

# 1970's

## Major Themes:

*The Cold War – Détente*  
*Watergate*  
*Economy, Oil and Stagflation*

## Presidencies:

*Richard M. Nixon (R) – 1969 - 74*  
*Gerald R. Ford (R) – 1974 - 77*  
*Jimmy Carter (D) – 1977 - 81*

## Overview:

As 1970 arrived, the decade started with the number of American troops way down from 1968, but with the war still going on full tilt. The invasion of Cambodia led to widespread protest, and people started demanding a prompt end to the war. That end was soon coming, but not before Nixon was re-elected. As he was campaigning for his second term, Nixon opened an era of *Détente*, when relations between the US and the Soviet Union were relaxing somewhat. He became the first US President to visit communist China. He opened talks on freezing the number of nuclear missiles both sides had. He invited Soviet Premier Brezhnev to a summit to discuss these issues. And he continued to reduce our troop presence in Vietnam. By 1972, there were only 120,000 Americans soldiers still stationed in South Vietnam. And the bombing continued. Some historians say the only thing still protecting South Vietnam from being overrun by the North was the American B-52 bomber. In 1973, we signed the Paris Peace Accords with North Vietnam (Treaty of Paris 4) and pulled our last remaining troops out of the country.

Nixon was very active in other diplomatic ways. As part of his policy of *détente* (a thawing of relation sin the Cold War), Nixon became the first President to visit communist China. Not only was he seeking to stabilize Asia, but Nixon was also trying to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and her communist ally China. At the same time, Nixon brokered the SALT I treaty, the first nuclear arms control treaty. It effectively froze the number of nuclear weapons at existing levels.

On the home front, Nixon signed the Clean Air and Water Act (he was a Teddy Roosevelt environmentalist), gave Mt. Adams to the Yakama Indian tribe, and ordered busing to integrate schools, a very unpopular move at the time.

Nixon was pretty popular overall, though, but he was still nervous about losing the election to Sen. George McGovern of Massachusetts. He shouldn't have been, as he would have won pretty easily, but he decided to cheat anyway. He took cash campaign contributions and used some of them to hire burglars to break into the Democratic National Campaign Headquarters to steal their plans for the election, and the burglars got caught. They wouldn't talk about who hired them, but in the next two years, the full truth would come out. On top of this, he also used the CIA (illegally) to interrupt McGovern's campaign rallies, sabotage the sound systems, and, in key southern states, to spread rumors and leaflets that suggested McGovern had fathered black children. All of this was at best, sleazy, at worst, thoroughly unconstitutional. He did win the election, overwhelmingly, but when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *The Washington Post* broke the final stories in 1974, Richard Nixon had to resign his job or face being the first President ever impeached.

Problem was, his Vice President, Spiro Agnew, had already resigned before him since he was being investigated for cheating on his income taxes. So the Presidency fell to then Speaker of the House, Gerald Ford, from Oklahoma. He was a nice guy, but as a Republican, he faced the task

of trying to restore the public's confidence in the Presidency and the party. It didn't help that he pardoned Nixon during his time in the White House (to protect the office). It also didn't help that in April of 1975, South Vietnam was attacked and conquered in less than a month. Vietnam was united as a communist country, and the Domino Theory came true as both Cambodia and Laos fell to communism the same month as South Vietnam.

As we wound down from spending on Vietnam, and as welfare programs began to be scaled back, the economy took a nosedive. Job growth stalled and inflation grew – which people described in a new word: stagflation. As Jimmy Carter was elected as a change President in 1976, he would have a full plate of problems to solve.

Carter was the negotiator. He was good at it, and still is. He finalized the SALT II treaties with the Soviet Union that limited the number of nuclear warheads and missiles each side could have. He succeeded at getting both Egypt and Israel to sign the *Camp David Accords*, the first, and only peace treaty between an Arab and Jewish state. They have been at peace with each other ever since. But the economy got not better, and in 1978, we faced a second oil embargo by Arab nations. We quickly ran out of gas, and lines at gas stations stretched sometimes for miles. The price of gas tripled, and the economy fell even further. We realized how dependent we had become on foreign oil, and Carter's popularity continued to drop.

The next year, 1979, Iran had a violent religious revolution, and was taken over by the Ayatollah Khomeini, their Islamic leader. Since we were friends with the old leader, the Shah of Iran, we refused to let Iran have the money they had deposited in American banks. As a result, they seized the US embassy and 53 Americans as hostages. Carter negotiated. Iran wasn't listening. As the election of 1980 neared, Ronald Reagan was able to gain popularity by painting Carter as ineffective and weak.

Overall, the 1970's were depressing. I mean, as if disco wasn't bad enough, we all wore very ugly clothes and the economy stunk. Vietnam had fallen and we were broke. Ronald Reagan would get elected, but he surely had his work cut out for him.

Important court cases to refer to:

*Roe vs. Wade*

*Nixon vs. U.S.*

*Gregg vs. Georgia*