dominate the Pacific and that both would cooperate in settling disputes peacefully. They also agreed to participate in scientific and cultural exchanges as well as to eventually reunite Taiwan with the mainland. **H**

**NIXON TRAVELS TO MOSCOW** In May 1972, three months after visiting Beijing, President Nixon headed to Moscow—the first U.S. president ever to visit the

## MAIN IDEA

### Analyzing Effects

**H** How did Nixon's trip change the United States' relationship with China?



◀ A 1973 military parade in Moscow displays the Soviet Union's arsenal, components of which were frozen at 1972 levels as a result of the Salt I Treaty.

Soviet Union. Like his visit to China, Nixon's trip to the Soviet Union received wide acclaim. After a series of meetings called the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), Nixon and Brezhnev signed the **SALT I Treaty**. This five-year agreement limited the number of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched missiles to 1972 levels.

The foreign policy triumphs with China and the Soviet Union and the administration's announcement that peace "is at hand" in Vietnam helped reelect Nixon as president in 1972.

But peace in Vietnam proved elusive. The Nixon administration grappled with the war for nearly six more months before withdrawing troops and ending America's involvement in Vietnam. By that time, another issue was about to dominate the Nixon administration—one that would eventually lead to the downfall of the president.



## ASSESSMENT

### 1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Richard M. Nixon
- New Federalism
- revenue sharing
- Family Assistance Plan (FAP)
- Southern strategy
- stagflation
- OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)
- realpolitik
- détente
- SALT I Treaty

### MAIN IDEA

#### 2. TAKING NOTES

In a two-column chart similar to the one shown, list the policies of Richard Nixon that promoted change and those that slowed it down.

Promoted Change	Slowed Change
Policies:	Policies:

In what ways do you think Nixon was most conservative? In what ways was he least conservative? Explain.

### CRITICAL THINKING

#### 3. ANALYZING EFFECTS

What were the effects of the Arab OPEC oil embargo on the United States?

#### 4. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Why was the timing of Nixon's foreign policy achievements particularly important? Relate his achievements to other events.

#### 5. EVALUATING DECISIONS

In your opinion, did Nixon's policy of détente help solve the country's major foreign policy problems? Support your answer with evidence from the text. **Think About:**

- the definition and origin of détente
- the effect of détente on U.S. dealings with Communist countries
- the effect of détente on the American public